

MOUSSAKA

66 A good moussaka—a baked casserole of eggplant, zucchini, tomatoes, and minced lamb or beef under a lush layer of béchamel sauce—is one of the most fabulous things you can eat. And it takes time. In Greece, when we think of this dish, we remember our mothers and grandmothers, who often labored for hours to prepare it. (I learned to make moussaka from my own well-organized mother, who often started the preparations the day before, frying the eggplants, preparing the meat and tomato sauce, then assembling the dish the day it was to be served.) But for a dish with such a strong grip on our memories, moussaka as we know it in Greece today has a short history: Though a similar casserole had existed previously, the added layer of Frenchified béchamel was popularized by the chef and cookbook author Nicholas Tselementes in the late 1920s. Now, I have a hard time with Tselementes. He was an admirer of French cooking, reworking Greek recipes to fit his idea of classical cuisine, and his influence nearly wiped out traditional Greek cooking for generations. But every time I taste moussaka, with its perfect balance of flavors, I think of his atonement: Perhaps moussaka makes up for the rest. —Aglaia Kremezi, author of *Mediterranean Home-Style* (Clarkson Potter, 2009)

