



On Left is Yomi Levi. The Yom Tov family sells 30 varieties of olives, lovingly served by Mom, along with homemade honey, olive oil, antipasti, cheese, salads, cured meats, stuffed peppers, hibiscus flowers delicately filled with cream cheese, and of course, the iconic deli counter. Photo by Dan Perez

On Having a Yom Tov

A storied delicatessen for modern times.

Words by Andrew Wasserstein Photos by Dan Perez

No better space defines the past, present and future of Tel Aviv than Levinsky Market, an urban souk in constant motion. Established in the early 1930s by a group of Greek émigrés from Saloniki, it was later joined by waves of immigration from Iran and Turkey. Situated in the southern Tel Aviv neighborhood of Florentin, Levinsky Market has come to represent the cultural mosaic of the city's immigrant origins. The olfactory landscape of spice shops, bakeries and eateries meld diverse Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and Balkan flavors and ingredients into the larger melting pot of what has come to define modern "Israeli" cuisine.

One of the most endearing shops in the market is Yom Tov Deli, both a namesake of its founder, Yom Tov Levi, and a tongue-in-cheek nod to its local linguistic context (Yom Tov means "Good Day" in Hebrew). Originally established in Istanbul in 1947, the deli was transported and inaugurated in Levinsky Market when Levi immigrated to Israel in 1969. The deli began as a kiosk for the local community and grew into a shop that later passed hands to his daughter and now also his two grandsons, Yomi and Eitan.

100 years young today, Levi's multigenerational landmark continues to serve the family's unique take on Turkish delights. Yom Tov Deli's iconic storefront has survived and thrived in the market's transformation from a working class neighborhood souk into an institutional culinary destination. The Yom Tov family sells 30 varieties of olives, lovingly served by Mom, along with homemade honey, olive oil, antipasti, cheese, salads, cured meats, stuffed peppers, hibiscus flowers delicately filled with cream cheese, and of course, the iconic deli counter. Customers trust Yomi and Eitan with the ultimate sandwich curation experience, choosing basic preferences for a final delectable surprise.

In 2019, the municipality banned cars along Levinsky Street and pedestrianized the market into a 24/7 hotspot. "Nowadays you can comfortably enjoy a cold glass of wine and cheese in the middle of the street and enjoy the good vibes and music without the harsh sound of honking cars," says Yomi Levi. The intersecting streets and alleyways around the market have transformed the Florentin neighborhood into the nexus of cool, with the city's youthful energy pouring out into trendy bars, the "it" restaurants of the moment and the laissez-faire cool that defines Tel Aviv life. Attempts to commercialize Levinsky with corporate chains have thankfully failed, with mom and pop operations continuing to define the market. After nearly a century of continued existence, history still reigns supreme in Levinsky Market. The space satisfies an innate hunger for tradition, for authenticity, and the beauty of a conversation with your local shopkeeper, an experience all too foreign in this decade.