

Greek chic is cool

Kouzina joins the new wave serving finessed Hellenic food

Greek food has recently come of age in Melbourne with such restaurants as The Press Club, Trapezi and Mini. The latest in this posse keen to show that Greek food is more than dips and burnt meat is Kouzina in Southgate.

Like many of this new wave, Kouzina's owner, Theo Kostoglou, was born in Australia. He previously ran the Mykonos Cafe Restaurant in Knox Ozone. Now he and his wife, Sharelle, serve finessed Greek flavours in a finer setting than the usual blue-and-white fishing net-strewn environment.

Greece's rich culinary history has influences from sources as diverse as Eastern Europe, Venice, southern Italy and Turkey. Some of these influences can be seen on the menu at Kouzina, although in Kostoglou's case it seems as if he's reinterpreting his family cookbook with a classical French accent. The lamb loin (pictured) comes with an eggplant moussaka timbale, a red pepper and walnut coulis and a tzatziki mousse. The

pickled octopus shows a pinch of Gallic charm with truffled-scented fava beans.

The saganaki comes flambéed in brandy, the cheese dusted with fennel seeds and sumac in what seems like a very Middle Eastern touch. Saganaki isn't actually a Greek cheese, as is commonly thought, but the name of the two-handled pan the dish is traditionally cooked in. Here the cheese they use is kefalograviera.

I only mention this so when you see Kouzina's popular "lobster saganaki" on the menu, you'll understand it is Western Australian rock lobster cooked with ouzo and passata in that pan, not lobster and cheese.

The food here is not shy of flavour. Take the kotopoulo yemisto, which is chook wrapped around a filling of cured beef (pastourma) and kasseri (a Greek cheese). It's a wholesome feed, although the dish that would bring me back is the \$8 side of Turkish coleslaw. This was loaded with shreds of pastourma, pine nuts and the occasional



sweet burst of a raisin or two. It was fresh, crunchy and supremely tasty.

You'd think by now that I would have learnt that one doesn't order the dessert platter when eating out. The problem with five mini versions of the main desserts is that too often there are two that stand out and you wish you'd just ordered full serves of these. If I had my time again, I'd order the baklava, which had a bit of apricot in it to give it some zip, and the galaktoboureko, which married the dark stickiness of date with the traditional semolina custard pie.

The restaurant's smart corner site with Yarra and city skyline views requires little adornment. It is refreshingly free of Greek stereotypes, although this also stretches to the floor staff, which is as multicultural as a

Kouzina

Shop MR3, Southgate, Southbank, call 9682 2999

OWNERS Theo and Sharelle Kostoglou

CHEF Theo Kostoglou

OPEN Daily, noon-3pm and 5.30pm-10pm

COST About \$100 for two, plus drinks

computing tute at RMIT. While I find it easy to accept the evolution of Greek food on the menu here, I missed that traditional (albeit stereotypical) expression of Greek hospitality and warm welcome I usually associate with eating Greek – and no modern alternative was offered to replace it. And, sadly, I find this even more unsettling than the time The Press Club's George Calombaris tried stuffing squid with baklava. [ehw](#)