

NEOLOKAL STORIES

In this small booklet, you can read about each dish you will savor tonight as we take you on a voyage to the far corners of our Anatolian culinary culture. We hope you enjoy your journey with us, it's a special one, celebrating our tenth anniversary with a menu featuring dishes that have become neolokal classics.

SOUR DOUGH

Her name is Neylan Ekşi. Neylan is a common girl's name and ekşi means sour. She was born on June 22, 2014, months before neolokal was born. Every day she gets wilder, which gives her character and a funky attitude. We serve the bread she produces with humus and colorful vegetable powders in a minimalist version of our iconic dish, Humus and Anatolian Landscape.

AYRAN AŞI

Ayran aşı is a cold, yogurt-based soup with chickpeas, wheat and fresh herbs. It's enjoyed all over the country in myriad variations dictated by geography and local preferences. In our kitchen, we flavor salted yogurt with carrot, beet, red cabbage, red and yellow pepper, spinach, creating a colorful mosaic of tangy, vibrant aromas to awaken your tastebuds and kickstart this beautiful meal.

TOPIK

Topik is a paradox and a prime example of neolokal's culinary credo, where we believe that geography shapes culinary habits more than ethnic roots. It's a traditional Armenian mezze, yet it doesn't exist in Armenia. It was created by Armenians who settled in Istanbul and embraced this dumpling-like Lenten dish of onion-stuffed chickpea- and potato dough. In the 19th century, many Armenians summered on the Princes Islands, a minuscule archipelago in the Sea of Marmara. Here, we've sculpted a semblance of the Princes Islands in a tiny snack.

CABBAGE & SİYEZ ROLL

Siyez, also known as einkorn, is the mother of all wheat varieties; hunter-gatherers ate it for thousands of years before it was domesticated. Today, it's grown in northern Turkey and is included in the Slow Food movement's Ark of Taste catalog of heritage foods. Because of its low gluten content, it's not suitable for breadmaking, but it makes

excellent, protein-rich bulgur. This dish is a classic in southeastern Anatolia, where they make it with Mardin bulgur, pomegranate molasses and fresh mint, parsley and purple basil. It's always served cold but enhanced with a dash of hot, garlic-heady olive oil. At neolokal, we elevate the dish with a lactose-free poached garlic mayo and parsley-infused garlic-flavored olive oil.

OCTOPUS CRISP & GAMBILYA FAVA

Native to western Turkey, the gambilya is a protein-rich legume that grows in brown pods containing split yellow beans, which could easily be mistaken for yellow lentils. They're actually related to peas, even though their shape is more square than round. And while the plant's bitter green leaves can be eaten fresh, gambilyas are always dried. Sadly, they face extinction as they're labor-intensive to harvest. We showcase them on an octopus crisp, prepared like fava, a traditional dish of mashed broad beans. Our gambilyas are grown using dry farming methods in the village of Taşlıca.

BERGAMOT & ANCHOVY PILAF, CELERIAC

Anchovy pilaf is a favorite staple of the Black Sea region, enjoyed during the fishing season. We reinvent it by cooking rice with anchovies, fresh herbs and black pepper, serving it nigiri style, topped with olive oil-braised celeriac, a celeriac cream and celery leaf mayo. In winter, when we miss anchovies, celeriac is like anchovies for the soul.

MARINATED BONITO

Rakı is also called lion's milk – the leche de tigre-sounding inspiration for our sauce with rakı, lime juice, spring onions, hot green pepper, parsley, and olive oil. We pair it with fresh local bonito, prepared in a brine infused with lemon and black pepper oil. To give the dish some depth, we add a pistachio tarator, traditionally made with nuts, breadcrumbs and garlic, and garnish the fish with capers, red onions, olives, apple reduction, and pickled apple to create a sweet-tart balance.

HUMUS and ANATOLIAN LANDSCAPE

Humus is a Middle Eastern-influenced meze from southeastern Anatolia, where each region has developed its own unique recipe. Our version, served here as a mini tableau of a neolokal classic, tries to replicate Anatolia's spectacular landscape with herbs, spices and dried vegetable powder. It's a multi-flavored journey, showcasing the richness and vibrancy of the Spice Route as it traversed Mesopotamia.

CHICKEN KADINBUDU

In Anatolia, many dishes receive their names from the cooking techniques or appearances they're based on. Kadınbudu, meaning woman's leg or thigh, is a tried-and-true way for restaurants to repurpose leftover rice pilaf, while shaping it into something that resembles a lady's limb. It's made by combining pilaf with minced meat and spices and rolling the mix into large meatballs that are then deep-fried. We've replaced the red meat in traditional kadınbudu with sautéed, boneless chicken thigh meat and added fresh herbs. Our meatballs are coated in flour and egg and fried just like our mothers customarily fry them. Though we serve them differently, with a chicken and potato foam, a condensed chicken jus, and confit lemon. Our vegetarian version contains rice, potato, carrot, and chickpeas and is served with a vegetable and potato foam and a condensed vegetable jus.

İÇLİ KÖFTE

The recipe for içli köfte, also known as oruk, kibbeh or kruz, varies from region to region, though the dish is most commonly eaten in the Mesopotamian part of Anatolia. It's a dumpling of sorts and a labor of love to make. The dough is prepared by pounding lean red meat and kneading it with sefer kitel bulgur and spices before carefully shaping it in the palm of one hand. It's then stuffed with cooked ground beef, pine nuts and walnuts and folded closed. Because we don't have our mothers' expert dexterity, we will never be able to make evenly sized içli köfte, so we've resorted to using a little dumpling mold.

RAHİBE KÖFTESİ

Rahibe (meaning nun) köfte is an old-timey fasting dish that priests in the southeastern region were particularly fond of. It calls for a bulgur, wheat and potato dough that is boiled and served with spinach, garlic and parsley oil. Sometimes, it's sautéed with tomato and pepper paste to give it a richer flavor. We serve ours with sautéed spinach, and spice-spiked spinach and cheese foam.

CHICKEN and RICE

Chicken and rice is a comforting and ubiquitous street food, served no nonsense-style with boiled or roasted chicken bits over chickpea-studded rice. Everyone in this colorful city has a favorite chicken and rice vendor, or tavuk pilav usta, who has perfected the art of making this simple, inexpensive treat; ours is İlhami Usta; he's been at it for over 25 years, running a tiny operation down the street from neolokal – ask your waiter for the address. We've given the dish a hint of Ottoman grandeur by adding saffron, in a nod to zerde, a saffron rice pudding popularized in the Ottoman palaces.

POACHED BLUEFISH

Bluefish is an Istanbul mainstay, even though it's predatory and difficult to catch. Buğulama is the technique we use to cook it, it's similar to poaching and is applied to fish dishes with lemon and vegetables. Our stock is made with fish bones and winter vegetables and laced with bay leaves, allspice and cinnamon, much like the aromatics that go into papaz yahnisi, a traditional stew that got its name from a priest. We serve the fish with a creamy vegetable purée of caramelized celeriac, fennel and cauliflower and an emulsion of mussels and olive oil.

GRILLED CAULIFLOWER

Autumn season is all about cauliflower, and this dish honors our mothers' home cooking. Cauliflower in all its variations – grilled, fried and purée – come together on one plate. Besides being a delicious vegan menu option, it's a fine example of our zero-waste philosophy. The fried florets are flavored with cumin, parsley and pomegranate molasses, while the grilled parts are sprinkled with a dill, parsley and mint powder.

LAMB MUTANCANA

The chefs in the kitchens at Topkapı Palace had one sole, monumental task: to perfect the dishes their Sultans enjoyed most. Mutancana was one of them; slow-cooked lamb with dried fruits. We use lamb neck and tenderloin, two cuts that are underestimated in Turkish food culture, pairing them with a collagenous lamb-studded, chard-wrapped mix of tel şehriye vermicelli and freekeh with a slightly smoky flavor – that's because freekeh, a type of wheat harvested while unripe and green, is burned to collect the kernels.

GRILLED OYSTER MUSHROOM

The practice of salting, drying and curing things to preserve them is as old as it's common worldwide. In Turkey, we air-dry and cure beef to make pastırma, seasoned with çemen, a spice blend we thought would enhance this vegetarian dish of grilled oyster mushrooms, glazed with a çemen and pomegranate molasses reduction, served with a mushroom and vegetable cream, mushroom and olive oil foam, isot pepper and fresh herb oil.

BAKLAVA

Baklava was invented in Gaziantep, and most baklava masters hail from Aleppo, Syria, because Gaziantep was once part of Aleppo before the Ottoman borders were redrawn. For generations, they've made baklava according to strict, traditional methods that require great skill and expertise; rolling the dough see-through-thin is an art. Whether these methods should be revised or updated remains a hot topic. In keeping with our concept of respectful modernization, we've designed our version with less sugar, more butter and plenty of pistachios, yielding a distinct flavor and texture – rolls of crispy baklava baked with candied walnut and clarified butter, filled with a silky mix of Antep pistachios, lor (fresh ricotta cheese) and kaymak (clotted cream), served with our iconic burnt sheep's milk yogurt ice cream and milk skin.

FRIGO

Eating chocolate ice cream bars at the movie theater was a mandatory tradition when we were kids. To this day, children of all ages eat them in movie theaters across the country. The unforgettable bar is called Frigo. Of course, we had to make it into a dessert; an icy treat of allergy friendly, gluten-free biscuits resembling mosaic cake with rakı infused candied fruits and citrus jelly for a tart kick.

OVEN-BAKED PUMPKIN DESSERT

This oven-baked pumpkin dessert is an homage to the Black Sea region, where pumpkins are simmered with a sugary syrup scented with cinnamon, cardamom and cloves. We pair it with tahini, as is customary, because the two are a perfect match, and finish the dish with an eggless meringue, made with Gypsophilla root, or as we call it, Çöven Otu -instead of Eggs.