

# DINE



Thassos Greek Restaurant in Clarendon Hills

TABLE FOR TWO, P. 00 »

---

*Whole fish such as red snapper are flown in fresh, deboned tableside, and dressed with olive oil, oregano, and lemon.*

---



Astakomakaronada

TABLE FOR TWO

# THAT'S THASSOS

Authentic Greek cuisine in an elegant setting BY PHIL VETTEL

**T**he western suburbs have seen a welcome increase in Greek dining options in the last few years; restaurants Violi and Mana have brought a contemporary-Greek approach to Oak Brook and La Grange, respectively, joining such stalwarts as Greek Islands in Lombard (the standard bearer for west suburban Greek dining for 40 years).

And then there is Thassos, which opened quietly in downtown Clarendon Hills just over two years ago. No stranger to suburban audiences, Thassos operated in Palos Hills for more than three years before relocating to DuPage County—a move that Nikolaos Fatouros (co-owner, with his wife, Natasha Hilemtzaris) reports has paid off handsomely. “We’re getting bigger crowds, definitely,” he says. “Diners really appreciate the difference in what we offer, food-wise and drink-wise. I

think the people here are a little more upscale, more sophisticated.”

Upscale, indeed.

“We try to offer the original yiayia [grandmother] recipes, paired with much better wine and drink options,” he says. “We put big importance on wines, bringing in indigenous wine varieties that have very limited availability. Some of them we’ve only been able to get in the last six months.”

Fatouros is equally proud of Thassos’s seafood offerings. Whole fish such as red snapper and European sea bass (branzino) are flown in fresh; deboned tableside; and dressed with olive oil, oregano, and lemon (the keep-it-simple approach, which is evident throughout the menu). Octopus is a reliable choice, whether it’s the warm grilled octopus on the main menu or the chilled octopus that appears in a



salad-like presentation, on the specials list.

Astakomakaronada (try saying that three times fast) is a classic dish of lobster tail, pulled from the shell and placed on a bed of pasta (spaghetti, in this case) and bathed in a rich, tomato-based sauce with a hint of anise. It’s a big splurge (\$82) but a definite treat.

For the more adventurous palate, there

---

*“While the menu is anchored in tradition, the dining room is definitely more modern.”*

---

are charbroiled sardines—not the tiny tinned variety but a quartet of meaty, bones-and-all fish. These are so strongly flavored that Hilemtzaris (who happened to be chatting with customers that night) felt the need to issue a heads-up to us. We ordered the sardines anyway and loved them (though your tolerance for oil-rich fish may vary).

Appetizer offerings include the ubiquitous saganaki, which I didn’t order, happy to watch the flamed-tableside show from a distance. Instead, I opted



Pastitsada



for thick slices of loukaniko sausage, spanakopita (spinach and feta cheese layered with crispy phyllo dough), and Greek salad.

Taramosalata, a snapper-roe spread, is milder and less salty than other versions

I've had. It arrives in three round scoops, looking at first glance like a dish of ice cream, and I think I've decided on this year's April Fool's gag.

The main-course options include a bone-in rib eye and a thick veal chop,



but I'd point you toward the lamb chops, which could hold their own against those at any high-end steakhouse. The chops can be cut thick or thin (the portion is the same either way); I prefer the thick cut, easier to cook to medium-rare, but if you like a higher ratio of char to meat, get the thin-cut chops.

Then it's on to comfort-food classics such as pastitsada, slow-simmered beef chunks in a complex, aromatic sauce over Greek macaroni (a.k.a., bucatini) and lamb yiovetsti, roasted lamb shoulder in a rich tomato sauce with orzo pasta. Vegetable sides such as gigantes (oversized lima beans simmered in an herbed tomato sauce) and briami, a melange of baked vegetables (potatoes, zucchini, green beans, and carrots on my visit) are solid choices as well.

For dessert, you can't go wrong with such classics as baklava, galaktoboureko (eggy custard on phyllo, with honey syrup), or ekmek (creamy custard and whipped cream on kataifi dough).

While the menu is anchored in tradition, the dining room (divided among several small spaces) is definitely more modern. White walls are matched by the linens that top each table; recessed lighting and a few contemporary hanging fixtures contribute to the light, uncluttered look. ●