

FOOD

Foodies Rejoice! Greek Food Blogs Offer Endless Options

By MARIA A. KARAMITSOS

Wikipedia defines "foodie" as a particular class of aficionado of food and drink. Whether you realize it or not – all Greeks are foodies. We are particular about our food and its preparation. We demand the highest quality ingredients. We're very passionate about food – not just to savor it with all of our senses. Meals are an event; the para is just as important as the food. We are meticulous in our preparation. We delight in watching a table full of guests relish the fruits of our labor. Food isn't just sustenance to us, but rather the preparation and eating of food is one of life's pleasures. It's no wonder that people so passionate about food are finding new ways to share their creations.

A weblog, commonly referred to as a blog, is an online journal that is regularly updated and accessible to all. Anyone can start a blog, on any topic – for free. There are hundreds of millions of blogs on every subject imaginable. People start blogs to share their knowledge and expertise. Writers, artists and others, use them to promote their works. Some publishing houses find titles to publish based on blogs. Blogs are a very powerful way to share information.

This is an exciting time in the world of Greek cuisine. With popular chefs like Cat Cora and Michael Psilakis on the scene, elevating Greek cuisine to new heights, many "home-based" cooks are sharing their own creative ideas, taking traditional Greek cuisine and traditional ingredients used in Greek cooking, and reinventing them into something new and different – and scrumptious. A Greek food blog is therefore a natural progression. Things have come a long way since Archestratos wrote that first cookbook in 330 BC.

There are sites that publish lists of recipes, however, blogs take it a step further and offer an interactive element. Bloggers also include stories, photos – sometimes videos – of food, preparation, plus wine pairing suggestions and more.

Do a Google search on "Greek food blog" and you'll get pages and pages of options. Here's a taste.

Kalofagas

Founded in 2007, the appropriately named Kalofagas (<http://kalofagas.ca>) is full of travel stories, plus vivid images of the foods. Kalofagas – which means gourmet in Greek – is the brainchild of Peter Minaki of Toronto. An investment adviser by profession, the blog is his hobby.

"Food is in our genes," he explained. "We've been brought up around the table. Sunday dinners with family are a big deal. It's our gathering point." Minaki is currently in Greece, exploring Greek cuisine in various regions. He's been Twittering and posting on Facebook about his various discoveries. The country is after all, a virtual treasure trove of culinary delights.

The recipes at Kalofagas run the gamut from traditional fare to reinvented classics to Minaki's own creations. "I like to be creative. There are family favorites. Sometimes it depends on your mood. Sometimes we long for something that triggers a memory of a vacation. I go to Greece every year and each time I experience something new. I look at what other chefs are doing, read other blogs and look at cookbooks, then I add my own twists. Sometimes I improvise if certain ingredients are not available," he said.

Minaki began blogging, "because I could. Anyone can." He added that he didn't like the way Greek cuisine had been presented to that point. "There's still work to be done. People think that we eat souvlaki everyday; that Greek salad is made with iceberg lettuce. Who better than a Greek person to share that our cuisine goes way beyond that?"

Every post at Kalofagas includes a story; since memories are very often made at mealtimes. He strives to include foods and ingredients from throughout Greece. "There's 1000 ways to make spanakopita. People are slowly becoming more open to trying something new, mak-

ing something in a different way." Each Friday he features the "Greek Food Gazette," complete with news from Greece, including tourism, food, "anything Greek that's newsworthy." Minaki also recommends cookbooks on his blog. Someday he'd love to write one.

"It's a very exciting time for Greek food. Non-Greeks are getting a better grasp on what real food is like. What they've experienced



The delightful Mediterranean Lentil Salad from the Chicago-based blog Elly Says Opa.

in Greek restaurants to this point has little to do with how we really eat." He added, "They've started cultivating avocados in Greece. I'm seeing it a lot in recipes now."

Minaki advises readers to "seek out Greek ingredients. Many stores now sell authentic Greek products. It's important to buy the real stuff. There's a lot of feta made in the US, however, real feta from Greece, made with sheep or goat milk, has a distinctive flavor. Be sure your olive oil is extra-virgin and pure. There are also some wonderful Greek wines out there now. If stores don't carry what you are looking for, ask. Use our ingredients, support our people." He also suggested that we "get our gardens going in the summer." He recommends lots of herbs and of course, tomatoes. "Half your job is done when you source the right ingredients. Cook seasonally, shop locally."

At the Greek Table

This blog (<http://www.greekboston.com/atthegreektable/>) is the product of a partnership between Fotios Stamos, known for his website www.greekboston.com, and Chef Paul Delios, most-known for his former Italian eatery, Paolo's Trattoria. Stamos' industry knowledge of food and wine is combined with Delios' self-taught culinary mastery. "We came together in 2004 to open the now-closed Meze Estiatorio," Stamos explained. "It was the premier Greek restaurant in the area, offering contemporary Greek cuisine."

"I've been doing Greekboston, so I had one foot in the electronic world, the other in food and wine. I thought to combine them both since everything's moving that way." They created At the Greek Table in November 2009. "The response has been huge – and in a short period of time," he expressed.

Stamos described the blog as "mimicking our culture. Everything happens around the table. We socialize, conduct business, do a lot over food. At the Greek Table encompasses both culture and lifestyle." Readers will find food and wine tips. Signature recipes from Delios incorporate tones of New England – one of his most popular dishes is blueberry baklava. "Adding one ingredient can change everything," Stamos added, noting the additions of the bounty of the region and the season. Soon, they will incorporate short videos to demonstrate recipes and techniques.

"We blog to educate, promote and preserve our Hellenic culinary culture. There's more to accomplish," he told The Greek Star. A cookbook is in the works, and they'll do a road show with cooking demos to promote it.

"We're seeing Greek cuisine more exposed in the mainstream than ever before, because of people like Psilakis, and others in Chicago, New York, Atlanta, the West Coast." He said that these people

were not so much reinventing, but often reinterpreting, breaking down the foods by region and introducing new methods and techniques into the preparation. "There's an infusion in progress – taking techniques of other cultures and infusing them with Greek ingredients."

In August, they hosted a series of wine dinners at the Elounda Soulféz Villas in Crete. The chef created his signature dishes us-

ing local ingredients. They also participated in wine tastings at Palivou Estates Winery in Nemea.

He suggested, "When in Greece, dine in the nicer neighborhoods in Athens, as they are some very interesting restaurants with imaginative cuisine."

Greek Chic Cuisine

This past May Stephanie Patsalis, owner of gourmet food business The Cooking Club, Inc., released a cookbook called Greek Chic Cuisine. A companion to the book is a blog of the same name. (<http://greekchiccuisine.com/>).

"I credit my culinary success to my dear yiayia, mother and aunt for

their tough Greek home-cooking school," she recalled. "And another aunt, who shared her love of cooking with a twist, exposing me to new techniques in Hellenic cooking." She says that learning and loving to cook inspired her to start her business. "It teaches the busy gourmet easy, make-and-take meals in an instructional kitchen." It launched her into other culinary adventures, including a catering company, a gourmet food retail catalog and instructional cooking classes for the home.

Something was missing on her culinary journey. "There was a growing need to do something with my strong love for my heritage, especially since so many asked me for recipes," she described. "I turned my passion for Greek cooking into the brand Greek Chic Cuisine, with easy-to-follow recipes." Patsalis indicated another driving factor in creating the book – she wanted to pass more than just a business to her two daughters. The girls helped her research, test and "create a legacy."

Both traditional and contemporary recipes are found in the book and on the blog. "There are creative elements in the dishes, but each is rooted in the authentic flavor of the Mediterranean," she explained. What's unique to this site is the opportunity to "Greek Chic" an item – get tips to add a contemporary touch to traditional dishes. Other recipes are reinvented classics, using traditional ingredients in a contemporary way. Look for yummy reinventions like Baklava Pancakes, Kalamata Bruschetta, Gyro Lettuce Wraps and Ouzo Chocolate Cupcakes. Also look for wine pairings.

"The blog is a great forum to engage with my readers. I like the freedom to write about things I discover in my travels. It shows the more dynamic side of Greek cooking,



The colorful and delicious Makaronia Me Vliita kai Vasiliko from the blog Kalofagas.

not simply recipes. I love the comments I receive, like, 'wow, Greek cooking isn't as hard as I thought!'"

Elly Says Opa

Chicagoan Elly Kafritsas-Wessels, like many other Greek-Americans, grew up in the restaurant business, which always gave her an "interest and inclination toward cooking." However, she didn't begin exploring and experimenting with other cuisines and flavors until she moved to Chicago.

Elly Says Opa (<http://ellysaysopa.com>) debuted in November 2006. "Food blogs have more personality than a recipe site and invite dialog. People comment or link back to their own blog if they tried a recipe. Readers can see how it worked for someone else, too."

She tackles many different cuisines on her blog. Her own personal touches are peppered through the recipes, even some humor. Look for traditional favorites, such as her grandmother's lahanodolmades and plasto. Also, check out her Baklava French Toast – and other unexpected dishes. There's

more to explore, as Greek recipes comprise just 1/3 of her blog.

"Although we love Greek cuisine, it's never gotten the best rap from food critics, who sometimes find it dull. Now chefs like Psilakis are making people take another look at Greek food. Critics and regular eaters alike are realizing it's not only a healthy cuisine, but a tasty one as well. I think the restaurant Taxim (in Wicker Park) has done so much. I draw much inspiration from Greek cuisine, but like to make my own changes here and there, and make things a little more eclectic."

Other Blogs to Check Out

Here are some other great blogs to check out: <http://kalisasorexi.com/>, <http://souvlakiforthesoul.com/>, <http://kopiaste.org/> and <http://nikisbakingspot.blogspot.com/> (another Chicago girl!). That ought to get you started.

There's a whole new world out there waiting to be explored. Need something to make for dinner tonight? Check out the blogs and try something new. A culinary adventure awaits you. Kali Orexi!

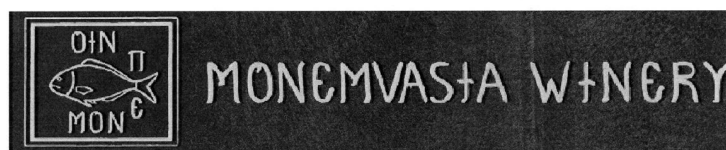
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