

## BY MARGARET LEROUX

The weather outside was frightful, but inside the Aegean Greek restaurant it was as close to delightful as you can get in Framingham. I have to admit my exposure to Worcester's urban neighbor to the east has been pretty much limited to the malls at either end and the occasional restaurant along Route 9. In fact, on this particular night my two companions and I were in Framingham for a last minute bout of shopping for the holidays. We'd never have found the Aegean on our own, tucked away as it is in a little strip mall on a street that parallels Route 9, but another friend encouraged us to give it a try. "It's been around forever," she said, "everybody goes there."

My friend was right; the restaurant's clientele night we dined ranged from a family with an infant to a few couples dressed in their holiday best; everyone, even the baby, seemed to be having a good time.

The Aegean reminds me of the supper clubs favored by my parents in the early 1960s, elegant in a way you don't see in today's trendy, stylized restaurants. The lighting, I think, is one of the biggest differences. The Aegean's is warm, golden and inviting. The walls and ceiling are cream colored, the carpeting is plush, napkins are cloth, and there's obviously been an effort at training and retaining wait staff; they know their stuff. Scenes from the Greek isles and a few pieces of pottery are decorations that give the dining room a sun washed feel. One wall is mirrored, reflecting light on all the tables and booths that line the other walls. The scents of garlic and lemon pervades the room and are as seductive as perfume.

I have to make special note of the prices, which also hearken back to a more affordable era. Three of us feasted — we impressed the waiter with the amount of food we put away — for a lot less money than the tab for single dinner at some restaurants I've visited recently.

On my friend's recommendation, our first appetizer had the deceptively simple name, lamb ribs (\$5.95). If you're a fan of grilled lamb, this is a heavenly dish; a platter of six small chops marinated in lemon and herbs — oregano and rosemary for sure. At first we were polite and used our knives and forks, but soon we had the ribs in hand so we could get the last bits of juicy meat from the bone. We also ordered stuffed grape leaves (\$4.95), filled with a warm mixture of ground beef and rice served in a yummy lemon sauce. Next time we want to try the Aegean's version of *taramosalata* (\$4.95), a creamy dip made from potatoes and salmon eggs, and *saganaki* (\$4.95) baked cheese.

Entrées come with the house salad of iceberg lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and olives; you're offered the option of feta cheese on

top; say yes, and you'll get a virtual snow-drift of it. With our meals we ordered glasses of Greek red wine (\$3.50) and fumé blanc (\$4).

The Aegean's menu offers all the Greek standards: leg of lamb (\$10.95); *moussaka* (\$8.95); *pastichio* (\$7.95); spinach pie (\$6.95) and lamb kebab (\$12.95). There's also a good selection of broiled and fried seafood: shrimp (\$12.95); haddock, scrod and sole (\$9.95) and fried smelts (\$8.95); as well as steak, chicken — baked or broiled — and a few items, like calves liver (\$7.95), that you probably haven't seen in a long time.

There are a couple of Italian dishes too: veal and chicken parmigiana (\$9.95 and \$8.95) and you can order spaghetti with sauce (\$4.95) or with meatballs (\$5.95).

Another must have, according to my friend, is the Aegean's broiled shrimp with feta cheese (\$12.95); I'm so glad I took her advice. The shrimp were large and succulent, sautéed with garlic; the salty cheese had melted, making a sauce that was the perfect contrast to the sweetness of the shrimp. The rice pilaf on the side also benefited from the sauce.

One of my companions ordered the house combination platter (\$11.95) of *moussaka*, *pastichio*, spinach pie, grape

leaves and Greek sausage, *lokatico*. The sausage is made from an unusual mixture of spices including orange peel; if you're a sausage fan, be sure to try this — it's also available as an appetizer. Another outstanding item on this platter was the spinach pie — layers of crispy phyllo dough with a spinach-cheese filling; we thought we could taste mint and dill in the seasoning. *Moussaka* is layers of sliced eggplant, ground meat, and a light tomato sauce topped with béchamel sauce. In the Aegean's version, the béchamel is very thick, like a custard and the filling very mildly seasoned. *Pastichio* reminded me of my mother's hot dish (casserole to you New Englanders) of macaroni, beef and cheese; a hearty dish, but a little on the bland side. The grape leaves were more of the same we enjoyed as an appetizer.

The third member of our group ordered lamb *souvlaki*, five large, boneless pieces of lamb broiled after a lemony marinade. He offered me a taste; I especially liked the touch of citrus which gave a lovely contrast to the earthy flavor of the lamb.

We wished we had room for dessert; *baklava* and *galactorbouriko*, a Greek custard, sounded appealing, but we'll save them for a return visit. With a bill that just topped \$60 including wine, we'll be back. ■

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**The Aegean  
Restaurant  
47 Beacon St.  
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(508) 879-8424  
Hours  
Mon.-Sat. 11 a.m.-  
10 p.m.  
Sun. noon-9 p.m.  
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