



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

Chef Dimosthenis Koulouas mixes Greek traditions with French methods at Tel'Veh Cafe & Wine Bar.

Small eatery, big flavors

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Tucked away in a small corner near Mount Vernon Square is an equally small kitchen, presided over by a young and enthusiastic Greek chef, Dimosthenis “Dimo” Koulouas. At the Tel’Veh Cafe & Wine Bar, this young man is charged with creating unusual, tempting small and main plates.

Although Koulouas was born in Silver Spring, he has spent most of his life with his family on the island of Lesbos in Greece, where he immediately blended in with his traditional Greek family and began absorbing Greek culture, especially the food. “In Greece,” he said, “eating is a ceremony conducted all around the table. It is a must.”

Honoring mealtime traditions, however, has been only part of his training. “I helped my mom cook,” he said. “I was the youngest kid, and she would say, ‘Grab this, grab that.’ ... I want to grow up in the kitchen. I liked being in the kitchen.”

After high school, Koulouas went to Greece to attend seminars held by world-class chefs. He was eventually hired to work for several of Greece’s elite hotels, including the Athenaem InterContinental and the Alkaios Hotel in Athens. Koulouas first became an executive

What is your comfort food?

Cookies, my cookies, especially the peanut butter ones. I make a basic dough and throw in whatever is tasty and enjoy them with a cup of coffee or glass of milk.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

Niwano Hana in Rockville. For Greeks, sushi is really exotic. And of course, Agora.

What’s in your fridge?

Because of my wife, I eat a lot of chicken and salads. Sometimes I sneak in seafood.

Which is your luckiest day?

The day I got married.

Which is your favorite basic ingredient?

Extra-virgin olive oil — Greek.

If you go Tel’Veh Cafe & Wine Bar

- » **Where:** 401 Massachusetts Ave. NW
- » **Info:** 202-758-2929; telvehdc.com
- » **Hours:** 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., 4:30 p.m. to midnight

chef when he was only 23. However, most of his family moved to the Washington area several years ago, and the young Koulouas followed along.

Answering an ad online, he was hired by D.C.’s Kellari restaurant, noted for its Greek and Mediterranean cuisine. “The manager loved me because I am Greek,” he said.

“Also because I had had experiences in hotel restaurants in Greece.” Eventually, Koulouas became the restaurant’s executive chef.

At this present job, Koulouas incorporates many Greek traditions but produces the dishes with classic French methods. “I like to experiment,” he said of what may best be described as a kind of Greek fusion cooking. “I wake up in the morning and think, ‘What will I cook today?’ There is always something that motivates me.” He may turn to his large cookbook collection, of which his favorite is Auguste Escoffier’s “The Escoffier Cookbook.”

Today, his relatives are proud of what he has achieved, but at first, some of them thought his career choice a bit strange. Fortunately for Koulouas and for his patrons, his sisters and his father encouraged him to follow the culinary path.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

Raving about Ravenswood

The final game of the football season is here, and this year I actually have a proverbial dog in the fight. I grew up on the West Coast and, more specifically, was raised in a house that revered the San Francisco 49ers. But alas, the 49ers are definitely not the local favorite.

It appears that my only ticket to overcoming the social stigma of rooting for the other team is to offer up winning wines that will, at the very least, get my foot in the door and hopefully a seat on the couch. And it just so happens that destiny and luck coincided this year to provide just the right wine, or should I say, wines, to win my way in.

The obvious choice came from Baltimore’s team’s name — the Ravens. And since most Super Bowl party fare tends to lean toward the heartier side of the cuisine spectrum (chicken wings, burgers, chili, etc.), I want to enjoy wines that will both stand up to the food as well as reflect something in the wine’s name that fans could identify with. The clear choice was easy. I am rooting with — and for — Ravenswood wines.

The first thing you need to know about Ravenswood wines is that the soul of Ravenswood begins and ends with legendary Founder and winemaker Joel Peterson. Peterson is routinely considered by the industry to be the pioneer of modern zinfandel winemaking in California — so much so that he was recently invited to visit the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, where a collection of his early wine paraphernalia was put on display in the National Museum of American History’s new exhibit Food: Transforming the American Table, 1950-2000.

But Peterson does not think of himself as a celebrity winemaker. On the contrary, he still thinks of himself as a would-be microbiologist who bought a few grapes back in 1976 and made a couple of cases of wine in Sonoma. However, Peterson quickly developed a reputation for making stylish, beautifully balanced zinfandels from vineyards where zinfandel grapes are grown and harvested alongside other varietals, such as carignane, syrah and petite sirah, in what is referred to as a field blend, made popular by immigrant farmers at the turn of the 19th century.

In addition to the powerful yet elegantly crafted wine, Baltimore Ravens fans will appreciate Peterson’s confident winemaking attitude, as expressed by his motto: “No Wimpy Wines.” Retail prices are approximate.

If burgers or grilled sausages are in the lineup for Sunday, then consider putting the **2009 Ravenswood Napa Valley Old Vine Zinfandel**

(\$19) in the game. Dense yet supple, this team-player zin offers up blackberry, black cherry and dark raspberry flavors on a medium-bodied frame, supported by smooth tannins and bright acidity. The characteristic notes of pepper are backed up by a hint of cocoa on the charming finish. **QPR 8**

When I am watching football, I love having a platter of spicy chicken wings nearby. The **2009 Ravenswood Zinfandel Old Hill Ranch Vineyard (\$28)** from Sonoma is a wonderful sidekick. The juxtaposition of ripe boysenberry, sweet cherry and blueberry liqueur flavors against the spicy, peppery frame provides a wonderfully balanced contrast between richness and rustic. The long, spicy finish fills out the entire palate. **QPR 9**

Love him or hate him, Ray Lewis is definitely an icon on the field, and he’s in good company with the **2009 Ravenswood Icon (\$75)**, a field blend of zinfandel, carignane and petite sirah that sports a sweet fruit bouquet of blackberries, dark cherries and hints of toasty oak. Flavors of blackberry jam, black raspberry and black pepper attack the palate. Subtle flavors of vanilla, clove and cinnamon are supported by firm tannins that run out long and elegantly on the savory finish. **QPR 9.5**

Note: QPR is a rating system that compares the quality a wine delivers relative to the price. A QPR of 10 is considered an excellent value.



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