

Ethos Greek Bistro

Ethos means “character” in Greek. For restaurateur George Pappas, owner of Ethos Greek Bistro in the Promenade at Coconut Creek, it also represents integrity, “your guiding belief.” When Pappas opened Ethos in May 2012 he was responding to his ethos and the needs of the local market. He wanted a restaurant that served fresh and healthful food, in a timely and friendly manner, at a fair price. When I dined there recently I got to see for myself.



by Linda Brockman

My friends and I ordered a variety of dishes – from spreads and salads to lamb and fish dishes – accompanied by elegant libations and finished with dessert, baked in-house.

Standouts are the Rebel Lamb, dips, Shrimp Saganaki (baked in fresh tomato and garlic, topped with barrel-aged feta), Zucchini Croquettes with tzatziki (yogurt and cucumber spread), and char-grilled octopus.

A popular appetizer is dolmades (traditional stuffed grape leaves). Pappas said the staff hand rolls 60,000 a year. My table decided instead to try the spread sampler, which proved to be a good choice. It was served with crusty bread fresh from the oven that my friend Beth called “the perfect dipper.”

The appetizer includes four dips: a refreshing tzatziki, a creamy feta, tasty hummus, and “eggplant smash” (which resembled its Middle-Eastern cousin, baba ganoush) with feta, roasted red peppers and walnuts. Each of us had a different favorite in the flight of spreads.

My friend Steve’s surf and turf comprises shrimp saganaki – (delicious, and also available as a small plate) and lamb chops. Steve ordered them to be cooked medium and he loved them, although the piece I tried was a bit rare.

The Ethos Platter has a bit of everything: Greek salad, spinach rice, roasted potatoes, grilled pita, and yogurt sauce with a choice of vegetable or protein, such as chicken, gyro, pork tenderloin, or kefte (lamb meatballs). My dinner companions ordered Faroe Islands Salmon and Bronzini (described on the menu as a Greek sea bass) as their entrees, which they enjoyed.

My dish was Rebel Lamb, which might be unfamiliar to readers (but well worth trying) even though it has been around for more than a century. The dish goes back to the Ottoman Rule, when Greeks hid in the mountains and would steal a lamb for food. They needed to cook it, but building a fire brings smoke that will reveal their hiding spot. So the rebels developed a slow-cooking method of sealing the meat and other ingredients in a clay pot and burying it with hot coals, allowing it to braise slowly. Today, Ethos uses New Zealand lamb and parchment paper, baked in an oven to get the same effect. Braising tenderizes the meat but I did not expect it to be this tender and have so much flavor – it was perfection.

The full drink menu has everything from wine and martinis to the classic Greek retsina and signature drinks with a Greek twist. Try the Mykonos Mule or Mastiha Cosmo made with a Greek liquor called Mastiha (pronounced mas-tee-ka or mas-tee-ha), which is made from the sap of a tree on the coast of Chios. I was surprised by its refreshing flavor and my



friend Beth found it to be the perfect complement to the meal – in fact she said it was her favorite part. A lighter version of ouzo, Mastiha’s licorice base is quieted by the other ingredients in mixed drinks.

The goal is to have the food served within seven to eight minutes of ordering lunch; 12 minutes at dinner. So you might not wait once you’re seated, but be prepared to wait a bit for a table on Friday or Saturday nights. Being in an open mall, Ethos attracts many shoppers. But the good part is you can walk around the Promenade while waiting.

Desserts are made in-house. “You can have an amazing meal, but if there is no wow at the end, it won’t be as memorable,” Pappas said. “Dessert must wow.”

Sweets include baklava, and lesser known Greek favorites Ekmek and Galakto Fantastico, both made with phyllo dough and custard. My favorite was the exquisite Triple Layer Cheesecake, dressed with walnuts, shredded phyllo, and topped with Belgian chocolate ganache. Wow indeed.

Within the Promenade, Pappas also owns Ciao Cucina and Bar, as well as another Ethos location in Wilton Manors. He has a business plan to open six more restaurants in South Florida in the next five years.

“When you try to deliver food that is healthful, fresh and tasty, coupled with good service at a fair price, often something will be lacking,” said Pappas, who was raised in Crete. “It is hard to put it all together. We work very hard to accomplish that here.”

No Zorba Here

Traditional Greek restaurants often make me think of waiters dancing the syrtaki, shoulder to shoulder and breaking plates (on purpose) with a festive “Opa!” Owner George Pappas didn’t want his establishment to be “that Greek restaurant.”

There is no blue and white Greek-style lettering, no dancing on the tables, no breaking dishes, no scattered napkins, and no waiters dancing with their hands on each other’s shoulders in a line. (I picture Anthony Quinn in *Zorba the Greek* and immediately hear the movie’s iconic theme.)

Pappas, 45, is proud to offer both traditional and modernized food and drink in a minimalist setting. He sees this more as catering to a local market – from Aventura to Boca – that wants a menu offering fresh and healthy dishes.

