

Synopsis

This is the year "It's Greek to me" becomes the happy answer to what's for dinner. My Big Fat Greek Wedding, the upcoming epic Troy, the 2004 Summer Olympics returning to Athens--and now, yet another reason to embrace all things Greek: The Olive and the Caper, Susanna Hoffman's 700-plus-page serendipity of recipes and adventure. In Corfu, Ms. Hoffman and a taverna owner cook shrimp fresh from the trap--and for us she offers the boldly-flavored Shrimp with Fennel, Green Olives, Red Onion, and White Wine. She gathers wild greens and herbs with neighbors, inspiring Big Beans with Thyme and Parsley, and Field Greens and Ouzo Pie. She learns the secret to chewy country bread from the baker on Santorini and translates it for American kitchens. Including 325 recipes developed in collaboration with Victoria Wise (her co-author on The Well-Filled Tortilla Cookbook, with over 258,000 copies in print), The Olive and the Caper celebrates all things Greek: Chicken Neo-Avgolemeno. Fall-off-the-bone Lamb Shanks seasoned with garlic, thyme, cinnamon and coriander. Siren-like sweets, from world-renowned Baklava to uniquely Greek preserves: Rose Petal, Cherry and Grappa, Apricot and Metaxa. In addition, it opens with a sixteen-page full-color section and has dozens of lively essays throughout the book--about the origins of Greek food, about village life, history, language, customs--making this a lively adventure in reading as well as cooking.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

According to the preface and acknowledgments to this book, 'The Olive and the Caper' by Susanna Hoffman, the author went through many more difficulties than usual in bringing this book to completion. Heading the list was the loss of the virtually complete manuscript in 1991, and its reconstruction in the following years. I for one am delighted that the author took the effort to

reconstruct this volume, as it should stand as a template for how to put together a readable, useable, entertaining exposition of the cuisine of a country. I am not saying Ms. Hoffman has given us the very best treatment of a national cuisine or even necessarily the very best treatment of Greek cuisine. Diana Kennedy's 'From My Mexican Kitchen' is a different approach to a national cuisine that works equally as well as a format and her content is of the highest possible quality. Similarly, Diane Kochilas approaches Greek food in 'The Glorious Foods of Greece' in an entirely different manner than Hoffman, giving us a third valuable approach. While Kochilas' approach is by region, with each chapter covering a different ethnic and culinary enclave such as The Peloponnesos, The Ionian Islands, Thessaly, Macedonia, Crete, and Athens and others, Ms. Hoffman approaches her subject by ingredient or type of dish. While this seems very conventional and while it is definitely less scholarly than Ms. Kochilas book, it is done with a depth that is uncommon among lesser books on a national cuisine. For example, the very first chapter deals with the drinks of Greece, including lowly water, which just happens to have a special place in Greek tradition. It reminds us that it is Greek intellectual tradition and customs that contributed much more to the development of early Christianity than Roman customs.

I enjoy cooking and eating the recipes from Diane Kochilas' first Greek cookbook and was really looking forward to this book after having read all the glowing reviews. So far I have tried 3 recipes and am not very impressed. I am still hoping that other recipes will prove to be much better. I do enjoy the layout of the book and all the interesting side bars, cultural notes, etc. The dearth of color photos is by no means any reason to downgrade the book--most color photos of food in cookbooks is just "food porn", produced with the aid of food stylists, and adding little of real value to the book other than just jacking up the production costs which are then passed on to the consumer. Below are notes on the 3 recipes I have done so far: Roasted Lamb Shanks p.387 Not happy with this. Recipe intro speaks of "long, slow roasting...glossy meat falling off the bone"...permeated with seasonings and garlic reduced to a "soft, sweet pulp" Recipe calls for roasting at 375 degrees, hardly what I would call slow roasting. Against my better judgement, I followed the instructions and ended up with tight, hard meat that was anything but "falling off the bone". The garlic was still hard and quite harsh. If I had made this recipe to eat as is, I would have been EXTREMELY disappointed. As it was, I made it as the first step for the lamb pie on page 106 Lamb Pie p.106 Not thrilled with this one either. The orange zest was so overpowering it was basically all we could taste. The trouble and expense of buying and roasting the lamb shanks was entirely wasted--could have saved a lot of money, time and effort simply by making the recipe with ground beef. I would like to try this

again--with ground beef and about half the orange zest.

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