

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Manhattan Elegance with Prices Reflective of Queens at Aegean Cove

By Nick Mavrikis

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Aegean Cove
20-01 Steinway St., Astoria
Tel: 718-274-9800

Appetizers: \$5 - \$14
Main Courses: \$14 - \$28

Astoria, as we know, is home to countless Greek tavernas and restaurants – the majority of them serving a wide variety of traditional, Hellenic cuisine that is defined by its great tastes and ample portions. However, for an added element of elegance, one would normally go to Manhattan, where Greek restaurants stand alongside French and Italian venues to vie for the patronage of those seeking a more upscale approach to food.

That hasn't stopped Giorgios Neofytides from opening a new venture in Astoria – Aegean Cove – one that brings the presentation of Manhattan dining, along with a modern touch to Hellenic cuisine. With executive chef Christos Christou aboard – known for his work at other Greek restaurants in Manhattan, such as Molyvos, Mylos, and Trata – Aegean Cove aims to please those looking for that extra touch of class in their outings, with prices that don't break the bank.

"All our prices are reflective of Queens, not Manhattan." Mr. Neofytides told me, "We want people to have a great experience, but everything is reasonable."

Newly opened at the beginning of May, Aegean Cove (taking part of its name from Mr. Neofytides' other restaurant in Great Barrington, Massachusetts – Aegean Breeze) interior aesthetics combines the rustic feel of a wintertime taverna along with the grace of fine dining. The first area upon entry has a large, wooden bar with golden, metallic touches. From behind here, the bartender serves anything you could want – from Black Label whiskey to Metaxa-based cocktail drinks, like the Greek 7&7.

All along the sparkling, hardwood floor, circular tables are set up – each with white tablecloths, silverware, glasses, cloth napkins expertly folded on top of plates, and Greek bottled spring water. Walls are painted in earth-toned browns and reds, with a hand-painted image of wine-barrels adorning one wall. From above, circular inlaid lighting, as well as a classically styled chandelier serves to light the room.

Walking through a small hallway to get to the second seating area, one can see the kitchen in full view though the large, horizontal window that looks into it. It's here that the chefs prepare the day's meals for all to see. The second area towards the back is laid out identically to the first, but with a large working fireplace set in the corner of the room. On the back wall, old-fashioned kettles and pots



ABOVE: The decor of Aegean Cove combines the rustic feel of a wintertime taverna along with the grace of fine dining. **RIGHT:** The selection of appetizers is diverse, leading the way to the delicious main courses and desserts.

are displayed, adding an extra dose of rustic charm.

A staircase leads to a whole other upstairs area, with its own separate bar. This area can be reserved for various functions and parties. An outdoor, rooftop seating area wasn't ready when I went, but Mr. Neofytides tells me it will be ready in about a month. Accessible through a large, windowed doorway, people here will be able to dine outside, under sun and moon, enjoying New York in its summertime glory.

Once you take in your beautiful surroundings, it'll be time to indulge in your meal. Before ordering, though, choose from a selection of Greek, Italian, Californian, and French wines – with emphasis, of course, placed on the Hellenic varieties. As is custom of Greek cuisine and restaurants, the selection of appetizers is diverse, ensuring everyone finds something they'll like. The spreads that all know and love go well with the complimentary, towel-wrapped basket of pitas that come. Taramosalata, tyrokafeteri, melitzanosalata, and tzatziki come individually or as a large assortment plate, perfect for sharing. Of note, Aegean's tzatziki wasn't overbearing with its garlic, instead going for a smoother taste and texture, and a subtle, yet distinct hint of mint.

The two salads available are traditional Greek offerings: a horiatiki, with beefsteak tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, feta, and green peppers; and a romaine lettuce-based marouli salad.



The appetizers I had were evidence of the thought put into the presentation of the food at Aegean. The octopodi I had was cut into large chunks, piled on top of each other to form a small tower. Sliced red peppers, Bermuda onions, and capers intermingled within the tower, and all was served upon a mustard-infused dressing that added to the octopus. As well as looking wonderful, the actual octopus was tender to the bite.

The loukaniko (sausage) I had was reminiscent of the octopodi in its presentation, only this time, diagonally-cut, grilled, Greek country sausage was layered atop a base of black-eyed beans. The sausage was juicy and brimming with taste, with a hint of orange to it.

The kolokithokeftedes were magnificent, with croquettes made of zucchini, feta, and kefal-

graviera cheese lightly fried in olive oil, and served with herbs atop a bed of a Greek yogurt and capers sauce. The psarokeftedes were equally delicious; this time, lightly frying fresh cod and shrimp, coated in a crispy batter, and served with red beans and a light skordalia.

Other appetizers include fried calamarakia, served with tzatziki; garides saganaki (feta and tomato-based, sautéed shrimp dish); baked feta, which is served over an eggplant salad, and gigantes – Greek-style lima beans baked in a freshly-made tomato sauce and served with fresh dill.

For main courses, a variety of options are available. Fresh fish such as grilled swordfish served in a tomato sauce with vegetables, roasted sea bass cooked in a white wine-and-tomato broth, and pan-fried whiting served with horta and skordalia are all on offer, as is grilled whole fish, such as Loup de Mer or Royal Dorado – both drizzled with olive oil, lemon, and oregano.

Classic casserole dishes such as Mousaka and Pastitsio are there for those that want some good, old-fashioned comfort food. The Soutzoukalia I had were excellent, coming as round, spiced Greek meatballs served atop a mountain of rice, all covered in a tomato and leek sauce.

Paidakia, brizoles, and a kefalograviera and mint-seasoned bitteki are great options for those set on meat.

Once you complete your meal, choose from a trio of desserts: baklava (both classic and chocolate flavored options), karidopita (walnut and honey pie), and yiourti me meli (yogurt served with nuts, honey, and spoon-sweets).

Should you be looking for an exquisite night out, with a prestigious environment, excellent contemporary Greek food, and affordable pricing, look no further than Aegean Cove. One doesn't have to travel to Manhattan to enjoy the eloquence associated with it.

Dentists Visit NY to Learn From Dean Vafiadis

NEW YORK – A group of dental professionals from Greece and Cyprus recently arrived in the Big Apple to continue their education and become acquainted with the latest concepts in American dentistry. The program is organized by the Hellenic Association of Continuing Dental Education (HACDE) in Greece, in association with New York University's College of Dentistry (NYUCD) continuing education programs and Dr. Dean Vafiadis (aka Dr. Dean), associate clinical professor at NYUCD and founder of the New York Smile Institute.

Knowledge is power but continuing education opportunities for dentists in Greece is limited. The 70 participants per year of NYUCD's continuing education programs are successful before they arrive, but what they obtain from the seminars and especially from Dr. Dean's two-session live patient "hands-on" demonstrations at the New York Smile Institute is priceless and unlike any typical dental school environment.

Dr. Nick Nakas, NYUCD's Greece international program director and founder of HACDE, has nothing but praise.

"Dr. Dean's live patient demonstrations are a unique way for many of the clinicians to enhance their skills and return to their practices in Greece with new techniques and help many patients." The six-week accredited NYUCD continuing education program requires three one-week visits to the U.S. and three weeks in Greece. The next one-week is scheduled for August 2008.

With over 20 years experience, Dr. Dean graduated from NYUCD as one of the youngest Prosthodontists in New York City, and one out of only eight Greek-American Prosthodontists in the State.

An Archon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and former vice president of St. Basil Academy's Board of Trustees, he says the importance of a beautiful smile should never be underestimated.

We communicate and show our feelings with our smile, which also happens to be the primary focus of our face.

He is inspired from his Hellenic roots and his desire to help change people's lives.

"I travel abroad throughout Europe, Russia, Korea, Japan but something always draws me back to Greece.

I want my homeland to get the most out of my educational experience and help their population of patients with advanced techniques and dental procedures."

Over the past 12 years, Dr. Dean

has been lecturing and offering educational programs to hundreds of Greek dentists in Athens and Thessaloniki and surrounding areas. His passion for dentistry has made him one of the leading sought-after educators from the U.S.

He has published extensively in the field of Implants and Aesthetics but only few clinicians have had the opportunity to witness the procedures performed on patients. By using video-streaming, internet cameras and state of the art computerized restorations, the educational experiences he provides are professional, unique and memorable.

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