

# Simple pleasures but far from spartan

*THE word **paraia**, which means the company of friends, is a key element of Greek food. Sharing dishes with friends and family is as important as the food itself and conversation, music and mirth are essential ingredients.*

Greek food is often seen as simple fare, coming from peasant origins, and this is part of its appeal. But Australian chefs with Greek backgrounds have brought great sophistication to their menus, reworking classic dishes with elegance and innovation. In Sydney it's possible to eat at both ends of the spectrum, from the no-nonsense bustle of a family-run taverna to a sleeker, updated take on ancient traditions.

#### TRADITIONAL FARE

With its chequered tablecloths, wood-panelled walls, Socceros posters and plastic vine hanging above the busy grill area, the Corinthian Rotisserie in Marrickville is just like a taverna in Athens.

It's full of rowdy groups of friends and families, mostly of Greek background. Small groups of young men, tucking into home-style food before a night out, sit close to the door, maintaining a fast turnaround. The sole waiter does a great job of keeping everyone happy, responding to the slightest twitch from a diner in an instant.



The food portions are huge. A mezze plate of haloumi has eight generous slices (\$11) and goes perfectly with spicy loukaniko sausage, also a large serving. The mains are served with chips, ubiquitous in Greece. The moussaka strikes a perfect balance of cinnamon and white sauce, the chicken souvlaki is juicy and tasty and the simple salad brims with quality olives and lovely whole spicy green peppers.

#### HELLENIC ELEGANCE

A stone's throw from Martin Place in Sydney, The Athenian occupies an old bank with soaring ceilings and Victorian columns, the walls plastered with scenes of ancient ruins. It represents the more elegant end of Greek dining.

The extensive menu has all the tradi-

tional favourites: stifado, souvlaki, stuffed vine leaves and moussaka but also, curiously, minestrone soup.

The importance of lamb is acknowledged with a variety of takes on the slow-cooked dish. The roasted lamb with stuffed eggplant and lemony potatoes is a generously proportioned dish, worthy of a place on any Greek family's kitchen table, as is the hearty beef stifado, a traditional stew cooked with whole baby onions. Less impressive are the prawn saganaki and moussaka, the first too sweet and overcooked, the other too salty.

Chicken liver and grilled lamb's fry are a good introduction to village-style dishes. To finish the meal, popular desserts include rizogalo (rice pudding), galaktoboureko (custard in puff pastry) and the nutty sweetness of

baklava.

#### MODERN INNOVATION

At Perama in Petersham, chef David Tsirekas woos diners with his modern take on traditional fare. The stucco walls, urns and soft Greek music are the only nods to the origins of the food here.

The seasonally adjusted menu features staples such as lamb skaras and kleftiko (lamb cooked in a claypot), keeping company with Perama innovations. The pick of the winter menu is the lobster moussaka (lobster stacked with potato and eggplant with saffron-flavoured bechamel). The lamb skaras beats the newcomer hands down. The meat is cooked to perfection, its char-grilled notes mingling with lemon, oregano and garlic.

The kalamata baklava with olive and mascarpone ice-cream takes traditional ingredients in new directions, while the mandarin flavours of the bougatsa (custard pastry) match the tahini and mint cream sauce perfectly.

#### A TASTE OF GREECE

*Corinthian Rotisserie,  
283 Marrickville Road, Marrickville,  
9569 7084.*

*The Athenian, 11 Barrack Street,  
city, 9262 2624.*

*Perama, 88 Audley Street,  
Petersham, 9569 7534.*

*Article from Sydney Morning Herald*

## Mourning wife admits to murder

The wife of a 57-year-old man, who went missing last summer from his native village of Dotsiko, near Grevena in northern Greece, and who had issued tearful televised appeals for him to be found, has now admitted to killing her husband and burying him with the help of her children, police revealed yesterday.

The 52-year-old allegedly admitted to fatally injuring her husband on July 16 last year after hitting him over the head with a plank of wood, following an argument about their children in their second home in Dotsiko, which they had been visiting on summer vacation from their permanent base in Germany. The woman allegedly told police that she attacked her husband in self-defense after he raised an ax toward her and her children. According to police, the woman claimed to have moved her husband's body the following day, on July 17, to a small warehouse in a nearby village with the help of her children, an 18-year-old youth and a 20-year-old girl. The next day, on July 18, the

52-year-old buried her husband's corpse in a remote spot near the village with the help of her children, according to her testimony as conveyed by police. A few hours later, the woman is alleged to have visited the local police station and announced that her husband had been missing since July 16. When asked why she had waited two days to come forward, she is said to have told officers that her husband had disappeared for a couple of days during their visit to Dotsiko the year before that and she had not worried initially.

Following her husband's disappearance last July, the woman had returned to Germany and had appeared on television appealing for the 57-year-old to be found. Greek police, who have continued their investigation over the past year, called her and the children to testify again a few days ago, after learning that the family was back in Greece, and reportedly extracted confessions from the woman and her son, who led them to the spot where the 57-year-old victim was buried.

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