



Greece is known for its flavored lemonades, and Kapnos does several lemonade craft cocktails, such as this rye version.

# Big Fat Greek Cocktails

Kapnos in Washington, D.C. offers Mediterranean-inspired cuisine and beverages

Washing down mezze with creative cocktails and a Greek-focused-yet-global wine list is the scene at Mike Isabella's 160-seat restaurant in Washington, D.C.'s hip Fourteenth Street corridor. Whole spit-roasted animals like baby goat, lamb and suckling pig are a menu focal point, along with dips and spreads, flaky phyllo pies, salads, charred octopus and daily specials like moussaka and souvlaki.

Selections on beverage director Taha Ismail's cocktail menu are peppered with an Aegean twist. The popular Papadapoulos mixes Hum Botanical Liqueur, grapefruit, lime, maple and Bittermens Burlesque bitters with Skinos, an herbal and pine-scented Greek liqueur made from the Mastiha tree—the source of the spice mastic.

The bottled libation Smile Like a Doughnut combines Beefeater 24 gin with a house-made grapefruit tonic and Idoniko Tsipouro brandy, a clear, grappa-like Greek spirit. And the effervescent Little One tops Absolut Elyx single-vineyard vodka, Aperol, elderflower and lemon bitters with the 2012 Kir-Yanni Akakies, a Greek rosé sparkling wine made in Naoussa from the xinomavro grape. Kapnos' cocktail menu spans 13 selections, each priced at \$13.

The tipples tend to be aromatic, with just a dash of the exotic. Make It Happen shakes up Vida mezcal, pineapple, lime, Bittermens Hellfire bitters and egg white with Kümmel, a clear, sweet liqueur flavored with caraway, fennel and cumin. The Absolut Elyx- and Domaine de Canton ginger liqueur-based Blame It on the Rain gets its heady quality from burnt cinnamon, lemon and a grilled Fresno pepper.

Four rotating kegged lemonades (priced at \$12 a serving or \$44 a pitcher of five servings) are fizzy thirst-quenchers. “I wanted to create a quick craft cocktail, and Greece is known for its flavored lemonades,” notes Ismail.

Most popular is the version with gin, Batavia Arrack, grilled lemon, honey, thyme and soda, and the rum lemonade with lemon verbena tea, lemon, cane syrup and Angostura bitters. Rye-based lemonade mingles allspice dram, grapefruit, lemon and sage, and a seasonal flavor adds readily available fruit and produce.

Tetotalers and the non-imbibing can select from four aromatic, eclectic house-made sodas. Priced at \$6 each, the sodas include ginger beer, and pineapple and lemongrass. Guests often ramp them up by mixing up a spirit. “We add gin to the rhubarb-tarragon soda, and aged rum to the mango, coriander, and hops soda,” says Ismail.

**IT'S NOT ALL GREEK**

Oenophiles may have to forego any shyness or lack of confidence about grape pronunciations, or risk overlooking the native Greek gems on wine and service director James Horn’s list. These include moschofilero, malagousia and xinomavro.

Horn’s favorite white on the menu is the full-bodied, saline-tinged 2012 Gaia Estate wild ferment assyrtiko from the island of Santorini (\$60 a bottle.) “This typically crisp, mineral-driven white varietal changes into a soft, Burgundian-style white with the addition of the wild yeast lees,” he says.

He also likes the 2008 Alpha Estate Florina SMX, a blend of syrah, xinomavro and merlot. “For me, this is



Above, the interior of Kapnos. Below, right, the restaurant’s popular gin lemonade cocktail.



similar to a Rhône-style blend of GSM, with medium body and a nice spiciness from the native xinomavro.”

Guests wishing to simply dip their toes in the pool of Greek wine can select from several by the glass, including the floral 2012 Annas moschofilero/roditis from Mantania served on tap (\$9 a glass), and the 2012 Kir-Yanni xinomavro, syrah, merlot (\$12 a glass, \$48 a bottle). Kapnos serves 25 wines on its standard by-the-glass menu, priced \$9 to \$21.

The rest of the wine world gets its due, too. “Since Kapnos’ menu has influences from all over the world, I feel it would be an injustice to focus solely on Greek varietals,” explains Horn. “We serve our portions mezze style, so the wine list needs to be flexible and match the versatility of the menu.”

Twenty-one high-end wines are available via the Coravin wine preservation system, in 3- or 6-oz. pours. These include the 1999-2007 Skouras Labyrinth cabernet sauvignon from Greece (\$34 for a 3 -oz. glass, \$68 for 6 oz.) and the 1978 Château Musar Bordeaux Blend from Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley (\$118 a 3 oz.-glass, \$235 for 6 oz.). Coravin wines at Kapnos are priced from \$14 to \$118 for a 3-oz. pour, and double that price for a 6-oz. serving.

Kapnos’ guests can get schooled in the Greek classics, while sampling some decidedly modern sips and apps. Yamas! ♦

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