



# The Judicial Palate

By Michael L. Sensor, Esquire

## The Georgian Table



Many of you, the faithful readers of “The Judicial Palate,” have asked me to tell you more about my trip to the Republic of Georgia over the summer of 2007. I wrote a bit about the culture of Georgia in my Editor’s Note published in January 2008, so now, I’ll try to describe the country’s food.

Rather like the country’s culture, Georgia’s food is neither European nor Asian, but an interesting admixture of the two. There’s a strong Persian and Turkish influence in Georgian food, especially in the popularity of kebabs—known as *mtsvadi* in Georgian. Veal and chicken are the most popular type, although pork is a favorite. Unfortunately, our visit to Georgia was in the middle of a swine flu outbreak, which resulted in the destruction of the country’s entire stock of pork.

Another Asian influence: dumplings. Large, tent-like dumplings called *kinkhali* are popular all over Georgia, especially in the mountainous regions. In fact, as our tour bus wound its way up the Georgian Military Highway up into the Great Caucasus Mountains to the Russian border, *kinkhali* shacks were all over the place.

Thicker and larger than Afghan and Turkish *mantu*, *kinkhali* go great with Georgian beer and make a delicious lunch. The dumplings are often filled with broth and meat and have a handy little knob on the top to allow them to be held easily. *Kinkhali*-eating is a finely-honed ritual for many Georgians: pick up the dumpling by the knob, take a bite out of the top to allow the insides to cool, and then slurp up the filling. A good *kinkhali* eater won’t let a drop of broth or filling hit the plate, leaving the thick, doughy knob on top as the only memory of a dumpling well-eaten.

Vegetable *pâtés* are very popular as well. Most of the ones we had were made of spinach or a similar leafy green vegetable with pomegranate berries on top, and were

drizzled with liberal quantities of walnut oil—itsself a frequent ingredient in Georgian food. They were quite tasty, and very healthy as well.

A Georgian meal isn’t complete without lots of bread. Georgian bread is long and is quite similar to Indian *naan* or Afghani *noni*, and is, in fact, cooked in a clay oven a lot like an Indian tandoor. Longish strips of dough are thrown against the side of the oven to bake and are pulled out, nicely browned on the ends. During our trip, I had an opportunity to visit a Georgian bakery, which was basically a room set around gigantic tandoor with lots of racks to hold that day’s production. The bakers let me try a loaf right out of the oven; its soft, hot warmth filled my mouth and stomach with delight.

Every meal we attended was accompanied by many bottles of fizzy mineral water, especially Georgia’s famous Borjomi water. Borjomi, the water of choice in the Soviet Union and Russia until recent tensions with Georgia cut off trade between the two nations, is an acquired taste; cold, it’s fizzy and slightly salty, but when warm it tastes a lot like salty baking soda. The water is said to have medicinal properties, and not without reason: during the trip, one of the tour members came down with a nasty case of gastritis from too much good Georgian food; a doctor prescribed room-temperature Borjomi along with a host of other digestive medicines for the condition.

Georgians also love wine and, to a lesser extent, beer and spirits. Along with water and fruit drinks, great quantities of wine were served with lunch and dinner. Georgian wine comes in two distinct varieties: a semi-sweet red wine (decidedly not a table wine), and a caramel-colored white wine. Georgian red wine is renowned throughout Russia, Europe, and even the United States for its deep flavor and light tannins. The white wine, on the other hand, is not well

known outside of Georgia. Far more potent than the red wine (I speak from personal experience), it is made by allowing grape stems and skins to steep for a brief time in the wine barrel after the grape juice is pressed. The experience of drinking brownish, strong white wine out of a wooden bowl is one I will not soon forget.

Finally, completing the Georgian table is a deep spirit of fellowship and camaraderie. The Georgian *supra*—a lengthy meal punctuated by song and extensive toasts—is said to be an extension of the Orthodox Church’s Divine Liturgy, with the food, wine, and guests all being gifts from God, to be cherished and honored. One *supra* we attended lasted seven hours, well into the night, and featured no fewer than three different choral groups, who serenaded us with the haunting polyphony of Georgian sacred and folk music. Between songs, dinner guests stood up as the spirit moved them to share their thoughts on the subject of the dinner, proposed by the evening’s *tamada*, or toastmaster. With skilful translators at hand, everyone understood everyone else perfectly, and there was no question that this meal was something more than just a time to sit down and eat. It was a true sharing of minds, hearts, and spirits, an experience to be remembered forever.

### Judicial Palate Updates

Kirkwood Highway’s *Kebab Express* (January 2007) closed just before Christmas. In its place, though, is a replacement establishment: a spice market, halal butcher, and restaurant which all have different iterations of “Royal” in their names. I’ll pay them a visit over the next few months and let you know what I find out.

*Glen’s BBQ/Vicky’s Fish* (February 2007) is now in downtown Wilmington! Their mobile kitchen sets up shop on Mondays and Tuesdays at the corner of 7th and King Streets, right across the street from the Doubletree Hotel. (There used to be a Deerhead Hot Dogs stand on that corner.) Now you don’t have to drive up to Gander Hill Prison to get your rib or fish fix.

A fan of the Palate advises that *Em-ings* (January 2008) no longer has a Milford location. However, their locations in Millsboro and Bishopville, MD are still alive and kicking. ☞