

A taste of tradition

After six years off, this husband and wife are back delighting customers with treats baked 'the old way'

THE smell of sweet milk and butter sparkles in the air. The galakotboureko is just out of the oven, the custard warm, the syrup glowing and the filo flaky.

Theofanis Papacharalambous, whose family calls him Fanos, cools the foil trays before putting the diamond-scored pastry out with the baklava (layered almonds and filo), kataifi (filo wrapped in pastry shreds) and bougatsa (custard and cinnamon).

With his wife Eleni Fanos, has returned to this long-established Greek cake shop after a break of six years, which they spent looking after their grandchildren and themselves. The husband and wife baking team works hard, starting at 5 am.

Eleni talks proudly about her husband's skill making "traditional recipes in the old way and not cutting corners". Fanos, equally proudly says, "When they see Eleni's face they remember who we are".

They may not remember Fanos be-

cause he is out the back baking. But they remember the ouzo in his paximadia biscuits and the mastic and mahlep in his plaited tsoureki breads and semolina syrum cake. Since the couple reopened the shop in March, after two months of renovations loyal customers have sniffed them out. A woman buying a box of biscuits says:

"There's just enough old stuff so it's not brand new and still has a warm feeling".

The pale coral-pink cupboards and gold trim were here when the couple ran the shop from 1993 to 2003.

They bought it from their friend, Andrew Efthymious who now owns Trianon Cakes in Earlwood with this three sons.

In a Greek-Cypriot version of six degrees of separation, Fano's first shop was Christopher's Cakes in Darlinghurst, which he bought in 1976 from the Panayani family who now own it again.

Fanos and Eleni's Maroubra pastry palace has new display counters and kitchen equipment but the whipped marzipans, lavish cream cakes and buttery shortbreads (kourambiedes) are just as they ever were.



Legacy... Eleni and Theofanis Papacharalambous are part of the community. Photo: Edwin Pickles

Fano's carrot cake is still from a recipe in a thumbled, browned notebook he brought from Cyprus. His "noukahini" an Egyptian style almond and creme patissier layer cake he learnt as a baker in Nicosia.

Balance is the key to the baking here. Even with syrup and honey the traditional treats are not too sugary. Freshness is another key.

Eleni inscribes the celebration cakes as the customers buy them. A young woman who is godmother for the third time wants "thank you" on hers. Eleni reaches for a bag filled with chocolate icing and

writes quickly and skillfully.

Often, Eleni and Fanos remember their customers who came to them when they were youngsters and now have families of their own. "We are part of the community" they beam.

Greek cakes by Eleni
914 Anzac Parade, Maroubra
☎ 9349 1800
Tue-Sat 8 am - 5.30 pm;
Sun, 10 am - 4pm

Article from the Sydney Morning Herald

Food: Deep purple

APART FROM the pine and olive trees that cover the island, Skopelos is also home to a large number of plum trees, with only a small proportion of the annual crop being sold fresh at Greek markets.

The bulk of this purple harvest is earmarked for two long-established island specialties, namely the traditional production of prunes and plum brandy.

In ancient times, the little Sporades island of Skopelos was renowned for the wine it made, said to have aphrodisiac qualities and extolled by the likes of Aristophanes, the classical comic dramatist, as well as by Casanova.

The wine at the time was exported in amphorae as far as the Black Sea coasts. But it was the phylloxera-pest catastrophe, at the end of the 19th century, that destroyed this most blessed of the island's resources by wiping out all the vineyards.

So it was that plum cultivation found its way to the island during the 19th and 20th centuries. Nowadays, however, the number of producers willing to preserve the tradition is decreasing drastically.

One of the few plum farmers remaining on Skopelos is 60-year-old Yiannis, who grew up with plum trees planted by his grandfather. And although the

trees are now old and gnarled, they still bear fruit.

After being picked, the plums are washed, dried and spread out evenly on grids. These are then placed on shelves and dried at a constant temperature.

All over the island, you will see characteristic little buildings next to people's homes containing charcoal-fired ovens in drying chambers for the transformation of plums into tasty and chewy prunes.

Yiannis says the plums have to be "massaged" occasionally so that they shrink evenly during the drying process. (The yellow Avgato plum is one of the island's most important.)

The plums remain in the drying chamber until they are dried and flat. Despite their wrinkled appearance when done, the prune's flesh inside remains soft and sweet.

RECIPES

Htapodi me damaskina Octopus with plums

Ingredients

1 octopus, about 4 lb/2kg
1 scant cup/200ml white wine
1 scant cup/200ml Greek extra virgin olive oil
1 scant cup/200ml vinegar
24 plums - 2 bay leaves
4 large potatoes, peeled and cut into strips (or 3 quinces may be substituted) - Salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Method

Preheat the oven to 350F (180C). Separate the tentacles from the body and place in a casserole dish. Arrange the plums and bay leaves around the tentacles. Pour in the wine, vinegar and oil, season with salt and pepper and cover the dish tightly with foil. Cook for about two hours (the sauce will turn to jelly). Add the potatoes for the last hour of cooking. Serve hot with freshly baked white bread.



Moschari me damaskina Veal with prunes

Ingredients

2 lbs/1kg veal from the shoulder
1 scant cup/200ml Greek extra virgin olive oil
3 onions, finely diced
1 scant cup/200ml dry white wine
2 bay leaves - 9 tsp ground cinnamon
9 tsp sugar - 1 lb/500g prunes
Salt - Freshly ground black pepper

Method

Divide the meat into portions. Heat the olive oil in a saucepan and brown the meat on all sides. Add the onions and saute quickly, adding the white wine before they begin to turn brown. Add the bay leaves, cinnamon and sugar, and season with salt and pepper. Pour in enough water to cover all the ingredients. Bring to a boil, then reduce the temperature and simmer over a low heat until the meat is almost cooked. Line the base of a saucepan with the plums and place the meat and stock on top. Simmer over a moderate heat for 15 minutes. Serve hot with rice.

