

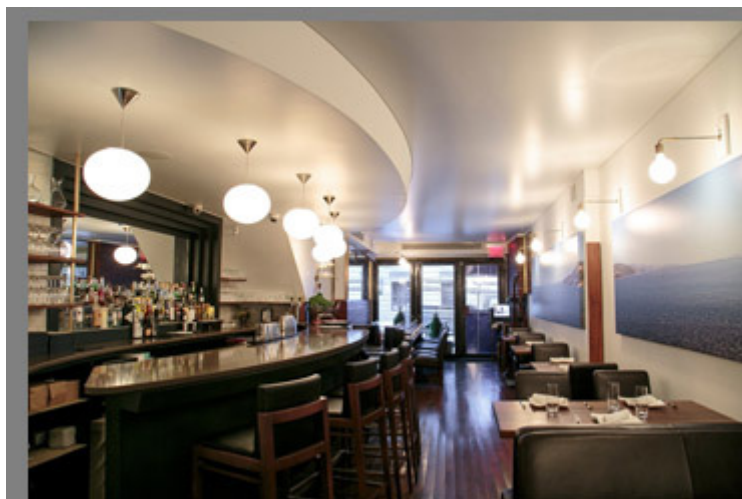
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Chef Maria Loi Recipes - Loi Estiatorio, New York, NY, USA



Chef Maria Loi's restaurant, [Loi Estiatorio](#) located in **New York City** focuses on **Greek Mediterranean cuisinethat** is deliciously prepared and presented and is healthy for you, too. In addition to being a dynamic chef, Maria is also the author of more than 36 cookbooks; to put it mildly, this woman knows how to cook! Chef Maria Loi graciously shares a delicious taste of her restaurant with her recipes for: **Carrot and Halloumi Croquettes (Karotopites Me Halloumi)**, **Crab Cakes (Kavourokeftedes)**, **Grilled Octopus (Htapodaki Stin Schara)**, and **Loi Greek Yogurt**.

We had the pleasure of meeting Chef Maria Loi and dining at her restaurant, Loi Estiatorio at the end of January 2016 two weeks shy of the restaurant's first anniversary. What we discovered is that first and foremost, Chef Maria Loi is a go-getter, someone who charmingly and enthusiastically leads the culinary pack. Her storied credentials include being named an official Ambassador of Greek Gastronomy by The Chef's Club of Greece, she has written over 36 cookbooks, was invited to cook for President Obama at the White House, also owns a gourmet restaurant in Greece, has her own line of food products including pasta, Greek orzo, olive oil, spreads, and yogurt, (available at Whole Foods), a line of kitchen appliances, dinnerware, and cookware, and is a frequent celebrity chef on television and at special culinary events, and this is just a small sampling of her culinary achievements. After meeting Chef Loi one cannot help but be impressed with both her background and her seemingly endless energy. Dara Bliss Davenport, Chef Consultant at Loi Estiatorio said that when she started working with Chef Maria Loi she compared her to the "Energizer Bunny," to which Chef Maria jokingly replied, "No, he takes after me."



Loi Estiatorio

Chef Maria grew up on a farm in Greece exposed to nature's bounty where the family grew tobacco, vegetables, had olive trees, and raised animals; from this beginning she developed an appreciation for good food. She learned to cook by watching and learning from her mother and her family cooking in the kitchen, and when she was seven and her mother was ill, her father asked her cousin to make meatballs for dinner, and when the cousin decided to do something else besides cook, young Maria decided to make them herself. At dinner, when her father asked if her cousin had made the meatballs, she asked him if he liked them, to which he replied they were the best he had ever eaten, she then admitted to making them on her own, and thus planted the culinary seed in her head.

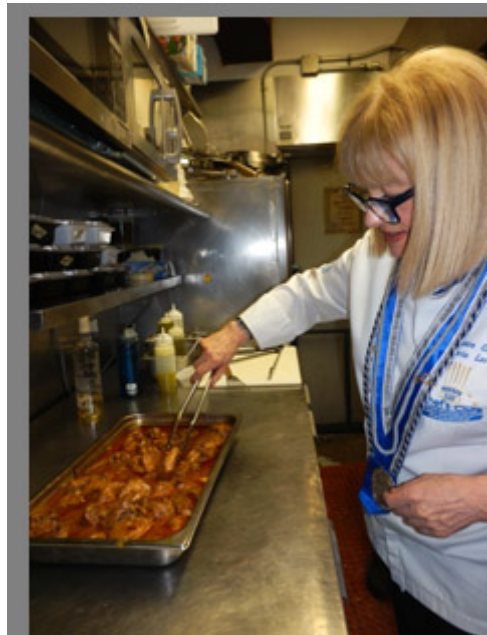
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Chef Maria Loi

For a chef, there is probably no better background than growing up on a farm where you realize the effort that it takes to produce a quality product and you learn to want to treat it and cook it with respect. She believes that anyone can learn how to cook, however the difference between simply cooking and creatively cooking is that you need to give of yourself in order to be able to create. For those who may be intimidated by the kitchen, just follow Chef Maria Loi's philosophy that cooking does not need to be difficult to still be amazing.

She has traveled the world, has worked as lobbyist, is a partner in a fashion company, and her latest project in the development stage is a cooking school for children. A strong health proponent, her cookbook on ancient Greek dining was the official cookbook of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, and her latest cookbook, ***The Greek Diet (Look and Feel Like A Greek God or Goddess and Lose Up to Ten Pounds In Two Weeks)with 100 Mouthwatering Recipes Based On Science***, co-written with Sarah Toland, a veteran health-journalist and former Olympic-level athlete, (HarperCollins, October 2014), is perfect for whenever you need a fitness boost or as a healthy lifestyle guide.



Chef Maria Loi in the kitchen

Her advice for those considering a culinary career is that you need to follow your heart in order to succeed. Asked how she spends her free time when she is not in the kitchen developing new recipes, she replied, "all my time is free because I love to work, I love people;" that philosophy was abundantly clear after meeting Chef Maria Loi and dining at Loi Estiatorio. Efcharistó Chef Maria Loi! (Thank you, in Greek).

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Chef Maria Loi graciously shares a delicious taste of Loi Estiatorio with her recipes to tempt your palate into making a trip to dine at the restaurant.

Chef Maria Loi - Recipes from Loi Estiatorio

Carrot and Halloumi Croquettes (Karotopites Me Halloumi)

Crab Cakes (Kavourokeftedes)

Grilled Octopus (Htapodaki Stin Schara)

Loi Greek Yogurt



Carrot and Halloumi Croquettes (Karotopites Me Halloumi)

Serves 4 - 6

Chef Maria Loi writes, "I love these croquettes because they are well-balanced and tasty, as well as beautiful! The color of the carrots and the brightness of the dressing make this dish dance across your palate. Vary the size of your croquettes depending on what you want them for-they're great for hors d'oeuvres, a light bite, or a beta carotene-filled lunch!"

Ingredients

4

Ounces

Halloumi Cheese, roughly chopped, plus 5.3 ounces more, cut into half-inch slices

8

Large

Carrots, coarsely grated or shredded

0.25

Cup

2% Plain Greek Yogurt

2

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Bunches

Scallions, finely sliced

1

Bunch

Fresh mint, stemmed and chopped

4

Eggs, beaten

Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper

0.67

Cup

Whole-grain or gluten-free flour, for binding

4

Tablespoons

Olive Oil, more as needed

1

Teaspoon

Whole-Grain Mustard

2

Tablespoons

Fresh Lemon Juice

Chopped Fresh Flat-leaf Parsley Leaves (no stems), for garnish

Method: In a large bowl, combine the chopped halloumi and the carrots. Stir in the yogurt, scallions, mint, and eggs, and mix thoroughly. Season with salt and pepper. Slowly stir in the flour, a few teaspoons at a time, and mix well until a thick batter forms.

Line a large rimmed sheet pan with parchment paper and rub the paper with a little olive oil to prevent sticking. Spread out the batter so that it covers the baking sheet, using a spatula to smooth it evenly. Cover the baking sheet with plastic wrap and refrigerate it for at least 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line another baking sheet with parchment paper.

Bake for about 15 minutes, or until golden and crispy on top. Remove the baking sheet from the oven and allow to cool slightly. Using a sharp knife or a cookie or biscuit cutter, cut out the croquettes until they are about the size of halloumi slices.

Arrange the croquettes in a single layer on the second baking sheet. Return to the oven and bake for 5 minutes.

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Heat a large grill pan over medium heat for about 1 minute. Working in batches, grill the halloumi slices for 2 to 3 minutes per side, until they are softened and grill marks appear.

In a small bowl, whisk together the mustard, lemon juice, 4 tablespoons olive oil, and salt and pepper to taste.

Arrange the croquettes and the halloumi slices on a large platter, alternating them in rows. Drizzle the mustard-lemon mixture over them, and sprinkle the parsley on top.

Cook's Note: If you can't find halloumi, you can substitute with any grill-able cheese, such as Kasseri, Provolone, or any other you prefer!



Crab Cakes (Kavourokeftedes)

Serves 4

"Crab cakes are beloved by all across the globe, but can wind up being heavy due to the binding ingredients. In this recipe, I opt for Greek yogurt instead of mayonnaise, which gives the cakes more flavor and a lighter, fluffier texture. - Chef Maria Loi"

Ingredients

8

Ounces

Lump Crabmeat

8

Ounces

Jumbo Lump Crabmeat

0.25

Cup

Minced Fresh Flat-Leaf Parsley Leaves (no stems), plus more for garnish

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1

Egg, beaten

1

Pinch

Ground Cumin

Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper

0.25 - 0.50

Cup

2% Plain Greek Yogurt

1 -2

Cups

Ground Oats (blend old-fashioned or quick-cooking oats in a blender or food processor until coarse)

Minced chiles, minced garlic, whole-grain mustard (optional)

Olive Oil, for searing and garnishing

Lemon Wedges, for garnish

Method: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Drain the crabmeat. Pick through it carefully to make sure there are no shell fragments.

In a bowl, combine the crabmeat, parsley, egg, and cumin. Season with salt and pepper. Mix to combine thoroughly. Gradually add one-quarter cup yogurt. Add half cup of ground oats. Add the minced chilies, minced garlic, and/or whole-grain mustard, depending on your personal preference. In order for the crab cakes to hold their shape, the mixture should not be too wet or too dry. If the mixture is too wet, add more ground oats and if it seems a little dry, add more yogurt.

When the ideal texture has been reached (the patties should hold together without falling apart or looking mushy), form cakes, using about 2 heaping tablespoons for each and shaping them into patties. Pack them firmly so that they don't break during the cooking process. Place the crab cakes on the baking sheet and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

Heat a large ovenproof sauté pan over medium heat, adding just enough olive oil to coat the bottom of the pan. When the oil starts to look shiny and hazy, carefully add the crab cakes. Sear them until they have a nice golden brown color, about 2 minutes. Flip the cakes and let them cook for another minute. Place the entire pan in the oven for the crab cakes to finish cooking, about 4 to 5 minutes.

Place the crab cakes on a plate, and garnish with a squeeze of lemon juice from a lemon wedge and a drizzle of olive oil. Garnish with minced parsley and additional lemon wedges.

Cook's note: Depending on the flavors you like and want to incorporate, you can add other garnishes, or mix in different options-this recipe is easily adapted to your particular taste!

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Grilled Octopus (Htapodaki Stin Schara)

Serves 4 to 6

"The all-time best seller at my restaurants is the grilled octopus. Though it doesn't get beaten against a rock before cooking like we do in Greece, in this recipe, by cooking it low and slow we ensure it is tender and juicy on the inside; by grilling it, we give it the perfect char and slight crispness on the outside. Don't be afraid, it's delicious! - Chef Maria Loi"

Ingredients

32

Ounces

Octopus Tentacles (see Cook's Note), thoroughly cleaned

1

Cup

White Wine Vinegar

1

Cup

Red Wine

10

Whole Black Peppercorns

4

Bay Leaves

Olive Oil, for rubbing on the octopus tentacles
Ladolemono Sauce (see recipe below)

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Chopped Fresh Chives, for garnish

Method: Preheat the oven to 170° F.

In a heavy Dutch oven or a braisier (a pot that has a thick bottom, making it ideal for slow cooking and braising), arrange the octopus tentacles. Pour in the vinegar and wine. Stir in the peppercorns and bay leaves.

Cover the Dutch oven either with a lid or with foil. Bake for about 6 hours or until the octopus is tender. Remove from the oven and set aside, covered, for about 30 minutes. Uncover and let the octopus rest for another 15 to 20 minutes.

Preheat a large grill pan over medium-high heat. Rub each tentacle with a little olive oil. Working in batches if necessary, grill the tentacles, turning once, until they have grill marks on both sides. Remove them from the grill.

Serve the tentacles dressed with the Ladolemono Sauce and sprinkled with chives.

Cook's note: When shopping for the ingredients to make this dish, keep in mind that it all starts with the octopus. The larger the octopus and the bigger the tentacles, the juicier the finished dish will be.

Ladolemono Sauce

Makes about 1.5 Cups

"Ladolemono is the most ubiquitous sauce in the Greek culinary arsenal. Used from salad dressing to a finishing sauce, from integral to optional, this simple sauce pairs perfectly with pretty much everything. - Chef Maria Loi"

Ingredients

0.33

Cup

Fresh Lemon Juice (2-3 lemons)

0.25

Teaspoon

Mustard Powder

Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper

1

Cup

Extra-Virgin Olive Oil

Method: In a tightly resealable container, combine the lemon juice, mustard powder, and salt and pepper to taste. Cover and shake vigorously until fully combined.

Add the olive oil, over the container, and shake vigorously until the sauce has emulsified.

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Loi Greek Yogurt

Ingredients

2

Quarts

Organic Milk (2% milk fat)

¼

Cup

Organic Milk (2% milk fat)

5

Tablespoons

Yogurt (with active culture)

Method: Heat 2 quarts of milk to 195° F. You will need a thermometer, but if you do not have one, turn off the heat just before the milk boils (just as it begins to simmer).

Remove the pot from the heat and transfer to a mixing bowl do not leave in a metal container, then wait until the temperature drops to 110° F. If you don't have a thermometer, you can try my grandmother's old trick to get the right temperature: keep your pinky in the milk and count quickly to 20; if your pinky is burning at 20, let the milk cool off a bit longer.

In a small bowl mix the 5 tablespoons of yogurt with ¼ of mild and pour mixture down the sides of the warm mild and be careful to leave surface skin of the milk intact by not stirring or jiggling it.

Cover the pot with a blanket to maintain the temperature and keep warm for at least 8-12 hours until mixture thickens. Note that you should not move or shake the pot during this process.

Move the yogurt from the warmth to the refrigerator.

Leave the yogurt for 24 hours in the refrigerator without moving, and your yogurt will be ready to enjoy. It will be good for ten days refrigerated.

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***Chef Maria's Note:** You can eat the yogurt like this, but if you want to make my grandmother's authentic recipe, you need to take one more step:

Strain the yogurt in cheesecloth and hang to drain for several hours, until the draining stops. This is the real Loi Yogurt that my grandmother used to make - all the whey is removed. This process adds another week of life to your yogurt.

Cook's Notes - To avoid common mistakes:

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Make sure you boil and cool the milk at the right temperature.

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Don't be anxious to move the yogurt until it's ready.

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Use high quality milk with no added water, and do not use skim milk.



Chef Maria Loi and Debra C. Argen

Loi Estiatorio is for Lunch Monday through Friday from 12:00 pm until 3:00 pm, for Dinner Monday through Saturday from 5:00 pm until 11:00 pm, and Sunday from 5:00 pm - 10:00 pm.

Read about our dining experience at Loi Estiatorio in the [Restaurants](#) section.

Watch the interview with Chef Maria Loi and see more photos on facebook:
www.facebook.com/LuxuryExperience



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