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Los Angeles



Chanel WEST COAST

FAIRMONT MIRAMAR HOTEL & BUNGALOWS



Meals
DECONSTRUCTED

Here for the
HERITAGE

Brotherly Love and Mother's Recipes Make for
American Fare With a Hearty Greek Flair

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There's a great Greek gem that sits unassumingly on the corner of 4th Street and Temple Avenue in Long Beach. Built on the site of what was once their father's car repair shop, brothers Pete and Gus Sverkos have transformed the site into Kafe Neo—an American kitchen with Greek soul.

The place has a homegrown feel with noticeably hands-on owners, both being in or near the restaurant at all times. The brothers have a style all their own—from their slick hair and stylish plaid, button-down shirts to the way they swiftly move about the kitchen. The restaurant is open and spacious, filled with the echoes of happy banter and dining customers appreciating the dynamic flavors of their dishes. There are plenty of great places to sit with as much covered outdoor seating as indoor. The colorful, high-backed booths upholstered in retro stripes complement the contemporary lines of the dining tables.

When asked what his favorite dishes are, Gus chooses the Crusted Salmon and the Lamb Souvlaki Plate, with the Homemade Falafel Plate being the most favorite vegetarian offering. While he cooks and preps, his greatest responsibility—aside from his co-ownership duties—is interpreting his mother's recipes. He rattles off the Greek phrase before translating it into English as an eye for salt. "But, really, what does that even mean?" Gus quips.



• SEA SALT & BLACK PEPPER

• PARSLEY

• CAYENNE PEPPER

• GARBANZO BEANS

• BREAD CRUMBS

• ONIONS

INGREDIENTS:

1. Garbanzo beans
2. Onions
3. Mint
4. Parsley
5. Coriander
6. Cayenne pepper
7. Sea salt
8. Black pepper
9. Garlic
10. Bread Crumbs

**PAIRING SUGGESTION:**

To kick it up a notch, and really open your palate, Gus recommends pairing the Homemade Falafel Plate with a red wine or their house Greek wine, which is characteristically robust and extremely complementary to the tastes in the falafel.

OTHER MUST-TRY ITEMS:**APPETIZER***Dolmades:*

made fresh in our kitchen, these four grape leaves are stuffed with tasty vegetarian rice

Baked Feta Shrimp:

juicy shrimp sautéed in olive oil, lemon juice, and garlic, baked with imported feta

Zeus Fries:

locally famous Greek seasoned shoestring fries topped with our secret spicy sauce and feta

ENTREE*Pita Pizza with Greek Soul:*

loaded with homemade marinara, imported feta, kalamata olives, tomatoes, onions and peperoncini

Roasted Rosemary Chicken:

half chicken baked with fresh lemon juice, olive oil, garlic, oregano and rosemary

Fresh Salmon Salad:

our fresh Greek salad topped with a filet of fresh salmon seasoned with extra virgin olive oil, lemon, oregano, with house dressing

DESSERT*Baklava Tower:*

homemade baklava, vanilla ice cream, topped with Ghirardelli chocolate

Galatobouriko:

our aunt's famous dessert, Greek custard between filo dough, soooo good



It's his eye for salt—and the trusty tasting spoons—that ensure Kafe Neo is living up to its own highly set standards. Throughout the day, Gus and Pete constantly taste everything cooking in the kitchen. Flavors change throughout the day and the Sverkos brothers make sure their food remains consistent. To stay true to both its Greek and American roots, Kafe Neo's feta cheese, honey and filo dough are all imported from Greece, but the produce is carefully chosen from right here in California. It's just another way the Sverkos brothers have chosen to meld another pair of ideas—in this case, authenticity and ingredient sourcing—in order to create a unique and conscious dining experience. "Making things from scratch is a challenge," says Gus.

Especially so when environmental consciousness is at the top of the agenda. Aside from great food, at the forefront of Kafe Neo is its ecological responsibility. The restaurant is wired with LED lights wherever possible, and because of California's drought year, water is both served and refilled upon request. They serve coffee and tea that is organic and sustainable, and the restaurant now even offers bike delivery. "We don't do it to be trendy. It's just our natural consciousness," says Gus, whose own childhood consisted of regular recycling and composting. With this in mind, Kafe Neo tries to help push the organic movement. "Produce is not to look at, but something to taste, and every season can yield something different," says Gus, "which is why we're always looking for the flavor instead of the aesthetics." Myers brand beef products are used here specifically for their quality and sustainability, as are the vegetables, which are often selected from farmers markets. "We're trying to keep a balance by walking on both sides of the road, but while always trying to do more."

While the restaurant offers fantastic Greek plates adapted from the Sverkos' family kitchen and American fare with a hearty Greek flair, no Greek restaurant is complete without falafel. Kafe Neo's deconstructed meal was exactly that—their Homemade Falafel Plate. From these raw ingredients (garbanzo beans, onions, mint, parsley, coriander, cayenne pepper, sea salt, black pepper, garlic and bread crumbs) emerges one of the best falafel plates around. Plated on a couple leaves of romaine lettuce and accompanied by cucumber slices and the house made tzatziki sauce are four hot falafels, fresh from the fryer.

The outer shell is perfectly crunchy and gives way to a softer, equally flavorful inside. The texture of the garbanzo transitions nicely from the crisp outer later to the smoother, heartier, inside textures and is not overly crumbly or dry like most falafel can be. The mint and parsley provide something visually appealing as well as tasteful with their green colors, and in the finish of the flavors is that slight spark of cayenne pepper. It's not spicy, just a clean cayenne finish that livens up the end of every bite. "It's all about subtle flavors," notes Gus.

And subtle flavors don't only exist in the falafels themselves. The tzatziki sauce is to accent the herbs and spices with a relaxed cooling effect, and, though some people do this, not to drown the food and cover the delicate blend of flavors. The romaine lettuce and cucumbers are not there simply as a garnish. The cucumbers serve as a palate cleanser, so that each bite is as savory as the last, and the romaine leaves form a nice wrap. ■

NATIVE KNOWLEDGE: If you'd like to be let in on a little secret, ask the servers for their recommendations, as they are in the know about things that are off-menu. Oftentimes, customers will make suggestions or little changes to their food that grab the Sverkos' attention "We've got to keep up our game," Gus admits, and wants people to know that he and Pete take note, and will sometimes even offer it...off menu, of course.