

OCTOBER | NOVEMBER 2007

# Garden Plate

FOOD AND DRINK AT EVERY EXIT

## THE WORLD ON A PLATE

### **Axia Taverna** Executive Chef

Alexander Gorant — a native of Greece and graduate of New York's French Culinary Institute who studied with Greek-American chef and writer Diane Kochilas — has mastered the art of *mezedes*, Greek dishes akin to Spanish tapas. These "small plates" afford diners the chance to eschew the appetizer/entrée scenario and do a good bit of gastronomic grazing, should they so desire.

The *domatokeftedes salonica*, three delicately fried tomato and fennel fritters, are perfectly seasoned and served with a pleasantly potent celery yogurt dip. The *gemista apo thalassina* — tomatoes filled with chopped mussels, Maryland lump crabmeat and rice — is another personal favorite, as is a nightly special of ground lamb enveloped in an ethereal pita pocket and surrounded by a sensuous sea of red wine sauce.

Axia doesn't dazzle patrons with a seafood display, but treasures of the sea still hold a prominent place. The monkfish medallions, velvety and sublimely tender, are caressed by an exquisite brown butter sauce and swim to table on a seabed of *al dente* homemade pasta. And the *youvetsi apo thalassina* — orzo baked in a clay pot with shrimp, scallops, feta cheese, and tomatoes — is more traditional but no less delicious.

What does dazzle, however — along with the cozy walnut bar, handsome glass-walled wine cabinets, and comfortable banquettes awash with throw pillows — is the extensive catalog of wines, half of which are of Greek origin.

The cooking of Greece traces its origins back to earliest classical times. But what the Greeks have enjoyed for centuries, residents of the Garden State are just beginning to appreciate. *Kalle orexi!*

#### **AXIA TAVERNA**

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