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Refreshing. It's the word that first pops into mind as I walk into Pasha's flagship restaurant on South Beach's legendary Lincoln Road. The menu, vibe, and décor at Pasha's are invigorating to no end. From the minimalist backdrop to the healthy carte du jour, Pasha's masters the art of unfussy elegance.

But the word "refreshing" really strikes a chord with me the moment I get the chance to chat with Pasha's CEO, Antonio Ellek. After a few words with the 36-year-old entrepreneur, I realize it's interviewing people like Ellek, which make my job as a journalist a rewarding one. As he tells the story of how Pasha's came to fruition from a Harvard Business School project to a real-life thriving business, his excitement cannot be contained. "The business concept was initiated during my second year at business school and was supervised by professor Myra Hart, a co-founder of Staples," he says. Following his professor's advice, Ellek worked in the food industry for four years after graduation. He found himself working for PepsiCo under the fast track management program, which owned a plethora of fast-food chains at the time - Taco Bell, KFC and California Pizza Kitchen to name a few. "During those four years, I did everything - I breaded chicken, fried chicken, cleaned up and learned a lot about the food industry," he says. The experience allowed Ellek to work in various locations such as Asia, North and South America and the Caribbean.

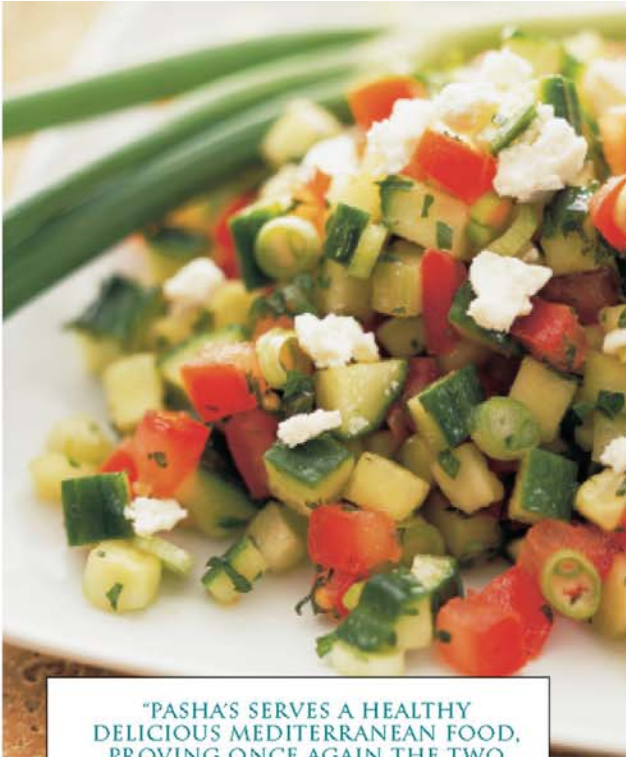
With plenty of experience under Ellek's belt, it was time for Pasha's to be born. By teaming up with his

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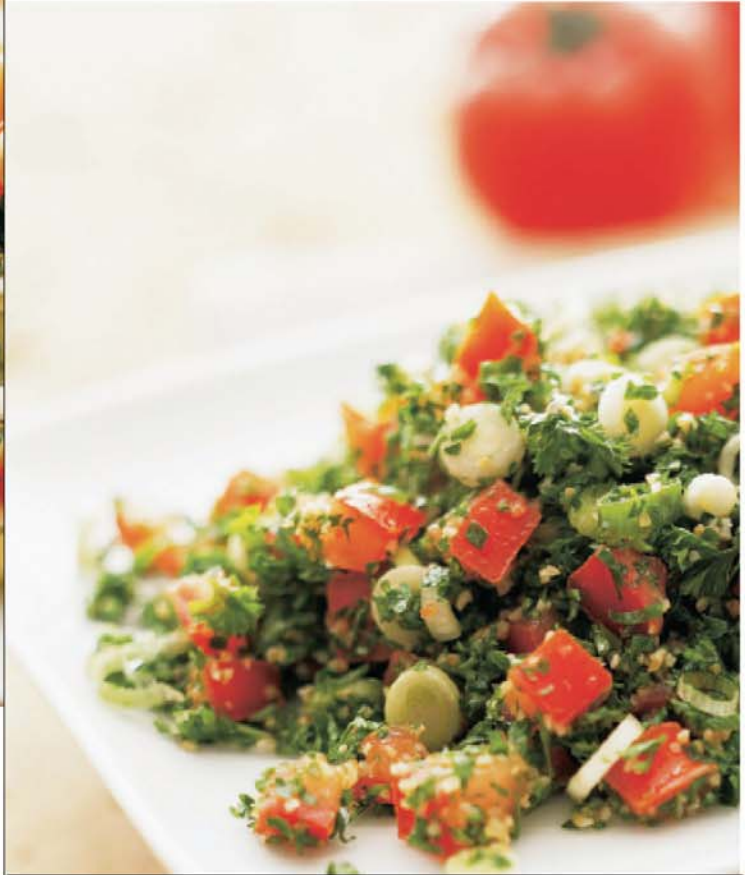
By Maria Tettamanti

MEDITERRANEAN MIRTH



"PASHA'S SERVES A HEALTHY DELICIOUS MEDITERRANEAN FOOD, PROVING ONCE AGAIN THE TWO ARE NEVER MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE"

ARTHUR AGATSTON, M.D. -
SOUTH BEACH DIET COOKBOOK



Harvard classmate, Nicolas Cortes, the duo created Pasha's in 2000. "We chose the name 'Pasha's' because under the Ottoman Empire, a Pasha was a noble person who knows how to live well, eat well, dress well and lives in a nice house," Ellek explains. As far as the concept is concerned, Ellek says, "We wanted to achieve a personable and honest brand. At Pasha's, what you see is what you get." Ellek adds, "Our products are the freshest they can be and the menu's items are made from scratch - but we do not advertise that in our marketing. We want our customers to discover that."

In a tiny pink house in Miami, the Pasha's team labored intensively to give the chain its future direction. Ellek's sister Carla (VP of Menu) and Tulin Tuzel (Chief Operating Officer) concocted a constant cook fest. Ellek says, "We are not another Middle Eastern restaurant because we took a Western approach as some of our products were created by ourselves. Take for example, our dishes called the 'Apelino' and 'Nido' - these items are unheard of!" Both Carla and Tuzel mastered making the tastiest hummus, kebabs, pizzas and salads in town.

The team outgrew the small pink house's quarters and opened up shop in the heart of the Design District. This was the location of the very first Pasha's restaurant and served as their support center. Ellek says, "We are innovative and we want to take our customers by surprise." From the spic-and-span looks of Pasha's kitchen and dining room, one can't help but notice how clean and technologically advanced the chain really is.

"We wanted to make Pasha's a third place away from home and work, just like Starbucks made it happen," Ellek says. It's a place where one can feel relaxed and comfortable, without fussiness. "And although you get served quickly and prices are lower, we are still an elegant place," Ellek adds. Pasha's caters to everyone - from Ferrari aficionados, to construction workers, the restaurant's doors welcome everybody.

The menu is also praised for its nutritional value. "We are right in line with the South Beach Diet, The Zone and Atkin's Diet," Ellek says. The main concept behind Pasha's has always been to push nutrition and make it readily accessible. With fast food chains on every corner serving fatty foods, Pasha's is a remarkably different approach to fast food as it serves up fresh greens, vegetables, meats, wraps and soups. "I want to help people eat better and feel better. There's no magic to what I am doing - I'm just making healthy and tasty food available to our customers," Ellek says.

With a third location on Brickell Avenue, Pasha's is growing and Ellek has plans to go global. But in true entrepreneur spirit, Ellek says, "Let's take one step at a time. I'd much rather have fewer units that are very successful than otherwise." As our interview comes to a close and I take a final sip of my Fiji water, I feel refreshed, of course. Hearing the story of how Pasha's came to be, and basking in Ellek's positive energy leaves me rejuvenated and recharged for the day that lies ahead. And like most meals eaten at Pasha's, I feel full but light-footed at the same time.