



Market Grille Café

Family, Friends and Good Food

By Rob Kachelriess

RESTAURANTS COME AND GO QUICKLY IN Las Vegas, but Market Grille Café has been a thriving locals' favorite for more than 14 years in the northwest valley. The family-owned and operated business began as a quick-serve counter, but outgrew the location and evolved to become two full-scale restaurants in Centennial (7070 North Durango Drive) and just outside Summerlin (7175 West Lake Mead). The food is inspired by the Italian background of proprietor Joe Pierro and the Greek heritage of wife Rhonda, producing an effortless mix of Mediterranean flavors. Their son, Joe Jr., is the executive chef responsible for putting everything together in the kitchen.

The secret to their success? Listening to customers, many of whom return like clockwork to reliably order their favorites. The family learned long ago to never remove a dish from the menu. The original ones all remain from opening day with new concepts added over time. Some recipes have been modified to be vegan or gluten-free to not only offer expanded choices, but reflect the restaurant's affinity for fresh, carefully-sourced ingredients. Two seasonal autumn dishes—a pumpkin cheesecake modification and a pumpkin mushroom soup—were so well received, they now remain on the menu year-round.

With so much diversity on the menu, it's almost hard to choose where to begin. Any first-timer is best advised to direct their attention toward the Pomegranate Chicken, a dish that put Market Café on the map after it was featured at the Bite of Las Vegas food festival. The chicken is marinated for 24 hours in herbs and pomegranate juice before it's grilled, sliced, and topped with a pomegranate glaze and sugared walnuts—producing an extremely tender balance of sweet and savory flavors. The chicken is served as an entree with basmati rice, hummus, and pita bread or a salad with fresh spinach, feta, and honey balsamic dressing. The color of the meat is a bright pinkish red, making an immediate impression before the first bite even touches the lips.

Another popular main course is the Lamb Roast Cabernet. The leg of lamb is slow-roasted throughout the day, allowing the meat to fall apart with ease and prompting a taste that's anything but gamey. The subtle flavors mix well with a cabernet reduction mushroom au jus that's bold but approachable.

Inventive touches are seen in the "Pie-Zanos"—Italian-style pizzas with pita bread used in place of traditional crust—and the Papous Pasta, a plate of spaghetti buried in tomato sauce with tuna. It may sound odd, but it's a traditional Italian recipe that was a favorite for the senior Pierro while growing up. The restaurant team is eager to hand out a sample for the curious. Similar experimentation is seen in the signature Aphrodite's Cheesecake dessert. Layered baklava is used instead of a graham cracker crust, topped with a New York-style filling that's light and airy with a cake-like texture. An even more indulgent way to wrap up a meal—the "World's Best Dessert"—is a Turkish version of rolled baklava with pistachios and chocolate in place of walnuts.

Anything on the menu goes well with a selection from the restaurant's wine list, represented with suggested pairings from Italy, California, and even Israel. The philosophy is simple. As long as the wine is good, it will complement the food.

Both Market Grille Café locations have Old World charm and comfort. The newer one on Centennial was originally a Chili's, but you'd never know it, thanks to brick and wood decor, string lights, and synthetic vines that wrap around the walls and hang from the ceilings along with dark, dramatic drapes. The experience is nearly as compelling as the food. See what the fuss is about by visiting marketgrillcafe.com or calling the Durango location at 702-396-0070 or the Lake Mead location at 702-564-7335 to learn more or make a reservation.