

DINING

NOMAD EATERY

USA



Los Angeles

WHERE ON EARTH

NOMAD EATERY

by ELYSE GLICKMAN

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
Nomad Eatery;
Bramble On, from
Nomad's creative
cocktail menu.



“...The real inspiration for this restaurant was my backpacking days...”



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I*F YOU ARE A RESTAURANT AFICIONADO*, you could mark time through restaurant styles and food trends that were “it” for one hot moment or two. There was a whole lot of Asian Fusion and Pacific Rim happening during the late 90s, and just before that, a time where every restaurant was doing their version of Chinese Chicken Salad. We’ve also seen the comings and/or goings of global cuisine, New American, Steakhouse Revival, Nuevo Mexican, Celebrity Chef-driven, Gastro Pub and so on.

We are now in an era where genre is less important and people are looking for value and authenticity as commodities prices rise and loyal customers wait with baited breath to see if their favourite places will still be in business when things return to normal following the global pandemic. There still remains a lot of talk about foods that stir up happy memories of past journeys abroad (especially as a way to cope with the difficulty of planning an overseas vacation), leading savvy restaurateur Scott Cooper to set aside genre and dig into his own memories for inspiration.»



SERVES 1-2

Greekish Salad

Cucumber 1, sliced

Kalamata Olives
8, pitted and halved

Grape Tomatoes
4, halved

Red Onion
1/4, thinly sliced

Roasted Red Pepper
1, sliced

Roasted Yellow Pepper
1, sliced

Capers
2 oz, drained

Sheeps' Milk Feta
90 g, cubed

Extra Virgin Olive Oil
45 ml

Lemon
1, juiced

Fresh Oregano
2 sprigs, leaves only

Sea Salt
1/4 tsp or to taste

Cracked Black Pepper
1/8 tsp or to taste

1 **COMBINE** the first eight ingredients in a large mixing bowl.

2 **ADD** in the olive oil, lemon juice, oregano, and sea salt and cracked pepper to taste. Toss to combine. Serve and enjoy!



...He was a nomad during his extended journey...

«Nomad Eatery is Cooper's new venture in El Segundo, close to LAX airport. Cooper set out to remind people that discovering new foods can still be fun, even if it is a while before they can get their fix of new discoveries overseas.

“The real inspiration for this restaurant was my backpacking days (in the 70s), when I had a schedule-free and open-ended four-month journey through the Mediterranean,” he details, surveying the space that until the pandemic was Jackson's Food & Drinks, an offshoot of his popular Jackson's Village Bistro in trendy oceanfront community Hermosa Beach.

“During that trip, a lot of things happened that changed my life, but one thing remained constant — I had this freedom to explore, do what I wanted, be spontaneous, jump on a train. I actually enjoyed not knowing where I was going to sleep, what I was going to do and what I was going to eat. Nomad is based on that idea of freedom.”

When Scott returned to the States, he found that the ultimate destination of his journey was the food business. The experience of seeking out “actual dishes real people ate everyday” not only prompted him to dig deep into the local LA food scene but also pushed him to learn as much as possible. As he climbed the hospitality industry ladder and worked for top chefs in the 1980s and beyond, he found it best to look in less obvious places for vital information that could differentiate his establishments from others, no matter what the trend du jour was.

“While executive chefs will often not share recipes or ideas, many sous chefs will tell you anything and everything as it is in their interest to do so in the process of becoming a top chef,” the L.A. native explains. “I started exploring the Los Angeles food scene, starting along La Cienega, which includes ‘Restaurant Row’ on Beverly Hills’ eastern border, and found a lot of inspiring mom-and-pop restaurants. Nomad is a culmination of what was in my head 25 and 30 years ago when forming a foundation for my own career.”

When Cooper started formulating the transformation of Jackson's, he had an eclectic, global concept in mind. He looked back at the foods local residents were eating during his trip and others

that were very different from what restaurants in tourist districts were serving. He remembered that the Latin, Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian and Mediterranean European dishes he tried off the beaten path were nothing like what tourists expected — and were all the better for it.

“I love those different geography-based types of cuisines for similar and different reasons,” Cooper continues. “What makes them similar is that although each one has their own flavour profiles and appears different on the surface, they all tend to have a lot of crossover when it comes to ingredients. Also, there’s the reality that while we’re striving for ‘organic’ eating, it’s normal everyday life for people in those other parts of the world. They don’t have a lot of mass-produced foods filled with the kinds of additives Americans consume on a daily basis. Now there’s a whole group of us trying to escape all of the processed and artificial foods we know are not good for us. While we have to seek out natural foods, natural is just the way people eat every day in the Mediterranean, Italy, Thailand and so on.”

In addition to recreating his recipes with healthier ingredients, Cooper wanted to give diners the spirit of fun in discovering new flavours and dishes as they would while on the road. He imagined that a group of eight or nine people could share eight or nine dishes in a way that could be at once affordable, healthy, and conversation starting.

“This restaurant is an adventure on many levels, putting the spirit of backpacking onto the menu,” he says. “However, we’re not completely coming out of left field with our menu. Most people who watch The Food Network may not know how to use turmeric or cardamom or other certain herbs. But they’ve heard of it, and they are not afraid to try it. Young kids, including my own sons, are especially interested in trying new and slightly unfamiliar things. No matter your age, everybody can have an expanding knowledge level of herbs, spices and other ingredients.”

In a short period of time, Nomad Eatery has become known for its *pateras*, tidy but colourful, share-ready dishes served in a wide, shallow bowl. The historic origins of the dish, he discovered, were rooted in ancient Rome, when *pateras* were used for many different purposes, from holding saucy dishes and beverages to making tributes to the gods.

“The common thread in *pateras* is precise portioning — low to moderate carbs, just enough protein, and lots of contrasting flavours and textures, from sauces and vinaigrettes to local nuts to vegetables,” Cooper explains. “Our *pateras* allow our kitchen to highlight many cuisines through dishes with great vibrancy, balance and flavour. However, to get everything right, I brought in four consultants to critique my efforts for authenticity. As I see it, I am as much a museum curator for Nomad as I am a chef, and I could not have pulled things together by myself. I am particularly proud of our Lebanese Chicken because of the influence and commentary the Lebanese chef we brought in had during the process.”

One of Cooper’s favourite quotes is from the late Anthony Bourdain: “You learn a lot about someone when you share a meal together.” With that, he hopes friends, families and couples can learn about each other at Nomad, as well as a few new things about their favourite. 

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USA

MAKES 4 CUPS

Real Hummus

Baking Soda

2 tsp

Dried Chickpeas

250 g

Lemons

2, juiced

Garlic

1 clove,
chopped

Tahini

100 ml

Olive Oil

25 ml

Sea Salt

and Cracked
Black Pepper
to taste

1 COVER the chickpeas in water, add the baking soda and soak overnight.

2 DRAIN and rinse the chickpeas, then simmer in fresh water until soft. Once done, they should be very tender and most skins should easily be removed.

3 BLITZ the chickpeas in a food processor until smooth and creamy.

4 WHILE the machine is still running, add the tahini, lemon juice, garlic, sea salt and pepper. Process for about 5 minutes until you get a smooth and creamy paste.

5 TRANSFER the hummus to a bowl and allow to rest for at least 30 minutes. If not using immediately, refrigerate up to two days.



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