

Atmosphere beautifully supports menu at Greek on Main

Owner's attention to detail evident in appetizers, entrees

■ **By CHRISTOPHER THUMANN**
SPECIAL TO THE MIRROR

More than any other cuisine, Greek food is truly the sum of its parts. While you'll run into some spices and herbs here and there, such as cinnamon, thyme and oregano, the food of Greece is most notable for the interaction of its core ingredients. A gamy lamb shank, a fine feta, a whole Mediterranean fish or fresh figs tend to need no help from the spice rack if combined masterfully.

Greek chefs have worked with these ingredients for thousands of years, and at this point, they know a little something about what ingredients work best together. The cuisine requires little refinement if done right.

And The Greek on Main does it right. The restaurant, on the corner of Main and New streets, produces Hellenic dishes from all regional cuisines. Some you may have heard of, and some may be new to you, but you can be sure that the kitchen is putting out versions at their best.

Owner Theodore Kappas underscores this with even his purchasing choices. Many of his core ingredients come from Greece, right down to his unfiltered olive oil. And you can taste that attention to detail in his appetizers and entrees.

The atmosphere here supports the menu beautifully. The dining room is clean and bright by day, and once the sun sets, it's intimate and warm. Colorful visuals and well-placed mirrors open up this corner space, and the acoustics soften the din of this busy gathering space.

We started dinner with our appetizers. Food historians stubbornly credit the French with inventing goat cheese (a.k.a. *chevre*), but even they admit that Muslim



—DEBORAH NILSON KMETZ

The Greek on Main's owner, Theodore Kappas, presides over a dining room that's both clean and bright, intimate and warm.

Arabs fighting the Crusades – and stopped in their tracks in France – were likely the creators of it. Geographically, let's split the difference and say the Greeks do goat cheese best. And if anything points to the power of this

cheese in Greek cuisine, it's the Fig and Goat Cheese Flat Bread (\$8) starter.

Here, a tender disk of pita bread is spread with a base of smooth and sweet caramelized onions, then topped with a generous crumble of goat cheese and small batons of sliced fig. The tang of this creamy cheese dovetails nicely with the fig's sweetness, while the onions hit the right balance between sweet and savory.

We switched over to feta cheese when we tried the spanakopita (\$10). While this ubiquitous Greek classic is as ethnically available as pierogi or pad thai, no supermarket freezer-case version comes close to the freshness of this version, which gets its bright flavors from fresh spinach, leeks

and fresh herbs. The phyllo here is crisp and meltingly light, while just enough feta cheese, with its rich texture and salty-tangy flavor, adds a sumptuous depth and subtle bite.

Greece has a variety of regional cuisines, but considering kakavia's ancient lineage and Greece's 8,500 miles of coastline, it's hard to nail down which one this ancient fish soup belongs to. Kakavia is named after the cooking vessels in which this dish developed in countless Greek fishing villages over the centuries.

According to the menu, kakavia (\$14) is a "traditional Ionian fish soup with mussels, clams, shrimp, calamari, and sea bass in saffron chardonnay wine broth." It's a lot like San Franciscan cioppino or French bouillabaisse, with its delicately robust wine- and tomato-infused broth and healthy serving of seafood. And like these other classic fish classics, The Greek's kakavia is buoyed by an infusion of liquor from its constituent shellfish components that make this a powerfully delicious sea-

food dish.

A yuvetsi is a Greek meat-and-pasta recipe baked in a spice-scented tomato sauce, and the Arni Yuvetsi Kritharaki (\$24) is an amazing example of one. In its splendid execution, the kitchen has adapted this crowd-pleaser to resemble lamb osso buco. In this inventive twist on that Milanese classic, chefs have replaced the risotto base with a beautiful bed of orzo ("kritharaki" in Greek) in cinnamon-laced tomato broth.

The meat of the good-sized lamb shank pulls apart as easily as you'd expect, and the generous topping of shredded kefalograviera, an aromatic hard Greek table cheese, adds a nice dimension to this dish.

Moussakas (\$18) is not unique to Greece – there are Turkish and Middle Eastern versions of it – but the Greek version is probably the one that you've encountered the most. Here, it's a layered pie of eggplant, potatoes, zucchini and ground beef, all bound together through a cinnamon-scented bechamel sauce. The

The Greek on Main ★ ★ ★ ☆
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(732) 515-9457 | thegreekonmain.com

Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday; noon to 10 p.m. Saturday, noon to 9 p.m. Sunday.

Appetizers and small plates: \$8 to \$14.

Whole grilled fish: \$28 to \$30.

Entrees: \$18 to \$34.

Credit cards accepted. BYOB.

Wheelchair accessible.

Restaurants are rated in relation to comparable establishments and reviews are based upon an anonymous evaluation of food, service, price, value and ambience.

One star is acceptable, two stars is good, three stars is very good and four stars is excellent.

dish comes together nicely, with the richness of the spice-infused sauce and meat complementing the lightness of the vegetables.

All of the desserts at The Greek on Main are house-made. Karidopita (\$7), a walnut cake flavored with rosewater and honey syrup and served with vanilla ice cream, is absolutely delicious. It's big enough to share, but you might get greedy after the first few bites. A little disappointing was the baklava (\$7). Here, flaky phyllo, walnuts, thyme and honey syrup deliver requisite flavors, but the dough layers are dense and a little tough.

The night wasn't without its issues, notably a service problem that the restaurant ultimately handed well. We sat down to a wait of 32 minutes before someone even approached us with a water pitcher, and our first waiter didn't help matters much. I finally complained, and the manager gave us a new, and very competent, waiter, who turned the whole dinner experience around for us. It also helped that we were comped our appetizers and kakavia.

Even with that blip, dinner at The Greek on Main was a good experience. I may not get to Greece for vacation this year, but knowing that the restaurant uses such authentic ingredients in wonderful recipes, I may only need go as far as Main Street to feel like I'm there.