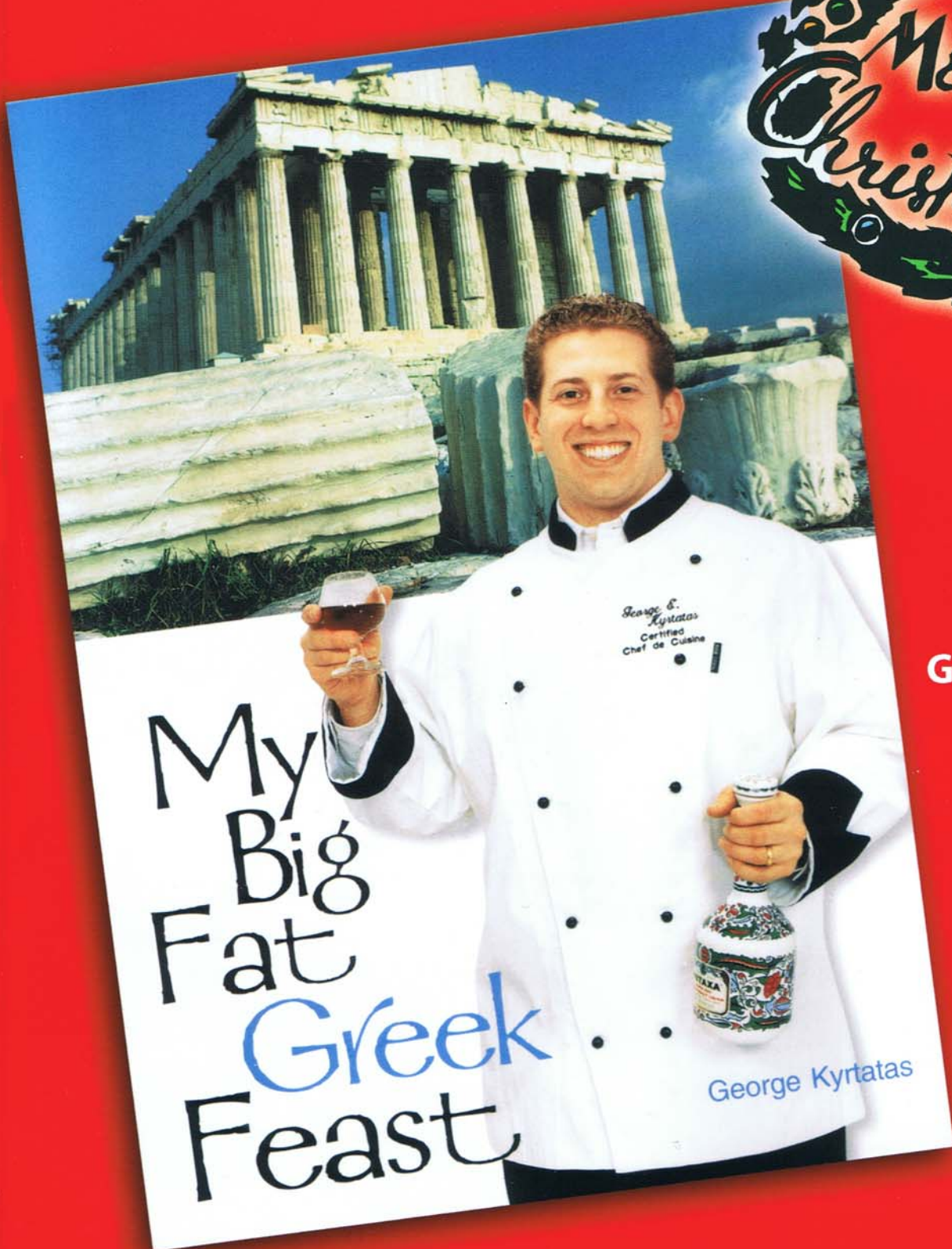


Estiator

December 2008

THE RESTAURANT



My
Big
Fat
Greek
Feast

George S.
Kyrtatas
Certified
Chef de Cuisine

George Kyrtatas

Young
Greek-American
Chef
Soon on TV
page 29

This Chef's Dream is to Disseminate What Is Purely Hellenic: Food

By BOB NICOLAIDES

Some of the most successful chefs have come from families that had no connection whatsoever with the food industry, while a good number of them were born virtually in the proximity of the grill. Whether the fact that they were born to families who owned or worked for restaurants has any connection with their success has yet to be proven, but given the cumulative experience one can amass by simply growing up in an environment where food is discussed frequently is enough to give that person an edge over the uninitiated.

George Kyrtatas of Medford, a town in southern New Jersey and not far from the town of Cherry Hill, a landmark any Hellene can recognize, belongs in the latter category. His family was in the diner business, so it was natural for him to grow with the desire to become not a diner owner—which he already was—but an accomplished foodie, in its superlative sense, a master of masters in the art of cooking, an instructor of instructors in the preparation of anything that is classified as haute cuisine. And since the art of cuisine is in one sense a visual one, the medium of television is the ultimate instrument in which one may achieve his goal. Then this, no doubt, is the chosen vehicle for one's ambition.

It may however be considered somewhat unusual for an executive chef to want to diversify in far-flung directions, as opposed to, say, being recognized as one of the top chefs of his day. Though the boundaries here are kind of overlapping, we generally credit top chefs with excelling mostly in demonstrations and instructions along their lines of what they profess, in becoming critics of other chefs' food as in judging panels and other similar tasks.

George Kyrtatas however breaks away with the entire lot, not because he is an iconoclast, but because his vision as far as his mission, the way he sees it, is much wider than one can fathom. With the Hathaways Diner at 10 Route 138 North in Cinnaminson,



George Kyrtatas

NJ, where not only he is the co-owner but also the executive chef, as his command center, he has expanded in skills that perhaps no other chef would dare go concurrently with their normal duties of overseeing a restaurant's kitchen. That includes authoring a book by the name *My Big Fat Greek Feast* in 2005 (Small Potatoes Press), being a co-host and producer of a weekly Tuesday night show until October of last year, serving as *Kiwi Magazine's* sole chef for a total of seven months ending last November, and being at the same time involved in recipe development, kitchen design and consulting—all at once. His book is a recommendable one, for great adequacy of recipes as well as for a flair of innovation, which includes an ouzo and melon soup, asiago cheese & Kalamata dip, and Grecian stuffed potatoes.

George's education justifies all that and much more. Having graduated from Atlantic Cape Community College with an associates degree in applied science

(1998), he also received the highest honor of a Gold Medal graduate from the Academy of Culinary Arts in May Landing, NJ, that same year. He was concurrently certified in Nutrition and Serve Safe by the same academy and ultimately received his certification in sanitation from Burlington County College in 2005. His membership in professional organizations such as the American Culinary Federation, which certified him as a *Chef de Cuisine* since 1999, the IACP and the Slow Food USA since 2004 and the American Institute of Wine and Food since 2005, attest to his worthiness.

Briefly we discussed one of the current icons in New York's culinary scene, Mike Psilakis, a man who never received any formal training in his art, yet is regarded by authorities such as New York Times restaurant guru Frank Bruni and so many other revered writers as a demigod when it comes to preparing food. His talent at turning flavors of Hellenic origin with the French flair is almost legendary. George admitted to being impressed by the Psilakis skills but has not ventured towards that route.

Then our topic turned to the scientific way of replicating food, by mixing ingredients such as fruit juices, purees with sodium alginate and putting it into a calcium chloride water bath, a process that creates the look and texture of caviar. Though he felt it is an avenue by which color, flavor and texture is added to dishes, he made sure to disassociate himself from the process, by being quoted as "not taking that food home to the family." He surely does not believe in ingesting chemicals not naturally found in foods. He is however in favor of traditional dishes, of which he does a lot, and which labels him a purist, judging by his views on hydrogenated foods or, say, the latest fad, products from cloned animals.

My big surprise came when the name of Julia Child, the high priestess of the culinary arts, came into the conversation. This is when Kyrtatas' face lit up

and in awe he declared her his ultimate inspiration! He had been always fascinated by the way this phenomenal first lady of gastronomy transported previously unknown food to the U.S. and how she turned intricate dishes into simple ones. "She," he exclaimed in rapture, "would not talk over you, but to you when she creates her famous swordfish. She was the pinnacle of methodology. Her all-fresh ingredients used in her preparations would hearten any admirer of her art."

As much as George may admire the Child's cult, nothing surpasses the veneration for his own culture. He is not just proud of, but passionate about what Greece has created. It stands to reason that he would worship Greek cuisine, but stands firm on his conviction that what he believes as true Hellenic fare is at a loftier niche than how local establishments such as Estia in Philadelphia and Onassis in Cherry Hill, NJ, present it.

My meeting with him came only weeks after his return from the Turk & Caicos islands in the Caribbean on an assignment of redesigning three upscale restaurants



in five-star hotel chains. It is part of the direction in which he definitely wants to head, and this direction could not be more ambitious. His dream is a nationwide—maybe worldwide—television program where he can demonstrate and teach the craft of Epicurus in its purest Hellenic state, classic and modern. After all, he has all the background he can ever ask for, having linked himself with every imaginable culinary show, on the

air or otherwise, and having traveled to Europe and back, gaining greater insight on his targeted goal, reaching out ever more intimately into the tract of his proclivity. And why not, I dare ask, when he has done it all—and at such young age to boot. He has been on PBS and taped for CNS, when he participated on a nationwide culinary show first aired in August 2005. He appeared that same year on an NBC show. He's been on hundreds of radio shows from Vermont to Virginia and reaching as far as Kansas with national radio hosts. He has created dishes. He has performed extensive food and landscape photography. He has done work for Athens Foods of Chicago, worked on projects with Drexel University, did photo shoots and cooking talent shows everywhere. He worked with national book chains such as Borders, Barnes & Noble. As we mentioned earlier, he produced and co-hosted Talk Radio WNJC 1360, a show by the name Bad Boys in the Kitchen. Ultimately, he has been in scores of national and local magazines and newspapers. Readers must not think that this dream of his is just a pipe dream. Not by a long shot! George

Από την οικογένεια
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is putting his money where his mouth is, and reports that his dream is very close to realization.

Sitting in the dining room area of the Hathaways, just short of reaching the cocktail lounge, he reflected on being a partner since the age of 16. About having to spend most of that time in the back—the location of the kitchen—he admits being a tough life, though he has no regrets whatsoever. He shares the reigns with his brother John who is just two years older than he. Life has been good to him, and he credits his parents, both from the island of Andros, for the good things in his life.

He also speaks of his wife Frances (Frangoula), who hails from Chios, and their two young children, 4½ and 1, and the future he is creating for them, just as his parents before him created for George and his sibling. His book, *My Big Fat Greek Feast*, sports some dedications: To my wife Frances: She is the light in my life. To my father Evangelos: He is the one who pushes me and teaches me. To my grandfather George Skordos: He is one of the most talented chefs to ever (have) live(d.)

Bacon-Wrapped Figs



Category: **Appetizer**

12 Slice bacon

24 Each Figs for frying extra virgin olive oil.

Instructions: Cut each bacon slice in half crosswise. Roll up each fig in a piece of bacon. Saute bacon wrapped figs in extra virgin olive oil until bacon is crisp. Serve hot.

Baked Prawns and Three Cheese

Serving Size: 4



16 each large prawns peeled and de veined / 1 each white onion - chopped fine

2 each garlic cloves / 1 cup diced tomatoes / 2 teaspoons fresh dill - chopped fine / 1/2 cup white wine / 2 tablespoons lemon juice / 1/4 cup asiago Cheese / 1/4 cup parmesan cheese / 1/4 cup feta cheese - crumbled pepper -to taste / 1/4 cup parsley - chopped.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In a sauce pot, saute onions and garlic until soft. Then add tomatoes, dill, white wine, lemon juice. Simmer for 3 minutes.

In a baking dish lay prawns down all in the same direction. Then top with the sauce then with the cheeses. Bake in oven for approx. 10 minutes or until prawns are cook. Garnish with chopped parsley.

Source: George Kyrtatas

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