

**The World on Your Plate, a Perspective** By Jake Pfohl, Ports of Call (2011)

One day recently, at lunchtime, a proud mother brought in her young son – about twelve years old, who had just received a Math Contest Award near the end of his school year. He was so excited to try something new. “I’ve never been to a Bistro before”, he stated with excitement. His reward was to order anything he wanted from the lunch menu. He read through it with gusto, and had many questions about each dish. I asked him to guess where the different dishes originated. He was bright, and linked our Gyro to Greece, and the curried chicken salad to India. We walked through some of the other dishes that were linked to Mexico, but some of the dishes had elements of more than one culture, Like the Oyster Po’Boy with Tzatziki Sauce. He could not contain himself to just try one dish on the menu, and his Mom let him order two different lunches. He had them placed at two different seats at his table, and had a few bites of one, and then a few bites of another, until all items were finished. This process concluded with a similar round of multiple desserts. He left as one happy boy, but left me as proprietor quite happy too. I thought, this is what the concept of Ports of Call is about...a place to not just eat a good meal, but to discover and explore a world of cuisine and all that goes into such a world.

We might have called his visit “Food Geography 101”. Just break under the surface and he’ll find a lot more complexity. What’s in that dish and where did it really originate? In really ancient times, nomads who had followed herds started raising them instead, and around these settlements ancient farming practices started. Over time, where these nomads settled on their travel routes became the paths of the early food traders. Systems became more complex as this evolved. One review of ancient Persian banquet foods suggested that they had wide access at the center of such trade routes. Cantaloupes were home grown in Persia, but wheat came from Egypt. Apples were from Anatolia and cucumbers from India. Carrots at lavish Persian banquets came from Afghanistan, and Saffron from Italy and Greece. A lot of this cross-cultural food movement could be linked to conquests. Alexander the Great went and conquered India, and Hellenic rule in India brought back Indian influences to Greek Food, for example. We’ve all heard about the Silk Road Spice routes and of course they influenced cuisine worldwide.

And were we not taught in school remember the British Queen spreading her first tea leaves from China on bread, wondering what to do with it?

Throughout history, areas of the world absorbed influences from other parts of the globe during the evolution of their “food families”. Regional cuisines were also the product of local environments. For example, in the Mediterranean, the climate and topography lends itself more to small animals such as lamb and goat rather than beef, hence the development of so many lamb dishes. Climate also lent itself to olive trees and so on, hence a preponderance of olive oils in the diet. Still, food has been rarely completely local. The Mediterranean sourced food influences from many other regions. The illustration below shows where many of these foods were sourced to enrich the Mediterranean diet.<sup>1</sup> Spices and plant foods from India and Asia came from the East, Africa provided melons, and grains, grapes, olives, figs and animals came from the Near and Middle East. Later the Americas were sources of Potatoes, Maize, Tomatoes and other products. This shows how food has truly global origins.



<sup>1</sup> / Evolution of Mediterranean Diet, M. Padilla, Montpellier, France

Mediterranean Cuisine is really a blend of three major food families; Southern European, The Eastern Mediterranean, and North Africa. There is a large cultural variance in these food families, but they have also influenced each other over thousands of years. Looking at the previous map, it could be said that it is a truly global cuisine.

We are now in the midst of a movement to rely more on local foods, which makes perfect sense for the most part. Let's not waste our resources by transporting food thousands of miles when we don't have to. But we're still free to cook up food that originates in many cultures, and probably couldn't avoid doing so even if we tried. Think about the world of cuisine but grow and catch locally, is our gastronomic equivalent to "think globally and act locally".

At Ports of Call, we celebrate "The World on Your Plate" but there are rules that govern our menu choices. We like being internationally eclectic but we're not all over the place at the same time. Hence our concept emphasizes Mediterranean and Continental cuisine, as well as some American dishes. Local products such as locally caught fish influence what we provide as well, as well as local demand. We'll occasionally include some Indian dishes as specials, which, keeping in mind links that many of these same spices have to the Mediterranean, are not so far from the flavor profiles of our regular dishes. Like the evolving cuisines of the Mediterranean that borrowed globally, our own unique menus continue to evolve and grow. We are conscious of their global sources, especially since in the course of our lives we've travelled to so many places. Celebrate a World of Cuisine with us at Ports of Call. We strive to provide authentic, high quality presentations of the World's fine cuisines.