

# Time Out

## New York

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**SOPRANOS SPECIAL**

What Michael Imperioli knows that his castmates don't

Why David Chase kept us waiting so long

Plus: A remembrance of seasons past

Eat Out

## Reviews



### Feta complete

New owners at Christos Steak House strike a balance in the combination of meat and Greek **By Randall Lane**

**M**eat's mainstream appeal, which spiked during the Atkins-inspired anticarb craze, shows no signs of dissipating. You'll find steaks on most French, Italian and Japanese menus. With an eye toward wooing a young clientele, the new owners of Christos Hasapo-Taverna—a respected Greek eatery in Astoria, Queens—recently reopened the restaurant as Christos Steak House.

The facade on the corner of 41st Street and 23rd Avenue may not be fancy, but higher aspirations quickly become apparent. There's a valet for those who live far away and want to avoid the ten-minute walk from the N or W train. The decor leans on the traditional dark wood and banquettes you'd expect in a steakhouse. If there's any doubt you've come to the right place, you can admire the 21-day-dry-aged cuts beckoning in the entryway—which can be purchased for take-out, butcher-shop-style—before you even get a table.

Consulting chef Mina Newman—a veteran of Tribeca's Dylan Prime and Thalassa—found just the right balance of meat and Greek to differentiate the place from other sirloin stops. In addition to oysters, mussels, baked clams and crab cakes, for example, Newman offers starters such as saganaki, taramasalata and a terrific grilled, slightly charred octopus that could feed four. Even the prawns have Aegean flair: Rather than prepare a boring shrimp cocktail, Newman wraps grape leaves around the bodies of the shrimp, which are then grilled with the heads on and served in concentric pools of yogurt and olive oil. It's a better concept than it is a dish; the yogurt-oil combination masked an overcooked texture, and an overfishy taste.

Interestingly, the entrées nearly abandon the Greek influences. The usual steakhouse

gang is all here: various cuts of meat, roasted chicken, grilled salmon; all prepared as you'd expect. On two different visits, the sirloin was the star, cooked bone-in with salt sharpening the meat's flavor, especially once the escaping juices provided a proper dipping sauce (the house steak sauce, a horseradish-and-red-wine vinegar, is a tad sweet for my palate).

But many of the other proteins—including a petit filet and a center-cut pork chop—were underseasoned or overcooked. Newman says she adds sea salt and oregano to every charbroiled cut, but I tasted neither. Even the lamb chops were bland—a surprise inside a Greek eatery.

Seafood-eaters will be drawn to the behemoth lobsters, which pace nervously in a giant tank near the entrance. I especially enjoyed watching the suited host spear a live one inches from one cozy couple and bring it back to the kitchen for prepping.

The bicultural influences return in the sides and desserts that are, again, inconsistent. The spinach and feta is tastier than the vast majority of creamed spinach standards, but the onion rings were oily and fell apart too easily. Many of the desserts qualify as quasi-fusion; I especially liked the cheesecake made of a Greek sheep's-milk cheese and covered in dense honey from Crete; and *milopita*, which is basically a Greek oatmeal-apple crumb pastry. Christos is currently too uneven to warrant a trip from the other boroughs, but the place scores enough points to satisfy locals—and anyone curious about the Greeks' take on steak.

#### Christos Steak House

41-09 23rd Ave at 41st St, Astoria, Queens (718-777-8400). Subway: N, W to Astoria-Ditmars Blvd. Mon-Fri 4pm-midnight; Sat, Sun noon-midnight. Average main course: \$28.

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