





GREEK FROM GREECE RAISES THE BAR

The Greek-sourced bakery-café franchise sets its sights on a national footprint.

BY MARIA BENARDIS

THE MARKET HAS BEEN FLOODED with fast-casual concepts over the course of the past five or ten years. Many adopt the Chipotle model, allowing guests to build their pita wraps or bowls as they pass along a line of ingredients, and others, a more traditional order model. One thing is constant, however: Most are successful. Greek From Greece bakery-café (better known by the acronym “GFG”) combines both the Chipotle and traditional order model. GFG is a success story that has occurred almost overnight through hard work, sheer determination, and having a true pioneer and visionary at the helm.

What makes this bakery-café special is that it serves up authentic sweet and savory fare from ingredients sourced directly from Greece. Their food is quick to serve and price-accessible. It is one of the fastest-growing Greek bakery-cafés in the United States, with eight locations in Manhattan, New Jersey, and Florida. The ambitious management team recently announced that they are aiming to open 50 locations within the next 18 months.

Georgios Drosos, the founder and CEO of GFG, opened the first store in 2017 to long lines and delighted customers in Hoboken, New Jersey. It has an appealing European café vibe, with people always buzzing in and out throughout the day. It’s relaxing, homey, and relatively quiet—the perfect place to connect for conversation; a place where you can always find simple, high-quality Greek food with a homemade taste like Mom used to make. It’s a spot that transports visitors to Greece without leaving the country.

GFG has a powerhouse of talent running the company. Drosos, from Epirus, is an award-winning franchisee, with more than 100 franchise locations throughout Greece, as well as in the United States, France, Austria, Romania, and Russia. Those concepts encompass various industries—bakeries, cafés, frozen-yogurt shops, and

PHOTO COURTESY OF GFG; MAP: CHAMELEON DESIGN

furniture stores among them. With GFG he combines his business expertise with his passion for Greek food.

A true innovator, Drosos engineered the brand with efficiencies—a simple food-production process, a highly efficient labor model, a flexible footprint, low food costs, and value-engineered construction costs. The food he serves is delicious, high-quality, and something unique in the market.

“Drosos is a true born leader and visionary and has the talent to inspire people,” says Violeta Xifara, a member of GFG’s senior management team. “He is always looking forward and is constantly inspired to create and think outside the box. This has contributed to his huge success.

He is dedicated to raising the bar on Greek food ordering and eating in America. The entire GFG team shares his vision and passion. They live it each day. We don’t work for him; we create with him. This is the mentality of the organization. It provides everyone with strength and drive.”

Drosos’s partners include two powerhouses; Giannis Chitos and Christos Panagiotopoulos. Chitos owns the popular Zagori water brand in Greece and is cofounder of Green Cola, while Panagiotopoulos is a respected leader in the construction industry (he is owner of P&C Development S.A.) as well as a co-owner of three well-known Manhattan restaurants (Ethos, Pathos, and Kyma). The management team at GFG consists of C-level experts in the areas of operations, training, information technology, and supply-chain management.

Growing up, Drosos spent summers with his grandparents in Epirus, the northwestern corner of Greece, an area renowned for its pitas. He recalls his yiayia hand-rolling phyllo for hours to bake her spinach pies. Her recipe, he insists, was sought after throughout Epirus, a region where the word for “pie” is synonymous with the word for “hug,” because “the phyllo hugs the filling and they are hand-baked with love.”

Drosos’s mother also baked spinach pies to take in his pack for school lunch. To this day, he receives monthly care packages of home-baked spinach pie hugs from his mother, who follows his yiayia’s famous recipe.



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And he still enjoys eating them. Baking, he says, was and remains a family tradition.

“Back in the 1930s, our great-grandfathers worked their way up from selling koulouria in the local fairs to opening two of the biggest bakeries in Athens: the famous Lavrion, located in the most central part of the city,” he explains. “GFG is a reincarnation of this culinary and baking past, on a mission to make every neighborhood we settle in a bit more like home—where you can always count on simply good food.”

“When Drosos set his sights on starting GFG in the USA, he was focused on Greek recipes and ingredients that would bring out the authentic Greek flavors,” says Xifara. “He knew in his heart that the GFG concept would work and that people in the USA would love his food. He could see that the concept he envisioned was lacking in the market.”

GFG is the only bakery in the United States where all products are sourced from Greece. Wheat, olives, and tomatoes are all grown under the Greek sun and the beneficial sea breeze. The company perfectly aligns with the universal shift toward natural ingredients and, specifically, the Mediterranean diet. An added benefit is that the products imported from Greece won’t have any unhealthy genetically modified ingredients that are found in so many foods produced domestically in the United States.

“GFG wants you feel like you have taken a short day trip to Greece to sample some of the many delights the country has to offer,” says Xifara. “So, if you eat spanakopita at GFG, it will have the same consistent flavor and quality ingredients that you would be having in Greece.”

According to Xifara, their core product is Greek pies, although GFG also serves up



authentic sweet and savory freshly baked pastries, light fare (hot meals, sandwiches, soups and salads), and café beverages (again, all sourced directly from Greece).

For Drosos, says Xifara, pie making is like a religion, and, as such, GFG serves up cheese pies, spinach pies, and pies with unfamiliar fillings that include tomato and feta, leek, vegetable, and honey cheese. There's even an apple pie on the menu in homage to GFG's host country. "Customers love our pies and have embraced them. Pies may be an American tradition, but Greek pies are something new for them."

GFG's hot meals (a.k.a. "magirefta") and breakfast offerings are also popular with customers. For breakfast, the concept offers a mix of Greek and American classics such as pancakes and "strapatsada" (an egg scramble with grated fresh tomato). For lunch and dinner, there are Greek classics like moussaka and pastitso. Everything is cooked "light and not heavy" to accommodate the American palate.

Much like fine jewelry is displayed at Tiffany's, the offerings at GFG are out on view. Dessert favorites like traditional baklava (drenched in Greek honey instead of syrup), bougatsa, chocolate pie, and walnut cake line the displays alongside innovative items that are twists from the traditional as well as items appropriated from neighboring culinary cultures (such as Beirut phyllo triangles and French macarons).

GFG also goes the extra mile to create a great coffee experience for their clients by serving a proprietary blend and purified water (using a reverse osmosis process to remove fluoride, chlorine, and other chemicals).

The food offerings are complemented by a small selection of premium pantry products from Greece. They hope to expand the line shortly and are collaborating with the 776 company in Greece (whose brand name is a nod to the year that of the first Olympic Games in 776 BC). Among the items found at GFG are trahana, hilopites (Greek egg-based pasta), and, of course, olive oil.

With great enthusiasm, Xifara shares that "customers have embraced every dish on the menu," validating the goal of finding the winning secret for Greek fast-casual success in the United States.

In February the team announced that they would be expanding their food offerings in introducing the "MediBowl."

"The MediBowl offers really authentic Greek flavors with a variety of options," says Xifara. Customers build their own bowls from various bases that include pita, broccoli, orzo, and brown rice with lentils, adding a choice of protein (such as roasted lemon chicken, Greek meatballs, roasted lamb, roasted salmon, chicken gyro, and plant-based meatballs) and condiments that include spicy feta, traditional tzatziki, and olive hummus. Sides offered include "tourlou" (roasted vegetables), cheese baked pasta, spinach salad, Greek salad, and kale salad, says Xifara.

Just like with any business, there were challenges and lessons learned along the way, she says. "The way of running a business in Greece is different than running a



Georgios Drosos, the founder and CEO

business in the U.S. This presents interesting challenges and at the same time opens you up to seek new opportunities. Through trial and error, the company worked it out and made modifications to the menu products lines. This led to more profitable out-

comes while at the same time remaining true to the vision and mission. Greeks have an inherent gift; they are multitaskers. With challenges, we are able to think and quickly find multiple solutions. That's what we believe sets us and GFG apart."

Last October, GFG announced that it had partnered exclusively with Fransmart, the industry-leading franchise-development company behind the explosive growth of brands like Five Guys Burgers & Fries, Qdoba Mexican Grill, and The Halal Guys to bring its authentic Greek flavors across the globe. "As the fast-casual industry continues to embrace organic, natural ingredients, the upside and growth potential of Mediterranean concepts like GFG is unlimited," said Fransmart CEO Dan Rowe.

In January, further groundbreaking expansion was announced; a merger with Fournos Theofilos. Fournos Theofilos' existing two locations in Manhattan would rebrand to GFG. "I believe it's the first time in good spirit that two Greek companies decided to merge and work together," says Xifara.

"This is an important move for our company. Combining our know-how with Fournos Theofilos' investment and operational team enables us to expand more rapidly in the Manhattan area, and establishes our place as the leading concept in fast-casual Greek bakeries and cafés. We are confident that rebranding their locations to GFG will enable us to create a unique Greek culinary experience for our customers and help lead the Pan-American expansion of the concept," says Drosos.

Despite their rapid growth, one goal remains important to them, and that is to offer and uphold the same "yiayia-tested" standards of loving care and authentic Greek taste baked into every bite. They are currently seeking experienced multi-unit foodservice operators and scouting potential markets across the country. This is a company that clearly knows all about high-quality Greek food, and they are determined to share it with the world!

