

The Zest Bonus with Mykonos Restaurant

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Andreas: This type, uh, food, this type atmosphere, people, they love it

Robin: I'm Robin Sessinghám and this is The Zest. Citrus, seafood, Spanish flavor and Southern charm for all about food in Florida. Today we're heading to Tarpon Springs to explore the flavors of Florida's Greek town. Thanks so much for joining us, and if you haven't yet, please subscribe and leave us a rating on iTunes.

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Miami has Little Havana, Orlando has Little Vietnam, and in northern Pinellas County, you'll find Florida's Greek enclave of Tarpon Springs. In the late 1800s, Greek immigrants established the town's sponge diving industry. Today, visitors flock to Tarpon Springs not only to buy sponges, but also to sample the authentic Greek food.

Mykonos Restaurant has been a Tarpon Springs institution

since 1992. Our producer, Dalia Colon, recently stopped by to chat with the restaurant's founder, 79-year-old Andreas Salaveros, and his 23-year-old granddaughter, Nichole Pastis. This was recorded before the coronavirus pandemic, and the restaurant was bustling, so [00:02:00] the three of them went around the corner to talk at Forno's Bakery, which the family also owns

Dalia: So will you introduce yourself, tell us your name and what you do?

Andreas: Andreas Salivaras. I'm the owner for the Mykonos, and the bakery of course. And, uh, I come to this country very close to 60 years ago, and I'm very proud because I come to this country, because the, this country, they adopt us even so w- without language for the beginning.

Nichole: And you. My name's Nichole Pastis, and I am the granddaughter of Andreas.

And, um, right now I'm in nursing school, but I've been helping him since I've been in middle school.

Dalia: Helping him at the restaurant and bakery?

Nichole: Yes.

Dalia: What do you do there? What were you doing when I came in and- Um- ... drafted you for this conversation?

Nichole: Well, it depends on the day. We [00:03:00] don't have a specific role at the restaurant, so even my grandfather will be on the floor bussing.

We've done that multiple times, doing the door, mainly the register, answering phone calls. It just really depends.

Dalia: Andreas, tell me about where you grew up in Greece and what brought you here to Tarpon Spring.

Andreas: I grew up at the small island, they call it Kimolos, who is an, in English mean chalk. And, uh, very small population, maybe very close to 1,000 people.

And I go to the school there, elementary school. Last two years I finished my high sc- three years actually, I finished my high school in Athens.

Dalia: And then how did you end up here in Tarpon Springs?

Andreas: My first destination was in Cleveland, Chicago, and then after I start to promote the gyro sandwich, go different places in United State.

And I come to the Tarp- to [00:04:00] Tampa, actually- From the beginning, my father-in-law and my mother-in-law used to live here, so I planned to come over here to visit them, but at the same token, I bought a place in Tampa. But we live in Tarpon Springs because we have to know Tarpon Springs is very famous for the Greek town.

Dalia: So you came here to promote the gyro sandwich, and is that how you pronounce it? Is it gyro? Is it gyro? Set the record

Andreas: straight. Gyros. A lot of people, they pronounce gyros, but it is, is the gyros. It is the gyros. And then the same token, I'm going to promote the gyro, of course, to make money, too, in state fair in Tampa.

Dalia: Now, Nichole, when he was talking about how Tarpon Springs has a reputation as a Greek town, you were nodding. How do you describe Tarpon Springs to people who've never been here before? What's it like to walk down the s- the sidewalk in Tarpon Springs?

Nichole: It's like a little piece [00:05:00] of Greece. I think so. Like, I have personally never been to Greece, but what I've heard about it, like the live action outside, you get to sit, you're by the water, you get to experience, like, different people from all over the world.

We had people yesterday come from Europe, and one was from Japan, and it was just... It's just nice. It's nice to have. It's like a family anywhere you go in Tarpon Springs.

Dalia: Absolutely, and that family likes to eat which is what we're here to talk about. So tell me about the restaurant, and then we're sitting in the bakery because the restaurant was so packed that we could barely hear ourselves think, which is great for you, not so good for the podcast.

Tell me about how the restaurant got started.

Andreas: First of all, I'm the, all my life in the food business. And I have a restaurant in Cleveland. But after I moved to Florida, I come to Tampa. I bought a place, was American, but I put a few Greek dishes. But I'm specialized on Greek food. [00:06:00] What I believe Tarpon Springs is the place to open place for the Greek food because percentage-wise, the people, they come to Tarpon because the Greek town, that's what they call it, and lately we call them Epiphany City.

So all this, you know, is a flavor of the Greece. Thank you, sir. So we don't want it to lose the flavor of the Greece. So I feel This is a really, really Greek town with Greek food.

Dalia: What year did you open Mykonos as a Greek restaurant, and why did you name it Mykonos?

Andreas: I opened 1992 with my wife, and we make it a Mykonos because percentage-wise, [00:07:00] lot of people, they know island of Mykonos.

We feel the people who's come to our place, Mykonos, we feel is our guest. Like we say, same thing if you go to Disney, the people say, "Is my guest." Of course it's our guest. We have to welcome every single one.

Dalia: So it's be our guest on the Greek isle of Mykonos. Correct. Pretty cool. I have to go back to something you said.

You said that the nickname for Tarpon Springs is Epiphany City. Why is that?

Andreas: Epiphany City is because- We celebrate every 6th in January the baptism of the Christ. So, but this one is not only for Orthodox, it's all for the all Christianity. That's the reason we, we, I think the city, they [00:08:00] recognize Epiphany city.

Dalia: That's what we see on the news when we see all those young men diving into the water when it's freezing outside for the celebration of the Epiphany. Nichole, for someone who's never experienced Greek food, what are some of the most popular dishes at Mykonos Restaurant?

Nichole: Well, I think the one that we, that has been ordered a lot is our lamb fricassee.

So it's our cooked lamb leg with the endives, like glazed on top. That's our most famous dish. Another thing is that a lot of people come in for like the big fi- Like, we do the whole fish. We make it look really nice. We can do it grilled or fried. Those are like our two main... Right? Would you say are two main top dishes that we have.

What type of fish? So we have yellow snapper and red snapper. Our red snapper can feed up to, what? We can do like four or five people. Four, yeah. Yeah. We have our B-liner's a little bit smaller, and then our yellow tail could be up to two people.

Dalia: What are some of the flavors, Andreas, you mentioned the flavors of Greece.

What are some of those spices, Nichole, when you're in the [00:09:00] kitchen, what are some of the items that you find yourself reaching for again and again?

Nichole: We do, um, ladoi, which is oil, and then we have oregano, garlic, salt, and pepper are like our main spice that we use on every dish.

Dalia: Okay, my mouth is watering now.

What's been the most challenging part of having this restaurant over the years?

Andreas: You have to love what you're doing. You have to be, you have to be on top of it, not only to the employees, but you have to be on top of it to the people, to the guest.

Dalia: You talked about making sure your employees are happy, and I know that a lot of your employees are family.

So Nichole, how much of your family works here? I feel like I've already met quite a few members of your family.

Nichole: Well, that's all of them right there. S- so it depends, you know, go across street, see my uncle, or I'm at the restaurant with my grandfather. My mom also works there as well, so I can see her in the back when I have my little woosah moment, my break, and then my aunt will [00:10:00] come around here and there.

Dalia: What advice do you have for families going into business together?
'Cause you're together much of the time.

Nichole: All of the time. We are all the time together. Um, I would have to say that we have to, once you get home, you need to put work aside and then remember that it's still family. I also think it's really important to, you know, take a breather and actually sit down and eat with each other, 'cause it's surprising enough We don't really do that that often 'cause we're so worried about everybody else.

Dalia: Mm. The cobbler's children have no shoes, right?

Nichole: Yep.

Dalia: Nichole, you said you started working in the restaurant when you were in middle school?

Nichole: I wouldn't say working. I don't really call it working.

Dalia: No, this isn't like a ...

Nichole: No.

Dalia: That's illegal.

Nichole: No, no, no, no, no.

Dalia: No, no. I think it's

Nichole: actually part of our culture, though, that even as a young age, kids are supposed to be doing a lot of chores around the house, helping your parents as much as you can.

I mean, my grandfather... No, when I was in middle school, I [00:11:00] remember my grandfather would pick me up, and we would go to the Funos and he would bake. Funos is our baker- our other bakery that we had. And we would bake right before class, so it was, like, 5:00 in the morning. And then after that, we would then, we'll eat, and then we'll go.

He would drop me off at school.

Dalia: Wow. Let's talk about some of the baked goods. We're sitting in the bakery. I don't know if I can do another interview in a bakery 'cause this is, like, a test of will here. Yeah. What are some of the most popular Greek baked goods?

Andreas: Most of the people, they like the baklava Because for many, many years, everywhere you go, they use a baklava.

We have the quality of the bread. We make some special cookies who is the homemade, is not like they say, you know, everything we do, we doing because we love it to do it. [00:12:00] We love to present to the people.

Dalia: I love that. Tell me, what is a Greek cookie? I mean, they look good, but what makes it different from a, you know, chocolate chip cookie?

Nichole: Well, it depends, 'cause you have so many different kinds of cookies.

Dalia: Of course.

Nichole: But a majority of them, though, we usually have them in the, in the morning with our coffee, and we kind of dunk them in, if that kind of makes

sense. Okay. And then, um, the majority of them have to be, like, a vanilla. It's, like, a very light...

So they're not heavy. They don't have any sprinkles on them or any, any what? Um, like, cream on top of them. It's just very, it's, like, very natural.

Dalia: Yeah, kind of like a, not exactly like a biscotti, but the idea of dipping something in your coffee.

Nichole: Correct. Mm-hmm.

Dalia: Have you thought at all about the restaurant's future?

Are you trying to keep it traditional? Do you wanna mix in some more modern dishes or techniques? What do you think about that?

Andreas: No. To my restaurant, no. [00:13:00] I don't want it to do Mykonos modern. I want it to keep it the same, because this type, uh, food, this type atmosphere, people, they love it. The hospitality and the food go together.

Dalia: All right, we're gonna start to wrap up here, 'cause you got another group of tourists coming in. It's a good problem to have. But Nichole, you mentioned that you're in nursing school. So what do you see as your future in the restaurant?

Nichole: I think I would actually put nursing as a part-time and do what I can at the restaurant.

It's not that, of course, doing something every day, people are like, "Oh, you must be, like, really bored of it." And I think my favorite part is just being surrounded by different people. As I said, a lot of people come from all around the world just to try his food. I feel like I would always just want to be involved, like, somehow, someway.

Dalia: Finally, is there a dish that someone could make at home? I don't know if you can [00:14:00] share a recipe or... Oh my God. But this man is

Nichole: very

Dalia: kind.

Andreas: Okay.

Dalia: Yes.

Andreas: I gonna be honest with you. I don't mind to share it with everybody, because that's my... I'm, uh, very proud if somebody ask me, say, "Tell me how you do this, this."

Because to me- He make me honor. Somebody call me and say, "Okay, Andy, I need it. To give me this recipe because I'm gonna make home." I don't mind to do that. Everything is easy as long as you love to do it. Everything. Nothing, nothing difficult, as long as you love your cooking. But not only cooking, but whatever you do in your life, if you love what you're doing, that's amazing.

Nichole: Okay. Can I add something into that real quick? Yeah. It's funny that you said that. I had, um, one of the people that he gave his recipes to, they said that they did exactly [00:15:00] what they s- what he told them to do, and they couldn't... It wouldn't turn out the same way. And then Babou was like, "No, it's the way.

Like, how much did he put in?" They're like, "Oh, a teaspoon of this, a cup of this." And he's like, "No, you just look at it and you know." Right. So I

think it... Yeah. So I think, I don't even look at the recipes. I don't know how well it's gonna be the same. You just have to, as he said, put the love into it. You just gotta know by looking at it, right?

Just like throw in there.

Dalia: Oh, you're one of those. All right. Well, Andreas Salivaras and Nichole Pastis, thank you so much for your time, and, um, much success in the future of Mykonos. Thanks

Andreas: very much. Thank you. Thank you, thank you. I appreciate you come to see us. We

Nichole: really do. Thank you so much. Very much.

Robin: That was Dalia Colon speaking with Andreas Salivaras, founder of Mykonos Restaurant in Tarpon Springs, and his granddaughter, Nichole Pastis. They shared recipes for two of the restaurant's most popular dishes: lamb fricassee and [00:16:00] tomato cucumber salad. Find them on our website, thezestpodcast.com. To learn more about the family behind Mykonos, check out Dalia's article in the June issue of Forum, the magazine of the Florida Humanities Council.

That's at floridahumanities.org. Thanks for listening. I'm Robin Sessingham. Dalia Colon and I produce The Zest with help from Cheyenne Jagla and Mark Hayes.

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