

Michael Psilakis' personal approach to Greek food

One could say Michael Psilakis' culinary career began by accident. He had been running the front of the house at Ecco, a Long Island trattoria, for two years when one day the cooks didn't show up for work. From that point, Psilakis, then in his 20s, found himself in the kitchen, learning each station.

In the short time he has been a chef, Psilakis has accrued many of the food world's highest honors, including being named one of Food and Wine's 2008 Best New Chef, and both Bon Appetit's and Esquire's Chef of the Year. He now co-owns four restaurants in Manhattan - Anthos, a modern take on Greek cuisine and one of only two Greek restaurants in the world with a Michelin star; Kefi, which serves classic home-cooked meals similar to those Psilakis grew up eating; Mia Dona, an Italian restaurant with a Greek flair; and Gus & Gabriel - along with a new Greek restaurant, Eos, in Miami.

Psilakis' first cookbook, "How to Roast a Lamb," is a personal story. Each recipe is introduced by a tale from his childhood. In a chapter titled "My First Recipes," Psilakis pinpoints the moment that put him on the culinary path and says: "It would be the time I first made breakfast in bed for my parents." The story is followed by a selection of Psilakis' first recipes.

One of the recipes I tested came from

this section of the cookbook: Tiganites Patates Me Avga, Tomates Kai Piperies (potato, egg, tomato and peppers). It filled the kitchen with complex aromas, and the finished dish was bright with color and flavor (see recipe).

The 150 recipes range from simple salads, like the Tomato and String Bean Salad, to classic Greek dishes such as Spanakopita (spinach pie). They are built upon delectable Mediterranean ingredients, such as capers, feta cheese, olive oil

ty of the recipes include helpful hints, optional shortcuts and useful ingredient explanations.

"How to Roast a Lamb" is a great way to explore Greek cooking and discover that food is a work of art, a gift that brings people together.

Potato, Egg, Tomato & Peppers (Tiganites Patates Me Avga, Tomates Kai Piperies)

Serves 4-6 generously

From "How to Roast a Lamb," by Michael Psilakis. While the recipe calls for incorporating the potatoes into the sauteed vegetable mixture, we preferred keeping them crisp by serving them on top of the egg mixture. If you like spicy flavors, add 2-3 chopped pepperoncini while you are sauteing the pepper mixture.

3 baking potatoes, peeled, cut into french-fry size batons

-- Canola, peanut, or sunflower oil, for deep frying

-- Kosher salt and cracked black pepper

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 onion, finely chopped

1 red pepper, cored, seeded and thickly sliced

1 green pepper, cored, seeded and thickly sliced

1 yellow pepper, cored, seeded and thickly sliced

2 large leaves sage, slivered

2 cloves garlic, smashed and chopped

2 plum or cherry tomatoes, cut into rough wedges

2 teaspoons white wine vinegar

12 large eggs, beaten well with 1 tablespoon milk

-- Small handful torn fresh herbs, such as dill, parsley, mint, and/or chives

1/3 cup crumbled feta cheese

-- Crusty bread, for serving

Instructions: To deep-fry the potatoes, place the potato batons in a large bowl of cold water in the sink. Rinse very thoroughly under slow-running cold water, until all the starch is removed, about 20 minutes or until the water runs clear. Dry the potatoes between kitchen towels.

Pour several inches of oil into a large deep saucepan. Heat over medium-high heat until the oil reaches 250° on a deep-fry thermometer. Fry the potatoes, in batches if necessary, until potatoes are tender but have not colored. Remove and drain on paper towels. Heat the oil to 375° and fry the potatoes a second time, until golden brown. Drain on paper towels, and season with salt and pepper.

In a large skillet, warm the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion, peppers, sage and garlic. Cook until soft, about 3-6 minutes. Add the tomatoes and vinegar, and continue to cook until the liquid evaporates. Add the fried potatoes (or see note above to avoid sogginess), then pour in the beaten eggs. Let cook undisturbed for 1 minute, then begin gently scrambling the mixture until it reaches desired consistency. Just before serving, scatter with fresh herbs and feta.

Per serving: 357 calories, 17 g protein, 31 g carbohydrate, 19 g fat (5 g saturated), 432 mg cholesterol, 227 mg sodium, 3 g fiber.

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varietals and Greek yogurt, and the dishes have a fresh, light, healthy style.

Though Psilakis aspires to make his recipes user-friendly, most are very involved, requiring sub-recipes that I felt didn't enhance the dish. Still, the majori-

American scientists solve migraine mystery

Migraine sufferer: Symantha Perkins with husband, Australian swimmer Kieren Perkins. Picture: Craig Greenhill Source: Herald Sun

A discovery among blind people has helped scientists resolve a mystery why light can make a migraine go from headache to head-splitter.

The problem appears to lie with a newly-discovered bunch of cells in the retina, say the authors of a new study.

Researchers from Beth Israel Deaconess Centre, an affiliate of Harvard Medical School, made the find after pondering why some blind people who suffer from migraines also experience photophobia - an extreme sensitivity to light that horribly worsens these headaches.

In a paper published online in the journal Nature Neuroscience, the team reported how they probed two groups of migraine-suffering blind individuals.

One group, of six people, was totally blind and immune to the normal sleep-wakefulness cycle caused by daylight and night.

The other group was made up of 14 people who were "legally blind" because of degenerative diseases of the eyes.

They could detect the presence of light and followed the sleep-wakefulness cycle although they could not

perceive images.

"While the patients in the first group did not experience any worsening of their headaches from light exposure, the patients in the second group clearly described intensified pain when they were exposed to light, in particular blue or grey," said senior author Rami Burstein.

"This suggested to us that the mechanism of photophobia must involve the optic nerve, because in totally blind individuals, the optic nerve does not carry light signals to the brain."

The team theorised that the culprit had to be recent-



Migraine sufferer: Symantha Perkins with husband, Australian swimmer Kieren Perkins. Picture: Craig Greenhill Source: Herald Sun

ly-discovered retinal cells, which have melanopsin photoreceptors - light-sensitive biological triggers for sleep and wakefulness.

"These are the only functioning light receptors left among patients who are legally blind," Burstein said.

The next step was to test the ideas on lab rats.

Using dyes injected into the rodents' eyes, the scientists were able to trace the pathway from the melanopsin retinal cells through the optic nerve and to the brain, where they found a group of neurons which became activated during migraines.

Tiny electrodes inserted into the rats' brains determined that, within seconds, light unleashed a surge of electrical activity in these cells - and the cells remained switched on even after the light was removed.

"This helps explain why patients say that their headache intensifies within seconds after exposure to light and improves 20 to 30 minutes after being in the dark," Burstein said in a statement.

The work could be a boon for migraine sufferers and opens up exploratory options for drugs that block the pathway, enabling a migraine patient to endure light without added pain.

Migraines are a widely researched disorder, although the causes remain unclear.

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