

# MARQ

DECEMBER 2008

A TWIN CITIES LIFE OF STYLE

The background of the cover features several glass Christmas ornaments with intricate marbled patterns in shades of green, yellow, orange, and red. The ornaments are set against a bright blue background with thin, glowing orange lines that create a sense of light and movement. The overall aesthetic is festive and elegant.

Festival  
of Light

by Jeremy Iggers | photography by Peter Crouser

# FINE MEDITERRANEAN

## SAFFRON REDEFINES MIDDLE EASTERN CUISINE AS ELEGANT AND UPSCALE

Saffron's seafood tagine pairs salmon and clam with potatoes, peppers, olives, saffron and fennel.

THE WADI BROTHERS, CHEF SAMEH AND MANAGER SAED, BILL THE cuisine at their elegant Third Street café, Saffron, as Mediterranean-Middle Eastern, but that description really doesn't do it justice: To most diners, Middle Eastern means hummus and falafel and shawirma and shish kabob — the kinds of foods you might find at the Holy Land Bakery & Deli in northeast Minneapolis, owned by the Wadis' relatives. The flavors at Saffron may have their roots in the region, but the preparations and presentations offer the sophistication of haute cuisine. That's no surprise — chef Sameh previously worked under Tim McKee and Josh Thoma at Solera.

Start with a selection of mezza (\$4-\$5.50), tapas-style small plates made for sharing. Favorites include the artichoke tagine, a savory stew of artichokes, peas and potatoes simmered in a saffron broth; the eggplant dip with pomegranate molasses and peppers, and the crispy fried mussels, served with thin strips of preserved lemon and a tahini sauce.

You can make a meal entirely of mezza if you choose, but there are other courses to explore: the small plates (\$6-\$12), such as the scallops with Jerusalem artichokes, capers and preserved lemons, or, if you have a big enough appetite, the entrées (\$18-\$29) — which range from a salmon and clam tagine with peppers, olives, fennel and potatoes, to a beef strip loin with smoked potato gratin.

The part of the dining experience that does feel Middle Eastern is the hospitality: Manager Saed, who serves as host, greets guests with a courtly warmth, guides them to their tables, and then visits over the course of the evening to make sure that everything is satisfactory. ♦

### SAFFRON RESTAURANT & LOUNGE

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