

The New Wave of Greek Cuisine

How chefs in Greece are reinventing what it means to eat from the sea. *By Theodora Tsevas*

For generations, seafood dining in Greece meant tables set by the shore, waves breaking just beyond the chairs, and the fisherman who doubled as restaurateur, serving whatever the morning’s nets had yielded. But a new generation of chefs is rewriting the script, introducing techniques like fish aging, crudo, and ceviche to Greek tables, and diners are responding.

In Athens and Thessaloniki, two chefs stand at the forefront of this evolution. Nikos Apostolakis, executive chef of Liystor and soon-to-open Ydoron in downtown Athens, who has trained in Michelin-starred kitchens around the world, is pioneering the art of fish aging. And Dimitris Tziovaras, sous chef at the Makedonia Palace Hotel in Thessaloniki, working alongside executive chef Sotiris Evangelou, is also co-developing the concept Kuzina à La Grecque, a contemporary philosophy rooted in authentic, traditional Greek cuisine. Their approaches differ, but both are reshaping how Greeks eat from the sea.

“Greek seafood has deep roots,” says Tziovaras. “From antiquity, when our ancestors cooked fresh fish with olive oil and herbs, to the tavernas of the islands. What changes today is that the Greek diner, more aware of world gastronomy, comes back to our product, but with a more refined eye.”

Today the shift is most visible on menus in Athens, Thessaloniki, and the islands, where fried calamari and grilled octopus share space with tuna tartare and sea bass carpaccio. Tzio-

varas believes this evolution is less a rupture with tradition and more a continuation of it. “Crudo and ceviche are not foreign concepts to us,” he says. “They are variations of what we’ve always done: respect for the raw material, minimal intervention, pure flavor. These techniques become Greek when combined with local fish, virgin olive oil, kritamo, or Aegean herbs.”

Apostolakis, who grew up fishing and eating seafood in Crete before training as a chef, agrees that the new Greek seafood scene is born from both travel and rediscovery. “Many Greek chefs have traveled extensively in the last decade to learn techniques and broaden their horizons,” he explains. “Some brought back these methods, and people liked it; it was something different. Ceviche might feel a bit complex, but a sea bass carpaccio? That’s become common now. As chefs evolve and bring new things, the consumer looks for them, too.”

Where Apostolakis stands out is in his obsession with a technique few in Greece have mastered: the aging of fish. He has studied it for nearly a decade, runs seminars for profession-

als, and has made it the centerpiece of his restaurants. “About seven or eight years ago, I discovered fish aging,” he recalls. “It fascinated me, and since then I’ve been studying it, evolving it, experimenting. You manage variables such as temperature, pH, humidity, and airflow in specialized chambers. You let the fish lose moisture and allow natural enzymes to break down proteins. The result is much more flavorful, with concentrated taste and firmer flesh. It’s completely different.”

At Liystor, Apostolakis is already applying these techniques in a casual setting, but his bigger ambition lies



upstairs: a “fish steakhouse,” a first for Greece, opening soon in the same building that will be named Ydoron. “Everything you know about a steakhouse, but with fish,” he says. “Large cuts of aged fish, side dishes, sauces, and a strong wine list. Not fine dining exactly, but elevated. It’s a very new concept for Greece.”

Far from a passing trend, both chefs see the rise of raw and reimagined seafood as a permanent shift in Greek dining. “The change started with the more traveled and cosmopolitan crowd,” says Tziovaras. “But I see people of all ages happily trying a carpaccio of Greek sea bass or an anchovy tartare, because they recognize authenticity and purity of flavor. In Greece, the ‘new’ does not replace tradition; it illuminates it.” Apostolakis believes that this is not part of a trend: “Trends were sushi and Asian fusion. What’s happening now with fish is real. Raw fish dishes are now standard in any serious seafood restaurant. The more simply they’re done, the more value they have.”

The challenge now is whether Greeks, long accustomed to equating seafood with simplicity and freshness straight from the boat, will pay premium prices for creative or aged fish dishes. “In our culture, fresh fish has always been a symbol of quality and celebration,” says Tziovaras. “Today, the premium price is justified when the customer sees that the same care and authenticity are carried into a more creative presentation, respecting seasonality, locality, and sustainability. When the dish tells its story, from the fishing boat to the plate, the Greek diner values it and pays for it.”



Apostolakis acknowledges some resistance but sees change on the horizon. “Maybe the public isn’t fully ready yet, but I see them already paying 60, 70, or 80 euros per person at good tavernas,” he notes. “If they’ll pay that for a grilled fish, why not for something unique? It’s value for money. With aged fish, when people taste it and realize it’s better than what they thought was ‘fresh,’ they’ll understand something has changed.”

Tziovaras is optimistic that the new spread can be done beyond the big cities. “Greek gastronomy has the luxury of local products of the highest quality, and that’s not limited to the big cities,” he says. “On the islands or in smaller towns, fish often comes straight from the fisherman to the cook. The challenge is to present the same material in a way that excites without alienating.” Apostolakis is more cautious. He believes that a fish steakhouse concept, such as the one he is preparing, needs the capital first. “Athens has the audience to support something so new. Maybe later it can spread, but the first step has to be here.”

Despite their forward-looking approaches, neither chef sees the classic fish taverna disappearing. “The fish taverna will not vanish; it’s the soul of Greek seafood gastronomy,” says Tziovaras. “But it will evolve. We will

keep eating fried calamari and octopus on the grill, but next to them will be more refined creations. The new era will not replace tradition; it will enrich it.” Apostolakis agrees, though with his own twist: “We are opening new markets with these new concepts, but the taverna will always be there. What changes is the variety of choices.”

For both major cities of Greece and for many islands, from the refined crudo of Tziovaras to the bold aging experiments of Apostolakis, Greek seafood is entering a new era, one where history and innovation share the same table. As Tziovaras puts it, “Greek cuisine has this unique ability to keep its roots while spreading its branches into new ideas. My mission as a chef is to keep Greece in every dish, whether simple or high gastronomy.” Apostolakis, ever the experimenter, sees no turning back: “As people taste what aged fish can really be, they’ll realize the future of Greek seafood has already started.”



Nikos Apostolakis



Dimitris Tziovaras

DIMITRIOS ALEKSOU

ANTONIS YIAMOURIS