

# *The Scarsdale Enquirer*

## **New To Bronxville, Elia Taverna for tasty Greek food**

Olive oil gives a fragrant essence to many Greek dishes so it's fitting that Elia, or Greek for olive, is the name of the delightful new Greek Taverna in Bronxville (Chester Heights), that offers a wonderful array of Greek dishes. Elia Taverna is simply decorated with banquettes, dark wood, mirrors, blue ceramic tiles, and sheer curtains, the deep blue of the sea. Ceiling fans, paintings of olives, family photos and Greek music set the mood for the flavorful meal that follows.

Owners Michalakis Sarris and Rui Cunha are brother-in-law. Sarris, who was born in Cyprus, heads the kitchen. He helped prepare meals for his large family and joined the army as a cook after high school. He then attended culinary school and worked in Cyprus. In New York, he worked in several excellent Greek kitchens in Astoria, Queens. Sarris describes his food as "simple, homemade and traditional."

He said, "I'm happy in my kitchen and I believe you must live your life in happiness. I love to cook for all people, from all walks of life and I treat all the same." Sarris was kind enough, and very proud, to give me a tour of his busy, bustling and clean kitchen with its wonderful aromas.

Cunha attends to the business side of the restaurant. He has worked in the culinary field since he was 14 years old. Most recently, he owned Oporto, a Portuguese restaurant in Hartsdale. He said the brothers goal is "to introduce Greek cuisine, at reasonable prices, to the county and bring the Astoria experience to Westchester."

The kitchen at Elia boasts custom doner machines to prepare gyros, and lava rock grills for the excellent fish preparations. Lemons, light Greek olive oil, oregano, cumin, cinnamon, bay leaves and mint enhance the seasonal and very fresh ingredients that Sarris uses.

A meal at Elia can be as simple as souvlaki or gyro sandwiches, a selection of hot and cold meze, or a multi-course dinner. I enjoyed several tastings from the extensive menu. Hot and cold appetizers are very popular here. Warm pita and a ceramic dish of spiced olives are presented at each table. I sampled tzatziki, the popular yogurt cucumber dip. Here a bit of sour cream added thickness. Very fresh beets, garnished with cucumbers and accompanied by a garlic and potato dip, were nicely marinated and an excellent starter. If you enjoy your dips very spicy, try tirokafteri, a tangy feta dip. The pita will cool down the spice. Also available are the traditional taramosalata, the caviar dip and melitzano salata, an eggplant spread. The hot appetizers were many and varied to suit every taste.

Very special was the grilled octopus. Red wine vinegar and Greek olive oil added a distinctive flavor to these tender morsels. They were served warm with a touch of fresh parsley and were simply delicious. Garides saganaki was another winner: jumbo shrimp tail on, sautéed with tomatoes and feta cheese. The popular keftedakia, or Greek meatballs, were prepared with fresh breadcrumbs and were crisp and tasty. Tzatziki was a fine accompaniment. Dolmadekia, stuffed grape leaves with rice, dill lemon and olive oil, was served warm, which brought out the flavors of the filling. From Sarris's native Cyprus, we enjoyed haloumi cheese. This mild goat cheese was sliced and grilled and served over tomatoes and spears of cucumbers. I could of made a meal of this steak-like delicacy. Seftales were both sweet and savory rolls of ground pork with onions and parsley subtly spiced with nutmeg. A special of baby spearing, dusted in flour and quickly fried in olive oil and served with lemon wedges, was deliciously crisp, ready to be savored, bones and all. Next visit I hope to try grilled or fried calamari, zucchini cakes, feta cheese

phyllo pie and sweet peppers with feta. Several nice salads topped with grilled chicken, gyro, calamari or shrimp. Traditional soups are available.

The moussaka was rich and hearty. Eggplant, sliced potatoes, ground meat and béchamel sauce were layered in this fragrant stick-to-the-ribs dish. Arni kokkinisto arrived as braised lamb and homemade tomato sauce with orzo. The meat was fall off the bone tender and beautifully seasoned. Imam, the baby eggplants, were stuffed and surrounded by fresh tomato, onion and garlic sauce and topped with parmesan. Baked to perfection, this was one of my favorites. Traditional pastichio, with pasta and meat, and spinach, feta phyllo pie are offered. Seafood is a popular choice in Greece, and at Elia we sampled several varieties, simply grilled with olive oil, lemon and parsley. Salmon, swordfish, shrimp and calamari were perfectly grilled and served with amazing roasted lemon potatoes. From the charcoal grill comes lamb or chicken kebabs, skewered with onions and peppers, nice and moist, lamb chops and Greek style burgers. There are specials each day, perhaps stuffed tomatoes and peppers, whole red snapper, branzino, whole or filleted, stewed baby octopus or fresh sardines.

Desserts include traditional pastries, baklava, kaitaifi and galaktoboureko, as well as thick Greek yogurt with honey and walnuts. For me, the divine loukoumades were the perfect finale. They are not available on Friday or Saturday, so enjoy these crisp fried dumplings drenched in honey syrup with a hint of cinnamon on other days. Greek coffee, or frappe, iced Nescafe blended to a frothy mix, are fine beverages to complement your meal. Slowly sipping the refreshing frappe will transport you to the Greek Isles.

Enjoy the simple, but never plain specialties of Greece, as prepared with care and skill at Elia Taverna.

As written by Judy Dweck food editor for The Scarsdale Enquirer

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