

On Monday night a group of us gathered at Jimmy's for a quick trip to the Mediterranean. Of course we used food and wine as our mode of travel. Getting through security is a snap that way.

We shared some crisp Chardonnay and shared wishes of spring while we were getting hungry for our dinner ahead.

Our first course featured the garbonzo bean. These little fellows are also known as chickpeas and ceci.

Hummus was the first item made from them. The other was falafel. The accompaniments were dill-spiced cucumber and sour cream and little fried flat breads.

The hummus was finely puréed cooked ceci mixed with a little tahini – sesame paste. The seasonings were salt, garlic and lemon. Spread on the bread it was really good. Add some of the cucumber and it was fantastic.

The falafel is the same beans in a little more coarse texture. Cumin and coriander are added along with salt and cayenne. It is moistened with olive oil and red wine vinegar. Baking soda and flour are added and the mixture is made into small discs.

To cook them you can gently fry or bake. We baked ours to a soft cracker like consistency. The taste was rich and flavorful

Our wine was Toscolo Vernaccia di San Gimignano. This crisp white dealt well with the lemon tones of the hummus. It had more body than most wines using this grape.

The next course was a salad made from papaya, avocado and shrimp. A green lettuce leaf was topped with slices of the fruit and topped with grilled shrimp. The shrimp were marinated in garlic, salt, basil and olive oil. Everything was dressed in a ginger vinaigrette.

The colors were great together. The tender shrimp were wonderful. Lots of clean plates followed this one.

The wine was Mirabile Nero d'Avolo. This was a Sicilian red that had good fruit and a medium body. It was nice with the salad. It would be great with tomato sauce dishes too.

Now it was time for soup. Ours was grilled vegetable. This was probably the most popular course followed by the previous one.

Grilled veggies – zucchini, tomato, onion, garlic and peppers – were the center of attention. Most of the veggies were puréed and the others chopped. It gave the soup a chunky texture. The grilling added a touch of smokiness and a splash of Sherry vinegar gave it a boost. A garnish of fresh cilantro added the perfect zest.

This time we went to a white wine – Brandl Gruener Veltliner. This is Austria's grape and what a good one it is. This is a very food-friendly wine. There is little food it won't work with. This one is particularly flavorful. We like it so much it's on our list at Jimmy's.

Gru-vees as they are sometimes known are worth seeking out. My friends Rick, the wine guy, from The Brass Brassiere and Gus, the other wine guy, from Fine Wine and Beer by Gus were in attendance. Either one of them can show you examples of Gruener Veltliner.

The main course was an unusual fish – skate. Skate is from the ray family of cartilaginous fish. You discard the central body and eat the wings.

This was an interesting experience in that we served the portions of the wing with the cartilage intact. This way the diners could see the "bone" structure. You simply pull the tiny fingers of sweet flesh away perpendicular to the wing itself.

This is a mild fish with a rewarding nose and texture. It was sautéed with oregano, salt, pepper and olive oil.

To accompany the skate we had quinoa that had been mixed with feta, olives and tomato. It was dressed with olive oil and red wine vinegar.

Quinoa (Keen-wah) is a grain that is cooked like rice. It has a nice texture and a nutty flavor. This is a great dish to serve if you have a vegetarian around. It is a special treat. Look for it in the organic foods section.

Rocca de Macie Sasyr was our wine. This is an Italian blend of Sangiovese and Syrah from the Tuscan region. This is a very good wine. It is full flavored yet soft in the mouth. It was very good with the bold fish dish.

Our dessert consisted of squares of still warm date cakes topped with fresh yogurt cheese and slices of Asian pear and strawberries. It must have been good because there were almost no leftovers on a single plate.

So our trip to the Mediterranean was short but lots of fun. We learned that the giant area is full of exotic foods that are fun to eat and enjoy.

With any food adventure always be sure to be "adventurous." Don't be shy and afraid of food. And don't let your prejudices keep you from trying new foods.

Just because you tried some version of a food years ago and didn't care for it, doesn't mean you won't like it this time. If you think you won't like it, you probably won't. Like I say to someone who wrinkles his nose when I describe something, "Be a grown up and try it. You can always have fried chicken tomorrow." And I like fried chicken.

Do it for the sake of the experience. Everything can't be your favorite or you wouldn't fit through the door.

Next month we are having lamb at our special dinner. Lots of good stuff will be in store including chocolate tiramisu for dessert.