



Traditional Italian and Contemporary Greek from an Unorthodox Chef

BY ALFIE LAU

John Chow can only laugh when asked where his love for Italian and Greek foods came from. After all, the Chinese-Canadian owner of two popular eateries in the Edmonds area, Amorosa Pasta House and Santali Souvlaki House, has little connection to the Mediterranean save for a family trip there in 2000.

"I've always loved Italian food," he says sheepishly, "And when I became fascinated with Greek food, I wanted to add my own special flavour to it."

Amorosa, open for 17 years, was joined by Santali four years ago when the building right beside Amorosa became available.

Chow jumped at the opportunity to open up a contemporary Greek restaurant that serves traditional Greek dishes with Chow's own Asian twists.

Chow splits his time between the two places and asking him to choose which is his favourite is like asking him which of his children he loves most.

"I like each of them in different ways," he said. "I try not to tinker too much at Amorosa because all my regulars have their favourites."

"If I have the urge to try something different, you'll probably see it at Santali."

The Amorosa experience can be summarized in one word: plentiful.

Large, appetizing portions for an affordable price are what keep customers coming back. Diners can choose from 10 different pasta shapes, matched with more than 20 different sauce mixes. You can literally have a

different pasta dish each time you come to Amorosa.

"A lot of my customers joke that they can order the large serving for dinner and it'll be big enough for tomorrow's lunch," said Chow.

Chow's Asian background does show itself in one of Amorosa's most popular dishes: the seafood cartocchio.

Diners choose a pasta and Chow then bakes it in aluminum foil wrap, surrounded by a seafood medley of squid, prawns, clams, scallops and shrimp.

"This was a dish I discovered in Italy and knew I had to have on my menu," he said. "Being Chinese, I love seafood and this dish allows me to combine seafood with pasta. If you had to ask me what my favourite dish is here, the cartocchio would be it."

Next door, the splendour of Santali can be seen in several dishes you won't find elsewhere.

Because Chow loves calamari and Caesar salad, he decided to combine the two into a salad dish that is one of the most popular appetizers on the menu.

"I've got a lot of people who are on a diet order this because they can say they're just ordering the salad," Chow jokes.

And for people who love spanakopita, traditionally a baked phyllo filled with spinach and cheese, Chow does it differently, wrapping the spinach and feta in a spring roll pastry and deep frying it.

"I love my spinach roll hot and this way, I can always serve it to my customers hot," he said.

Chow doesn't deviate too much from a traditional Greek menu, as he knows that lamb and souvlaki are staples he has to do well.

Perhaps his favourite dish is the Klefiko, the meaty and tender lamb shoulder that he slow roasts and serves with mustard, herbs and a red wine sauce.

"Klefiko is a more affordable cut than rack of lamb

but you don't lose any of the flavour," Chow said. "It's a great dish for \$16."

Talk to Chow for any amount of time and you can see his passion for serving gourmet food at affordable prices.

"I don't ever want people to say they can't afford to come to my restaurants," said Chow, "And I don't ever want people to leave here hungry."

As Chow takes a break from overseeing both kitchens, he has many customers come by his table and thank him for things other than the food.

"A couple of my servers are the children of some of my most loyal customers," he said. "The parents started coming here for dinner and when their daughters were looking for their first jobs, I was looking for servers. I think it's a great way to do my part for my friends and the community."

And that in a nutshell is John Chow: A local restaurateur who serves big portions at affordable prices, isn't afraid to offer new dishes and supports the local community by hiring locally.

"Having two restaurants close to where I live, that's a dream come true," he said. "I'm a very lucky guy."

Santali Souvlaki House is located at 7870 Edmonds St. Call 604-525-8286 for reservations or more information.

Amorosa Pasta House is located at 7874 Edmonds St. Call 604-525-3343 for reservations or more information.

Both restaurants are open seven days a week for dinner and Tuesday to Friday for lunch."

