

# Three sisters in the kitchen



Newly minted cookbook authors Eleni, Betty and Samantha Bakopoulos get prestigious award after writing the first Greek Canadian cookbook

**S**OMETHING was missing from Samantha Bakopoulos' kitchen shelf - a simple Greek cookbook with the "real" Greek food she had been raised on. Her parents had emigrated from Kalamata, in the Peloponnese, in the early 1970s.

That's when Samantha got the idea to write her own cookbook with simple and authentic recipes - from *souvlaki* to *stifado* (a braised rabbit dish) and from *pastitsio* to *avgolemono*.

So she got her two sisters Eleni and Betty on board. Though none of the sisters is a professionally trained chef (Eleni is an artist/photographer, Samantha and Betty are both teachers), all three love to cook.

The trio spent a year cooking, testing, writing and photographing more than 100 recipes. Their self-published book *Three Sisters Around the Greek Table* is now a best-seller and winner of the prestigious Gourmand World



Cookbook Award in 2009 for best foreign cookbook in Canada. The 277-page book sold out the first two printings of 6,000 copies total and is now in its third one of 5,000.

On June 23, the trio was invited to cook for the annual summer event organised by the Hellenic Canadian Board of Trade in Toronto for food and wine lovers. This follows a cross-country Canadian book signing tour and another award, at the 2011 New York Book Festival cookbook category.

✓ For more on the sisters, visit [www.3greek sisters.com](http://www.3greek sisters.com)

## 'We're obsessed about food'

In an interview to the Athens News, the Greek Canadian cooking trio talk about their dream of promoting the variety of Greek cuisine and the benefits of the Mediterranean diet to Canadians

By Panayotis Sfalagakos

**Athens News: How did you get started?**

**Samantha:** We kind of have the entrepreneurial spirit from childhood. Our parents had their own company, so I found myself always thinking that I would end up running something. And when I got married, a newlywed, and I wasn't teaching, I was cooking a lot. I wanted to impress my husband and cook those family meals. The idea for a cookbook just pretty much popped into my head.

**Eleni:** We got very excited, because Samantha had just gotten married and I had bought her one of those Kitchen-Aid mixers, and I had wanted to get her a Greek cookbook. There's a difference from a cookbook written in Greece - there are slightly different ingredients that are more popular here. So for North American Greeks, I think, there wasn't really a cookbook that connected with them.

When Sam mentioned the idea, I said, 'Oh my goodness! We could do this, because we've got the photography, we all write,' so it clicked with all three of us.

**Samantha:** We write, we cook ...

**Eleni:** We cook a lot, and we're obsessed about food! One thing with a publishing company is that sometimes they can be really happy that your book sold 5,000 copies, and they could think 'that's really great for Canada, but, you know, we won't reprint it'. You never know, and that was one of our fears, too. And we thought that Greek cookbooks, if you look at them statistically, haven't sold as well in North America as Spanish and Italian, and French ones. Greek cuisine is kind of considered 'the poor relative of Europe'.

**Betty:** And we had a vision, how we wanted the book. It never, ever, crossed our minds to take it to a publisher.

**Why not?**

**Betty:** We always thought they'd turn around and say to us that we should only put a picture of food on the front cover or that we should call it something like *Opa!* [the Greek exclamation when dancing]. We couldn't imagine doing it that way.

**Did you have to leave out a lot of recipes?**

**Betty:** Yes.

**Does this mean there's a second book on the way?**

**Betty:** We've already started. It's in the works. It'll take a while. I think the second one will take longer than the first, actually, because we're still promoting this one.

**Has it been easy?**

**Betty:** Greek restaurants are popular and people love to go and eat out. But whenever you talk to people they think Greek food is really hard to cook or ask, 'What is it really? Isn't it just souvlaki, and all that?' and I thought what a shame that they don't know all the great dishes that are part of everyone's lives.

**Samantha:** And the Mediterranean diet that you hear of, they don't really think that is the Greek diet.

**Eleni:** What we've heard from other people who also wanted to do Greek cookbooks in the past is that it sells better if you say 'Mediterranean' cooking. And we just got frustrated - why couldn't we say 'Greek', since it is actually Greek food? We would laugh and



say that the country's been around for thousands of years and it's come up with a few pretty good dishes.

As for olive oil, most people don't know anything about it. They don't know that the flavour of Greek olive oil is different from that of Italian olive oil and Spanish and so on. Just trying to get the word out there we realised that it's huge - what we're doing - promoting it.

We're currently talking with production companies because there's never been a big mainstream food network with a Greek cooking show.

**Samantha:** Wine too - there are 300 grape varieties in Greece - that's unbelievable!

**What about the Gourmand World Cookbook Award?**

**Betty:** Our book was launched in November 2009, and the book had to be in the competition by November. So we shipped it off to the competition to meet the deadline, and then a month after that, at Christmas, they announced the winner. So we made it just under the wire and won Best Foreign Cookbook for Canada. We went to Paris in February and competed internationally. We placed fourth in the world.

**Do you see this as part of an effort - as Greeks abroad - to help Greece?**

**Eleni:** We feel very passionately about it. We've talked and we've tried and we still are always talking to other Greek companies, whether they're importers or exporters of olive oil and all those kinds of things, and we keep saying that we should start a Greek movement. Can't we sell the Greek lifestyle as something that's healthy and desirable?

I think people know a little bit about the ancient history of Greece. And what do they see now about Greece? There's the economic crisis, a terrible image of Greeks being lazy, which is what they think. So you've got to change it.

**Samantha:** We know, in their hearts, people are rooting for Greece.

**Eleni:** People know it's a beautiful country. They like to travel there, but you also have to encourage them to appreciate our olive oil and our naturally, organic products.

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