

Efímerída #03

The Road Home | Athens



READ ALL
ABOUT IT

We ate our way across the city.

Ten years in, the founders of Brother Marcus went back to where the food began.

Two days in Athens. A koulourí at dawn, coffee from hot sand, souvlakí and rosé retsína, and a supplier lunch in a 1920s grocer's down by the port. This is what they found.



DISPATCH ONE · THE FIRST DAY

Day One, through the city

Breakfast in Athens starts slow. We began with Artemis at Takis, a bakery he runs with his brother, three generations in and a cornerstone of the neighbourhood. The koulouri comes from the north, from Thessaloniki, drier and a lot more sesame, something between a loaf and a cookie, with a tahini nuttiness that keeps you going back. The tyropita is pure nostalgia: a Greek childhood, a school packed lunch swapped for a classmate's cheese pie, every time.

Pastries eaten and Freddo cappuccinos drunk, we took the long way to the market, up around the foothills of the Parthenon. Evripidou Street is the city's answer to the Spice Bazaar, less show and more purpose, herbs and olives and stalls, the smell changing every few doors. It runs into Varvakios, the great central hall, meat and fish under one roof, the heart of how Athens actually eats.

Next door, Mokka, a temple of coffee named for the old port in Yemen. Brass grinders working, beans roasted just behind, and one man on the ibrik, the copper pot set into hot sand for a gentle even heat. You know it is ready when it climbs and bubbles to the top. It arrived perfect, and did not need the sugar.



Coffee worked in hot sand, Mokka.

Midday took us to Makedonikon on the edge of Exarchia for bougatsa, a family bakery, father and son, granddad already tucking into a Mythos at half eleven. Here the sugar is dusted inside the

pastry rather than on top, and only the custard one truly earns the name.



Granddad and his Mythos, Makedonikon.

A couple of blocks up, Prigkipas is a souvlaki shop that took the unit next door and turned the basement into a wine cellar. It is where we had rosé retsina for the first time. On souvlaki I am a traditionalist: pork neck over charcoal, salt, oregano, a squeeze of lemon. This is the sort of place I love sharing with Alex, for the food, the people and the care in every last detail.



Pork neck over the coals, Prigkipas.

One of our values is kefi, the joy in the everyday. It is right there in front of you here.

Then up to the foothills of the Acropolis, not for food but to take stock, to rest with full bellies in the heat of the day. So much of

how we do food comes straight from this, from what one of us grew up eating, a table simply put in the middle for everyone to share.

DISPATCH TWO · THE SECOND DAY

Day Two, and the supplier lunch

The night before had ended late. Dinner at Ouzeri Lesvos, one of the most characterful rooms in the city, with Nicholas from Roots, a friend and London supplier who makes Greek spirits. His rule for the table: there are no rules. It is a circle, the more ouzo or tsipouro you drink the hungrier you get, so you eat a little more, and round it goes. Two highlights stood out, the bakaliaros pastourma, salt fish cured with fenugreek, garlic and paprika, and a red mullet laid under grated tomato and seared right down. We ordered more than we could finish, drank more than we should have, and left with a standing invitation to come back.



Dinner at Ouzeri Lesvos.

Then Bar in Front of the Bar, where a building-works pop-up quietly became the bar itself, the signage all tongue in cheek, “we serve humans here.” There was a banana piña colada that tasted exactly like it sounds but ten times better, the kind of thing you would imagine at Willy Wonka's, or here, crafted by the god of wine himself. What struck us most was how the Athens bars treat one another as peers rather than rivals, a whole cluster of the world's best sitting within a few streets of each other, sending drinks across, swapping ideas, lifting each other up. It is the very thing we

are trying to build back home. We stayed far later than we had planned.

Day Two started early, and heads were a little sore. Back to Varvakios one last time for the Cretan bits and the prawns off the ice, then the rush across town to Piraeus, to Oidikon, where the whole chapter was waiting to close. Founded in 1920, half grocer and half taverna, it looks like it has barely changed since: tins stacked to the ceiling, a marble counter worn smooth, and a fridge from the twenties still humming in the corner. Upstairs is a kitchen small and mighty, four gas stoves and barely room to turn around, with a resident musician tuning up in the doorway.

The table read like a map of the country. Manousos had driven his Galomyzithra, his Cretan Graviera, his Anthotyro and that extraordinary Staka butter up from the mountains; Chelmos and Kostarellos brought feta, Nineli her kataifi, Moutevelis his sausages, Kontogiannis his Corinth raisins, and Corné a tsoureki still warm from the oven. Kokotos and Mylonas poured the wine. Almost everything we put on a plate had come from someone sitting at the table, and we cooked all of it straight back to them. It was, hands down, one of the finest lunches any of us can remember.

The highlight was cooking alongside Apostolos, the owner, hovering over my shoulder like a friendly vulture, asking the whole time exactly how I meant to use his Staka butter, and whether I truly understood what I had in my hands. I told him I was beginning to.



Ten suppliers, one long table, Oidikon.

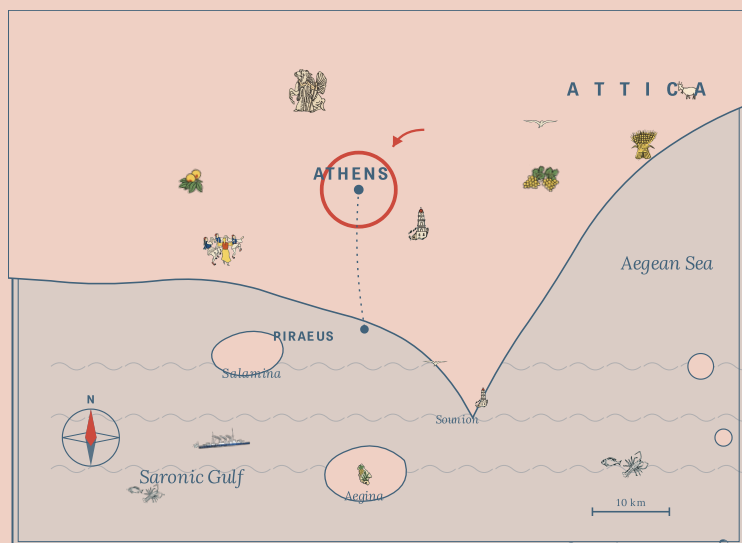
We arrived as strangers, and left as friends.

When the plates were cleared a guitar appeared in the basement and Zorba started up among the barrels. Then Apostolos put Stefanos in the car and drove him round Piraeus door to door, gathering stories and samples until the light went; that, in a single afternoon, is Maltby & Greek. He came back with kaimaki ice

cream, made with lotus root for that chewy, stretchy pull, a flavour that for any Greek is childhood in a spoon. We had walked in as strangers with a booking. We left with phone numbers, leftovers and a taxi to catch, already planning the next one, and the long road home.

The road we walked, and the road we'd send you.

- **Takis** the breakfast koulouri
- **Evripidou & Varvakios** the market
- **Mokka** coffee from hot sand
- **Makedonikon** bougatsa, Exarchia
- **Prigkipas** souvlaki & rosé retsina
- **Ouzeri Lesvos** fish mezes & ouzo
- **Bar in Front of the Bar** the nightcap
- **Oidikon** the supplier lunch, Piraeus



...which way for the mezze?

- 1 **The Clumsies** the most awarded bar in town
- 2 **Barro Negro** tequila & mezcal, Monastiraki
- 3 **Baba Au Rum** rum, round the corner
- 4 **Line** made from scratch, Petralona
- 5 **Taratsa** the rooftop at sunset

- 6 **Manári** Ari Vezené, off-menu kokoretsi
- 7 **Akra** the chefs serve you
- 8 **Pharaoh** design & open fire, Exarchia
- 9 **Linou Soumpasis** candle shop meets taverna

central Athens



Maltby
& Greek



*ok, we ate everything.

Not a blend this time but the producers themselves, ten of them, whose Staka butter, feta, kataifi and wine now land on the Brother Marcus table. We came back full of ideas and cannot wait to get cooking.

The road, on film.

Four short films from Istanbul and Athens. Every place on this page is in them. Scan the code to watch the whole series.

brothermarcus.co.uk
enquiries@brothermarcus.co.uk
@brothermarcus

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



BROTHER MARCUS

