

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

At Yani's Café

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, November 20th, 2019

Not your usual eatery

To say it all we refer to Yani's café as the Greek's.

A blend of student and neighborhood hang-out, a blend of family cooked Mediterranean food and banter with those familiar to the place, to whom he will jokingly declare that he won't feed them if he does not feel like it!

That is the easy-going spirit of this small unassuming café with its easy-to-miss non-descript store front. *See feature image.*

The key words here are "food" and "familiarity" for this is a family run café, with Yani's father busy with preparing the day's vegetables that go on the menu board placed right at the entrance, next to the community information board and the local newspapers stacks.

Here you are fed but will not be served before discussing with Yani how you want the day's cooked dish arranged, or what you feel like eating, or an acceptable substitute.

Territories

It may sound strange to speak of territories for such a small café, I use the term here in order to describe some regularities in the way certain people and activities will be found in certain parts of the place.

The front

Upon entering, we find inside the bay window a small indoor garden next to a large round table usually occupied by small groups seeking some privacy and the ease to spread out their computers etc. *See image below.*

It requires of course the longest walk to the kitchen to order and pick up their food but it allows moving the chairs around, stretching across the table and loud talking.



Interior of Yani's Café showing front and central "territories"

The center

That area harbors an array of small tables, some with a church bench along the wall under large light fixtures with bulbs that look like miniature heating elements, and some simply lined up against the opposite wall each with a couple of chairs.

These tables will be occupied by the quieter crowd working at their computer, reading and-or just eating, under a series of mirrors that visually widen the space. *See image above.*

At the far end of the center a couple of tables are set together to accommodate two or three people, usually habitués, who may wish to be close to the kitchen ... and closer to Yani for impromptu exchanges. That is where my photography friend and I will usually sit.

At the end of this space we find a glass enclosed cooler holding today's dishes and topped with the deserts under their own glazed presenter. Brightly lit it is the heart of the café where all customers must eventually come to place and discuss their order and choose their drinks. *See image below.*



Centrally located food and dessert cooler

The rear

Behind the centrally located cooler is the working kitchen of the café and the cash register counter facing the wall along which, on the way to the stock room and the restroom, we find two small tables and a bench informally reserved for Yani's friends and family members, who invariably sit facing the kitchen in order to engage in discussions with Yani. *See image below.*



The rear "territory" showing the friends and family seating area

The table located at the rear corner is Yani's, seated here on the bench, discussing with a helper at the table.

From there he can view the entire café and supervise the access to the stock room and restroom .

A word about Yani

He is a well-known neighborhood personality, quite noticeable by the way he engages some habitués about the weather, the parking situation and the taxes he has to pay ... or any news of the day.

He will also personally bring food to your table and on occasion have a running discussion with the customers seated at these tables, discussions that may end up involving other customers!

A good way to characterize his presence and role perhaps, is something of *the chef and social "conductor"* of his café.

From "calimera" to "yassou"

These are the usual Greek expressions respectively for *good day*, used as *welcome*, and *to your health*, used as *good-by*.

They are also the way I can lay claim to my maternal Greek heritage, by sounding them off when entering and leaving Yani's little café.

Of course, when pertinent, I will mention my liking certain dishes, given my mother's Greek style cooking, and discuss with Yani similarities and differences with what he offers in his café.

A last word

Taking all this in consideration, I think that behind the unassuming store front and size of Yani's café lie the spatial and human characteristics of a *“good place,” with its rich blend of Mediterranean ambiance, cooking and sociability.*

Credit all photos to Maurice Amiel

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