

FIRST ANNIVERSARY ISSUE (PARTY INFO ON PAGE 2)

METRO

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6 NEW RESTAURANTS

THAT EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT

(Brasa, Café Maude, Manhattan's & more)

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BY MECCA BOS-WILLIAMS • PHOTO BY SARA RUBINSTEIN

Chef Sameh Wadi is receiving plenty of well-deserved recognition for his inventive, upscale Mediterranean/Middle Eastern cuisine at Saffron Restaurant & Lounge in the Minneapolis Warehouse District.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

It's been a year of comings and goings for Twin Cities diners. Sure, we're going to miss our delicious old friends. But change is good, right? Have a look at these, the new faces.

SAFFRON RESTAURANT & LOUNGE

123 N. 3RD ST., MINNEAPOLIS
612.746.5533, SAFFRONMPLS.COM

It's been a long time since I've slathered fresh, olive-oil-shiny hummus on a slice of bread while enjoying white-tablecloth service. In fact, it's been unquestionably far too long. I think it could have been my last trip to Manhattan, or at least to Chicago.

This restaurant feels important. And that's because it is. It is a place where Muslim women in hijab looking for halal mezze come together with an Eagan family celebrating a grandparent's birthday and everyone can feel special, thanks to the warm service, candlelight, spice-colored walls and soaring ceilings. ▶

INFORMATION

NEW T.C. RESTAURANTS

But perhaps more than that, it's got every-one unified, feeling flush with the unmistakable flavor of the extraordinary: a veal and tuna carpaccio with brown-butter vinaigrette, hazelnuts, and preserved lemons so light it dissolves on your tongue; a house-made Mirquaz sausage with red pepper confit and coriander that tastes like the inside of your spice cabinet smells; or a hand-rolled garganelli pasta with duck confit, frisée and mascarpone. All of which reminded us we were in a Mediterranean restaurant, where Europe comes together with Africa and Asia, and one and all can be, for the duration of dinnertime, united.

THE FOOD: Upscale Mediterranean/Middle Eastern

THE ATMOSPHERE: Casual white tablecloth

METRO TIP: Go for a flight of chef's choice mezze rather than an entrée, in order to sample more of some of the city's best food.

MANHATTAN'S

800 LASALLE PLAZA, MINNEAPOLIS
612.339.3600, MANHATTANSMPLS.COM

At peak time on a Saturday night, Manhattan's is decidedly quiet. In a former street-level sandwich-shop space across from Rock Bottom Brewery on Hennepin Avenue, Manhattan's has slid in a sleek polished granite bar, replete with white-shirted mixologists and an acceptable level of Upper East Side posh. On our visit, the dining room—situated across the building's hallway from the lounge—sat completely empty. Sad, given the promising kitchen talent and perfect service. Consider this one of the best-kept downtown dining secrets.

While classic, unfussy American fare seems to be making a big comeback, I believe it remains one of the most difficult concepts to do well. Happily, Manhattan's is nearly there.

A beef satay appetizer was tender and juicy, paired with a Malibu rum-soaked pineapple slice that might have served only as a garnish but was inhaled to the core. The accompanying cilantro-ginger sauce was addiction-inducing. Rare lamb chops were properly cooked. One minor complaint: the overabundance of a perfectly fine fried shrimp and calamari appetizer. It easily could have served six as a starter or two as an entrée. Don't fall victim to oversized portions, and order shrewdly to sample more.

THE FOOD: Classic American

THE ATMOSPHERE: Posh

METRO TIP: All cocktails are made with fresh-squeezed juices, and old-school mixology is at the heart of the operation. Motto: "Where cocktail is king."

LANDMARC GRILL

405 S. 8TH ST., MINNEAPOLIS
612.455.1204

Not until I sank myself into one of the ebony leather booths (reported cost: \$6,000 each), tall and pretty as Naomi Campbell on platforms, did I imagine myself to be in a real restaurant. Located in the unassuming restaurant space in downtown's Normandy Inn, the Landmarc's cheap hotel vibe can be initially tough to shake. But manager Michael Morse, best known for his ownership of the late Un Deux Trois, has brought solid French-influenced fare to the menu, along with a few fine-dining sensibilities.

A hangar steak sandwich with caramelized onions and port wine sauce with frites was simple and flavorful; ditto the Chinese chicken salad and a sturdy iceberg wedge salad with bleu cheese, chopped tomatoes and bacon. A shrimp cocktail was lackluster and served with sauce that tasted bottled. An uninspiring dessert of profiteroles with vanilla ice cream and dark chocolate had me wishing I hadn't wasted the calories. Complimentary popovers, a throwback from the 83-year-old hotel's past, seemed to be a hit all around.

THE FOOD: Classic American/French

THE ATMOSPHERE: Budget hotel with a surprising dining room

METRO TIP: Ask to be seated in one of the glamorous booths.

CAFÉ MAUDE

5411 PENN AVE. S., MINNEAPOLIS,
612.822.5411, CAFEMAUDE.COM

You can almost imagine Café Maude owner Kevin Sheehy lordling over the room in a smoking jacket, sipping on a dirty martini. Although, that would be too tacky for a guy who travels the world climbing mountains, visiting orphanages and importing textiles. The former owner of Caravelle Imports in Uptown and current owner of two local coffee shops, Sheehy found himself opening a new restaurant by calling.

Some regulars at one of his coffee shops told him the space—a former neighborhood deli—at 54th and Penn had opened and they really wished he'd open a café there. Around the same time, both of his parents passed away. "It was almost too much grief to bear, and so I thought, 'OK, I'll immerse myself in work,'" he says. "Friends were saying, 'You're crazy to open a restaurant,' and I thought, perfect."

Sheehy, who has visited Istanbul more than a dozen times, has a strong affinity for Middle Eastern fare. Not wanting to constrain his kitchen, however, he calls the menu "loose Mediterranean." As a result, what you'll find is a hodgepodge of what people like to eat: small plates of crab cakes; grilled blue prawns; sides of house-cut fries served with cheese fondue and grilled corn on the cob served with truffle butter; wood-grilled meats such as hangar steak and half chickens; a smattering of salads; some flat breads with various toppings; and a cheese taster section for three bucks a pop. Best of all, the average price point for an item is \$10, so Café Maude is perfect for a group family-style feast.

THE FOOD: Casual Mediterranean/American

THE ATMOSPHERE: Neighborhood bistro with full bar and specialty cocktails, live music/DJs on select nights

METRO TIP: Check out the owner's impressive collection of international travel magazines in the breezeway.

BRASA ROTISSERIE

600 E. HENNEPIN AVE., MINNEAPOLIS
612.379.3030

Chef Alex Roberts, of Alma acclaim, obviously has a finger on the pulse of the masses, and not only on the exacting diners who have come to expect the transcendent cuisine that garners James Beard nominations. One moment over the threshold of Brasa Rotisserie, and you've seen the future. Only got time for fast food? Check. Only have a ten-spot? Check again. Don't like eating antibiotics, pesticides or junk? You got it. Have a hankering for a Modelo while you wait? Fine. Feel like a piece of birthday cake, only it's not your birthday? Brasa does that, too.

Roberts is serving up exactly what you want to eat: simple cuts of roast chicken and pork,