



KOKKARI

By Erik Cosselmon and Janet Fletcher





kokkari, samos, greece



KOKKARI

contemporary greek flavors

by

Erik Cosselmon and Janet Fletcher

photographs by sara remington



dedication

The owners of Kokkari would like to dedicate this book to their mothers, Kay Frangadakis, Eleni Eugenikou, Maria Moutsanas, and Jane Otten, in gratitude for cooking countless delicious meals for them. It was their mothers' passion for cooking and pleasing their families and friends that gave them the inspiration to start their two restaurants.

acknowledgments

It takes a village to execute a project of this scope. We have many people to thank. We want to acknowledge the creative team responsible for bringing this book to life: Janet Fletcher for her commitment to understanding our mission through her thorough research and hands-on experiences; Sara Remington for capturing the images that evoke the spirit of Kokkari and our culture; her assistants Stacy Ventura, Kassandra Medeiros, and Jen Hale; food stylist Robin Valarik; and prop stylist Ethel Brennan. To the team at Chronicle Books who kept us on track and helped us to make the best and most informed decisions at every juncture: Pamela Geismar, Beth Weber, Suzanne Bass, Peter Perez, Carolyn Miller, and our editor Sarah Clegg. To the folks at Elixir Design, Jennifer Jerde, Scott Hesselink, and Kyle Pierce, who so deftly melded many visions into a cohesive and impressive design. You listened and understood.

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Lastly, a humble nod to our managing partners, Paul Kirby, Erik Cosselmon, and Panos Gogonas, for their commitment to getting it right each and every day. And to the staff at both Kokkari and Evvia, many of whom have been with us from the very beginning (Carol Papazisis, Rito Castaneda, Guillermo Coronado, Frank Gallo, Joanne Kellarakis, Victor Velarde, Fredy Parra, Alejandro Perez, and Victor Espinoza), who help to make our vision of hospitality a reality to hundreds of people each day. -George & Judy Marcus (Moutsanas), Angie & Kenny Frangadakis

I would like to acknowledge my team of chefs at Kokkari for their dedication, loyalty, and hard work: Tony Cervone, Manuel Vera, Chris Briley, and Guillermo Coronado. I could never have put this book together without their help. I also wanted to thank Janet Fletcher for her perseverance and tireless

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The Birth of Kokkari & Evvia

yassas!

Welcome to Kokkari. It means so much to us that you have joined us on this culinary journey to explore Greek flavors. Welcoming visitors from around the world was a hallmark of the culture of ancient Greece, and we extend our warm greetings to you today. This cookbook is our attempt to embody the love and joy we experience every day at Kokkari and its sister restaurant, Evvia. We opened our restaurants so we could have a “home away from home,” a place where Greek food is enhanced with the freshest local ingredients California has to offer. This cookbook is a chance for you—our friends, our neighbors, and our wider community—to enjoy the warmth and delicious flavors of Kokkari in your own home.

We have taken great care to make these recipes approachable, and every single one is absolutely delicious. This is not a cookbook we want you to leave on display on the shelf. We want it to be stained with olive oil and splashed with wine, a source of laughter and pleasure at the table as you journey through Greek cooking in the years to come.

A special thanks to everyone who makes Kokkari thrive, from the kitchen to the front of the house. We also want to pay special tribute to our mothers, in whose honor we share this food with you.

Let’s get cooking!
Kali orexi—enjoy.

Angie and Kenny Frangadakis
George and Judy Marcus (Moutsanas)

our story

“Wouldn’t it be fun to have a place to be with our friends and show them what Greek food is all about?”

That simple question brought us to where we are today, with two of the top restaurants in one of the world’s culinary hotspots—the San Francisco Bay Area—serving food that has ushered in a new global movement of contemporary Greek cuisine.

These restaurants grew out of our friendship. We have been the best of friends for many years, all the way back to our childhoods in San Francisco, where Kenny and George and Judy (not yet married) grew up. Kenny and George met at Greek Sunday school. Angie grew up in the Central Valley town of Lodi, where her dad had settled after a successful career as an entertainer in Greece. Judy is a true San Franciscan, tracing her family heritage back five generations.



We remember our mothers gathering wild greens for horta among the weeds in the neighborhood, and cooking them with a bit of lemon and olive oil. At home, we spoke Greek and struggled to find a balance between our Greek heritage and our desire to be American. We came from island cultures defined by their hospitality and welcoming ways: George from Evvia, Kenny from Crete, and Angie from the village of Kokkari on Samos. Our doors were always open; kids from the neighborhood would come over for dinner and loved eating our kapama (lamb stew) and dolmades (stuffed grape leaves), even though they had no idea what they were.

As adults, we re-created our family meals with one another. We would come into one another's kitchens and cook together; Judy would share her mother-in-law's keftedes (Greek meatballs) recipe, and Angie would cook her famous browned-butter pilaf.

These meals turned into a shared dream to honor our Greek ancestry and elevate Greek cooking in the United States, as other immigrant groups, particularly Italians, had done with their cuisines.

the restaurants

So how did a dentist and a real estate broker and their wives open two successful ground-breaking restaurants? To be honest, we ask ourselves that question every day.

It is hard to imagine today what it was like when we decided to open our first restaurant, Evvia, in Palo Alto. At that time, there was nowhere you could go in the Bay Area to get the kind of food we cooked at home. Since we opened, there has been a proliferation of restaurants focused on the style of cooking we showcase: contemporary Hellenic cuisine.

Unlike most restaurants, Evvia and Kokkari were opened by people who love to eat, not professional chefs. We knew we were not restaurant experts, and we also had other jobs, so we hired a great team to run the restaurant, many of whom are still with us today. Yet every one of the four co-owners brings special skill to the table: George brings his business acumen from his years in the private sector; Kenny brings his ability to build a great team, as he has in his dental practice; Angie brings her

exquisite Greek culinary skills, and keeps an eye on the food and flavors to ensure they embody the best of Greek traditions; and Judy brings a love for Greek culture that permeates the restaurants.

We were determined to share the best that Greek food has to offer and tailor it to suit California tastes. Angie and her mom spent hours with the original chef, sharing their family recipes for dishes like moussaka, lamb shanks, and gigan-des beans (the staple Greek legume), many of which are still on the menu today.

the food

We also encouraged the chefs to innovate by blending fresh California ingredients with Greek flavors. They took juicy summer peaches and combined them with Greek manouri cheese and honey for a delectable summer salad. They grilled spring asparagus and tossed it with feta and dill. We wanted the food to embody the fresh flavors of Greece, but did not need it to be slavishly traditional in style.

To make sure the food was exceptional, we did blind tastings of Greek ingredients like olive oil and feta. We tried over twenty types of feta until we found the one we serve, a perfect blend of creaminess and saltiness. Everything we did received the same care and attention.

We were scared to death when Evvia opened. Would anyone actually want to eat Greek food? Our market research found that many people did not hold Greek food in high regard. The first day, we even bribed our friends to eat there for lunch. To our delight, it became the most popular restaurant in town and a place where many Silicon Valley deals are negotiated.

Four years later, one of our managers wanted us to expand to San Francisco. Again, we were nervous about opening in such a world-class culinary setting. We were from small-town Palo Alto and did not know if we could compete with the big guys. We went for it, and today Kokkari is a treasure we all enjoy. It is three times the size of Evvia and has succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.

Even as we have grown, our love of old-world flavors and hospitality endures. It is not a surprise that so many anniversaries, weddings, and birthdays have been celebrated in our restaurants. Kokkari and Evvia today reflect our vision at their founding: good friends sharing wonderful Greek food with one another.







- a. a warm welcome
- b. a heritage of hospitality

in the greek tradition



a warm welcome

From Our Greek-Inspired Kitchen

If you relish backstage moments, come to Kokkari late on a winter afternoon when we are preparing for the evening service. Order a glass of sparkling wine at the bar and watch dusk descend on Jackson Square, in San Francisco's historic Antiques District. A whole lamb will be spinning languidly in the fireplace, the embers snapping, the juices hissing as they hit the potatoes roasting underneath. You won't see the servers folding napkins and finishing their "family meal" in the rear dining room, but soon they will rise, straighten their ties, and switch on the parchment-shade lamps that make Kokkari glow.

Erik Cosselmon, Kokkari's chef, will come into the front dining room to check the lamb and baste it with drippings and lemon juice to help the skin caramelize. Fredy Parra will begin to organize the bread station on the antique butcher's block by the hearth, stocking the mammoth grape harvester's basket with country loaves and focaccia and lining bread baskets with thick white napkins.

The first dinner guests will arrive soon, unbundling scarves, relinquishing coats, and relishing the dining room's warm embrace. You can't help but admire, from your barstool perch, the handsome details that set this stage: the wide-plank oak floors softened with richly woven rugs; the heavy wooden ceiling beams and burnished copper pots; the shapely terra-cotta urns and tapestries; and the fire's hypnotic flame. A glazed tureen with graceful handles holds glistening mixed olives, and the linen-draped tables gleam with polished stemware. The look weaves rustic with urbane, like an Old World farmhouse restored with taste.

In the rear dining room, with its open kitchen and white-jacketed cooks, the tempo is already quickening. The communal table is a sea of suits by now, its well-dressed occupants passing platters of mezedes. Skillets mounded with cooked greens, horta, are steaming and sizzling on the stove, as cooks slide Kalamata pita and whole fish into the wood-burning oven, drizzle olive oil over cumin-spiced meatballs, and arrange thick slices of spit-roasted lamb on crusty potatoes. The cooks dutifully wipe the plate rims and set the orders on the counter for pickup. Then the expediter—the chef on duty—rewipes the plate rims. Then the server arrives and, reflexively, wipes the plate rims. Every employee is a critic here.

A monumental braised lamb shank, set on its thick end and showered with myzithra cheese, leaves a scent trail of cinnamon as a waiter carries it aloft through the dining room. Could one person eat all that? The server sets it in front of a wisp of an elderly woman, who daintily tucks her napkin into her blouse and dives in.

At the pastry end of the kitchen, a cook adds a birthday candle to a galaktoboureko—custard wrapped in phyllo pastry—then spoons a ribbon of honey over a plate of thick yogurt with dates. The evening's earliest diners are already sipping inky Greek coffee, made the ancient way, in a slender copper pot on a bed of hot sand.

a fresh sensibility

Well into its second decade, Kokkari remains one of the busiest establishments in the most influential restaurant city in the nation. One first-time customer, marveling at the frenetic pace on a weeknight, asked her waiter, "What are you giving away here?"

Clearly, Erik and his team are offering the kind of food people want to eat: modern Greek cuisine with a “California fresh” sensibility. But we also know that patrons return because they have such a good time at the restaurant. Memorable food is, we hope, always part of the Kokkari experience, but we think diners are also responding to the warmth of Greek hospitality.





a heritage of hospitality

The Greeks have a word for the way we try to treat our guests: philoxenia. It's hard to pronounce (filox-sen-EE-ya) but an easy concept to grasp. To a Greek, philoxenia is the art of making a stranger a friend. It means receiving people with genuine concern for their welfare, whether you know them or

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