



*Supermodel*

**NIKI  
TAYLOR**

*On Her Milestone Year*



**GET AWAY TO  
WINE COUNTRY**

**25** *MOST*  
**BEAUTIFUL  
PEOPLE**

Octopus  
Souvlaki

# Word on the *Street*

At GReKo, it's all about the flavors of Greece, graffiti art, and family.

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PHOTOS BY EMILY HALL DORIO

## GREKO GREEK STREET FOOD

704 Main St., East Nashville  
615-203-0251  
grekostreetfood.com

### What to Order

Tirokafteri dip, \$7  
Greko street fries, \$3; \$6  
Lamb pita, \$11  
Grilled octopus, \$12  
Athenian half chicken, \$13



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Cousins Bill and Tony Darsinos want to show you a little piece of home—a bustling sliver of Athens, Greece, set inside a squat, gray building in East Nashville. From the moment you step in to GReKo Greek Street Food, a fast-casual, street art-splashed space, where the menu's painted on the wall and the smell of herbs and sizzling meat draw you in, you won't be able to deny that this spot is changing your mind about what a "traditional" Greek restaurant looks like.

But, while the Darsinos cousins have managed to smuggle the feel and energy of a place that's halfway around the world—a place that "could succeed in Athens, if we opened it there," Tony says—they're also bringing with it the thread of a generations-old storyline of immigration and cultural connection.

The Darsinos' fathers are brothers, who emigrated to the U.S. from Greece in the late 1960s and early '70s. Tony's father came first, and, like a lot of immigrants, found success in the restaurant business. He opened the original Gondola Pizza House in Clarksville in 1969. Bill's father soon followed, picking up a job with his brother. Both Tony and Bill grew up running around restaurant kitchens, gaining a love for the industry along the way.

Although Tony went on to study architecture, Bill stayed in the family business, opening Southside Grill (originally Sofie's Bistro) in 2006. Tony came back around, re-opening a Gondola House Pizzeria in Hermitage in 2010. All the while, both families have kept their connection to the old country, traveling back to Greece every year with their own families.

Theirs is an often-told immigrant story that points to the success that can be found in the world of food, hospitality, and community spaces. Like many, the Darsinos occupy that important role of entrepreneurs fueled by the American dream—while also providing tantalizing tastes from a world away.

GReKo is meant to evoke the street-food joints that the guys frequent on their trips back to Greece—down to the graffiti-inspired artwork covering every wall. "Every street, every building is just covered with it in Athens," Bill says. >>>

Half Roasted  
Chicken





Tony Darsinos, chef Sal Avila, Bill Darsinos



Greek Frozen Yogurt

The food, meanwhile, is street food, peasant style, and served on paper-lined metal trays: hot off a grill, marinated and skewered, and packed with the bright flavors of grassy olive oil, fresh herbs, and smoke. To recreate that vision, the Darsinos not only import olive oil, salt, and bottles of Skouras wine straight from home, but have also constructed their own charcoal-burning rotisserie oven.

At the helm is chef Sal Avila, most recently of Prima, whose background is mostly in fine-dining kitchens, but he has a passion for high-heat, live-fire cooking. Here, that means manning the rotisserie, where whole chickens, as well as lamb, pork, and beef *souvlaki*, or skewers, are regularly dripping fat from their perch on a horizontal spit.

The menu comes from what the cousins know well: simplicity and seasoning. The *souvlaki* are cut into bite-sized pieces, marinated in oregano and lemon juice, and skewered before going over the fire. Try the tender, smoke-laden octopus or the beef, which is more like a minced sausage, and, on the side, get the horta greens, a chilled mix of wild and leafy greens, just lightly sautéed in olive oil. Better yet, the street fries will amp up the salt factor but also provide a savory bed for any leftover juices.

Of the pitas, which are fluffy orbs made on site each day, the lamb and pork options are standouts, each getting hit with Greek yogurt. Avila has also mastered the traditional tzatziki sauce, a refreshingly sour cucumber-yogurt mixture that gets slathered over the beef *souvlaki* pita.

Our prime pick would be the Athenian half chicken, which comes bone-in and handily portioned over a pile of street fries. The honey-lemon sauce adds a kick of sweet acidity that is best tied together when swiped up with a few extra pieces of pita. Eat it while sitting on the graveled patio; then, for dessert, finish it up with a tart-and-sour frozen Greek yogurt, loaded with a topping, like sour-cherry syrup or honey.

Or sit inside, pulling a seat up at the bar beneath a portrait of Poseidon, whose arms are nearly licked by the tentacles of an octopus. It'll give you a spot to put your elbows while you devour your pita by hand—and feel yourself slipping away to Athens via East Nashville.