



TRAVELERS' TALES,  
FROM NEAR + FAR

EDITED BY  
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▼  
The lounge area  
and coffee bar at Ammos,  
a hotel near the port in  
Chania, Greece.



# EXPERIENCES

## Greek Revival

On Crete, the ancient port city of Chania is buzzing with new restaurants, hotels, and shops that are bringing contemporary style to age-old traditions. **By Gisela Williams**



▲ From left: The Chania coastline; an alley in the old town.

IN 2007, Alexandra Manousakis quit her Manhattan real estate job and moved to Chania, the port city in western Crete. The plan was to take a break—stay a year at her family’s winery, become more fluent in Greek, then head back to New York refreshed and ready to resume her big-city life.

But Manousakis quickly grew attached to the town’s Venetian-style architecture, Greek Orthodox churches, and traditional tavernas. Inspired by its thriving population of artists, she returned to pursuits—ceramics, painting—that she had abandoned to focus on her career. Fifteen years later she is still in Chania and, along with her sommelier husband, Afshin Molavi, is part of a growing group of young entrepreneurs who are breathing new life into their hometown.

“Moving here gave me the space, both literally and figuratively, to follow my own creative path,” Manousakis told me one warm autumn evening over dinner at **Manousakis Winery** ([manousakiswinery.com](http://manousakiswinery.com); entrées \$7–\$14).

Surrounded by tidy rows of Grenache, Mourvèdre, and other varieties, her family’s small production facility sits in the hills above Chania, just outside the village of Vatolakkos.

Since her arrival, Manousakis has helped her father expand the business, adding the restaurant where we dined on *horta* (foraged mountain greens) and *kolokithokeftedes* (zucchini fritters and feta) with braised lamb. In 2015, she and Molavi opened a second restaurant, **Salis** ([salischania.com](http://salischania.com); entrées \$9–\$43), in Chania’s port, and decorated it with her colorful pottery and murals. Late last year, the couple debuted **Maiami** ([maiamichania.com](http://maiamichania.com); entrées \$8–\$28), a modern seafood brasserie with an art studio where she displays more of her pieces. For Manousakis, these projects aren’t just businesses; they’re places of artistic expression.

“My inspiration comes from everywhere: a pattern in someone’s dress, a fragment of a Minoan mosaic,” she said. “I wanted to create a world where I could put all of my passions in one place.”

Crete was united with Greece in 1913, after centuries of fighting the empires of Romans,

Byzantines, and Ottomans (to name a few). Still, there is a fiercely independent spirit, especially among the many young people who, like Manousakis, are finding their way back after spending time abroad. For decades, the destination has been driven by mass-market tourism, but this energetic generation is bringing a more sophisticated type of traveler, luring them with restaurants, hotels, and art galleries that blend Chania’s rich history with a fresh outlook.

After 13 years away studying in Athens and working in Spain and France, Danaï Kindeli returned to Chania to make something special at her family’s 400-year-old Venetian farmhouse. Located on the outskirts of town, the dusty-pink estate framed by pomegranate and avocado trees was her childhood home. In 2013, Kindeli took over the property from her uncle and reimagined it as **Metohi Kindelis** ([metohi-kindelis.gr](http://metohi-kindelis.gr); suites from \$271), a chic guesthouse with three suites, each of which has its own garden and pool. Before the pandemic, Kindeli offered her guests tastings of Greek wines and workshops on Cretan bread and cheese making. She’s since launched a series of wellness activities, bringing experts in tai chi, sound healing, and Reiki to the property.

That same build-it-with-love-and-they-will-come attitude led Chania native Nikos Tsepelis to create **Ammos** ([ammoshotel.com](http://ammoshotel.com); doubles from \$158), his 33-room beach resort near Chania’s fortified port. He spent more than two decades perfecting the interiors of his hotel, finally completing it in 2020.

“Thinking about how to make these rooms more interesting was kind of an escape for me,” Tsepelis said. His efforts have resulted in a wildly avant-garde yet inviting retreat filled with designer furniture, including an extensive collection of chairs by Ilmari Tapiovaara, Maarten Baas, and Pierre Yovanovitch, among others. Tsepelis’s attention to detail also extends to the hotel’s restaurant, where he and I dug into a silky taramosalata beneath a pergola on a small terrace overlooking the sea. At my host’s insistence, I ordered what he claimed is “the best Greek salad on the island.” I couldn’t help agreeing as I bit into its flavorful just-picked tomatoes and feta with fresh oregano and chunks of savory barley bread.

Tsepelis has since turned his attention to **Red Jane** ([redjaneproject.com](http://redjaneproject.com)), a bakery set to open this summer in an old machine shop renovated by London designer Michael Anastassiades and New York–based artist Laila Gohar. Red Jane joins other culinary newcomers, including **Kafeneio Fix** ([instagram.com/kafeneiofix](https://www.instagram.com/kafeneiofix); entrées \$5–\$10), a meze bar that overlooks the centuries-old Church of Agios Nikolaos, and **Matzénta Kuzina del Sol** ([matzenta.kuzinadelsol.gr](http://matzenta.kuzinadelsol.gr); entrées \$12–\$19), where Dimitris Malandrenis set up an authentic *barbacoa* pit for Oaxacan-style dishes like *cochinita pibil*.

While Tsepelis and others are bringing a certain international flair to Chania, many of the city’s creatives never left. “I always knew I wanted to stay here and forge my own path,” jewelry designer **Katerina Makriyianni** ([katerina](http://katerina)

▼ From left: Alexandra Manousakis’s ceramics on display at Maiami; a guest villa at Metohi Kindelis; Nikos Tsepelis at Ammos.



▶ Jeweler Katerina Makriyianni at work in her studio. Far right: An alfresco lunch with Manousakis rosé at Salis restaurant.



*makriyianni.com*) told me at the workshop she shares with her parents. On the day I visited, the atelier looked like something out of a Cretan folktale, every nook and cranny crammed with colorful fabrics, beads, and art pieces. While her parents run a successful small business, Makriyianni has managed to take her company global, selling designs like her signature fabric-and-bronze fan earrings through London retailer MatchesFashion and collecting high-profile clients like Adele, who wore one of Makriyianni's pieces for a 2017 concert in Sydney.

Another Chania designer with an international following is Alexis Apladas, who founded fashion retailer **JustBrazil** (*justbrazilstore.gr*) with his partner, São Paulo native Renata Leitão, in 2014. While JustBrazil is known for showcasing up-and-coming South American and Greek brands, its owners have shifted in recent years to focus on heritage crafts such as basket weaving and embroidered clothing—a move Apladas says was inspired by his hometown's growing artistic energy.



▼ Manousos Chalkiadakis in his workshop.

And one of the island's most respected artists isn't new to the scene at all. **Manousos Chalkiadakis** (*greekceramics.gr*), who has lived and worked in Greece for all of his 74 years, is known throughout Europe for his surrealist paintings and large-scale ceramics. One evening, I toured his two-room studio in an 18th-century stone house, following him as he floated from giant ceramic watermelons and hanging balloon sculptures to Cycladic-inspired busts and candleholders resembling baptismal fonts. One of his many cats trailed him like a devoted assistant, and, for a moment, I had the notion I had entered a Chagall painting.

Just outside in the garden, amid a chorus of chirping cicadas, a table was set for a dinner party. The scene reminded me of something Tsepets had told me earlier at Ammos: "Chania is so much about the people who live here," he said. "They can be crazy and eccentric but, even among the Greeks, they have a reputation for being the warmest and most welcoming." Minutes later, when Chalkiadakis invited me to stay for dinner, I immediately said yes. 🌐

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