

Greek ways

A strong focus on fresh produce is the secret to this authentic food

PAM Talimanidis' career in the kitchen evolved from weekend work by husband Kosta's side – while she juggled a career in law during the week – to running the show at their Aireys Inlet restaurant full-time.

At A La Grecque (meaning "in the Greek way"), and in the book of the same name, Talimanidis says her goal has been to interpret Greek cooking to include the influences of surrounding Mediterranean countries while making use of Australian produce.

In the book, she tells of her marriage to Kosta, reflecting on the influence of his family, particularly his mother Kyria Domna, to whom the book is dedicated. "She taught me to cook; she is the reason I cook in our restaurant today," Talimanidis writes.

Of course, beyond the compelling tale of the handsome Greek man who wooed the Anglo-Saxon law student, married her in Greece, produced three sons and created two renowned west-coast Victorian restaurants, there are recipes aplenty: nine chapters, plus one each on eating in the Greek way and the Greek pantry. Talimanidis covers a mouth-watering array of fish and seafood, salads and vegetables and meat and poultry.

One of the book's nice reflections is on the role of meat in the Greek diet: for many it is a luxury. During the months they spend each year at Polypetron, Kosta's village in the north of Greece, the focus is on eating what they, or friends and neighbours, produce. And back home in Australia, Talimandis writes that she tries to emulate something of the Greek table: "I hope to show you how preparing and eating good food are the essentials of wellbeing."

A La Grecque is published by Hardie Grant Books, RRP \$59.95

RECIPES

Long yellow peppers stuffed with feta

This tasty lunch dish is very easy to prepare. The sauce that forms in the pan from the cooking juices and feta is delicious mopped up with some bread. Choose large, mild Hungarian peppers about 20 centimetres long.

INGREDIENTS

12 yellow or red peppers
1kg feta cheese
4 ripe tomatoes, sliced
freshly ground black pepper
190ml extra virgin olive oil

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 180C and lightly oil a baking tray. Slice the stem ends off the peppers and use the point of a sharp knife to scrape out the seeds inside, keeping the peppers whole.

Cut the feta into pieces about two centimetres by two centimetres by eight centimetres. Don't worry if it crumbles. Push a piece of feta inside each pepper, inserting it as far as you can.

Lay the peppers flat on the baking tray so they fit snugly together. Top with slices of tomato and pepper.

Drizzle with oil and bake for 50 minutes or until the peppers are lightly coloured.

Serves 4

Chargrilled eggplant, red capsicum, tomato, onion, parsley konstantinopoli salata

This salad originated in Kiz Derwent, the village in Turkey where my parents-in-law were born. Back in the early days of the 20th century when they were small children, the horseback journey to the capital, Konstantinopoli, was a rare excursion for most of the village people. In those days, few villagers had the opportunity or means to venture outside the village, especially the women, who, to this day, rarely leave the house.

Clearly some brave soul did make the trip, though, and on his return to the village enthused over the salad he had eaten in the city. From then on, the village women referred to the dish as Constantinopole salad. It is a colourful combination of sweet, ripe summer vegetables, which have a wonderful smoky aroma as a result of being cooked over charcoal. If you don't have a charcoal grill, a barbecue will work well.

INGREDIENTS

2 firm, shiny eggplants
2 red capsicums
3 ripe tomatoes



1 red onion, sliced into rings
1 cup flat-leaf parsley leaves
125ml extra virgin olive oil
2 tbsp red wine vinegar
freshly ground black pepper
salt

METHOD

Prick the eggplants all over with a sharp knife. Cook the eggplants and capsicums over charcoals or on a barbecue until the skins have charred and the flesh is soft.

Remove the eggplants from the heat and immediately peel away the skins while holding them under gently running cold water. Place the peeled eggplants in a colander to drain for at least 1 hour.

Transfer the capsicums to a bowl and cover with cling film. When cool enough to handle, peel them and remove the seeds.

Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil. Cut a small cross in the base of each tomato and drop them carefully into the boiling water. Remove after 30 seconds and refresh immediately in iced water. This will make it easier to slip off the skins.

Slice the tomatoes into wedges and place them in a serving bowl. When ready to make the salad, cut the eggplant flesh into three-centimetre pieces and the capsicums into three-centimetre squares.

Add to serving bowl with tomato wedges, onion and parsley. Whisk oil and vinegar together and season with salt and pepper.

Pour over the salad and toss everything together gently.

Serves 4

Article from The Age

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