



Kefi Greek Restaurant owners Peter and Georgia Piliotis, with their special, Mediterranean Chicken and baklava desert.

PHOTO BY IAN SMITH/
VANCOUVER SUN

■ IN THE SUBURBS

Picky Piliotis' are perfectionists

Kefi Greek Kouzina in Coquitlam embodies the spirit of joy, passion and high spirits

BY ALFIE LAU

Peter Piliotis jokes that when he was growing up in the fishing town of Pylos, near Kalamata in Greece, his mother's nickname for him was "Tzanabeti" or picky.

Piliotis knew what he liked and anything less would not touch his lips.

That same discerning attention to quality has made its way to Kefi Greek Kouzina in Coquitlam, which Piliotis and his wife Georgia have run since 2004.

"I'm a perfectionist," Piliotis said, "If it's not good, I won't serve it and if it's not something I would personally eat, I don't want my customers to eat it either. Everything, from taste, texture, purity and freshness has to be there."

Piliotis's pursuit of perfection led my quartet of diners to Kefi one rainy weeknight.

For starters, the Four Wonders appetizers, which features liberal helpings of tzatziki (yogurt, cucumber and fresh garlic), homous (tahini and chick pea paté), tirsosalata (spicy roasted red pepper with whipped feta) and tarama (smoked fish roe spread) features the best selection of Greek spreads anywhere and for \$7, it was a dish that couldn't be beat.

And another perfect choice is the saganaki (\$10), the pan-fried kefalograviera cheese that our server kebabeéd with ouzo before our very eyes.

For our mains, the choices are numerous and it is hard to fault the vegetarian

mousaka (\$13), which comes with layered eggplant, zucchini, potatoes and béchamel sauce, the Mediterranean chicken (\$16), which is two chicken breasts stuffed with feta, sun-dried tomatoes and spinach, and the paidakia (\$17), the tender lamb chops cooked in garlic infused olive oil.

But the highlight of has to be the stuffed sole (\$16), which is two generous portions of sole surrounding a heap of scallops, prawns, halibut and herbs.

Piliotis explains how the stuffed sole made its way onto the specials menu: "We had a distributor bring in a ready-made stuffed sole and when I had it, I didn't like it. ... When I started to think of what I'd like to see stuffed inside, I thought some vegetables, some herbs and some more seafood. And when I tried it out, I was very happy when I added the scallops, prawns and halibut."

Both the appetizers and mains come in generous portions, but there was still room for dessert and waiting 20 minutes for the bougatsa was well worth the trouble.

Piliotis's wife Georgia lovingly takes care of the dessert menu and her pursuit of pastry perfection is evident because the creamy custard filling baked into layers of phyllo pastry and sprinkled with icing sugar and cinnamon was a dream dessert. Imagine the freshest, flakiest light-tasting custard you've ever had and you get a smidgen of the taste sensation of Kefi's bougatsa. And for \$5, it may be

the best dessert bargain anywhere.

"It's so good that I've burned my mouth on it trying to eat it too fast," said our server Marina.

Piliotis came to the business in an unusual way: "I was a woodworker and interior designer who designed and built many of Vancouver's well-known Greek restaurants," he said. "I saw how successful these businesses were and I wanted to get involved."

Hiring chefs to do the cooking, Piliotis found that their definition of perfection wasn't the same as his and he took over the kitchen, where he still works each night.

"We started making money when I went back into the kitchen," he said. "My focus is on making sure we only use fresh ingredients ... and everything is prepared right here. We don't use prepared sauces."

Kefi, Piliotis said, is a word meant to embody the spirit of joy, passion, enthusiasm, high spirits and frenzy.

On that account, Kefi seems a perfect place to have a great dining experience.

Special to The Sun

KEFI GREEK KOUZINA

102-100 Schoolhouse St. (corner of Lougheed Hwy and Schoolhouse)

604-529-1776

www.kefi.ca

Hours: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. weekdays

Noon to 11 p.m. weekends

Budget - \$50-\$100