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Saffron: "This place
deserves to be packed."

- PETER LILIENTHAL p. 354



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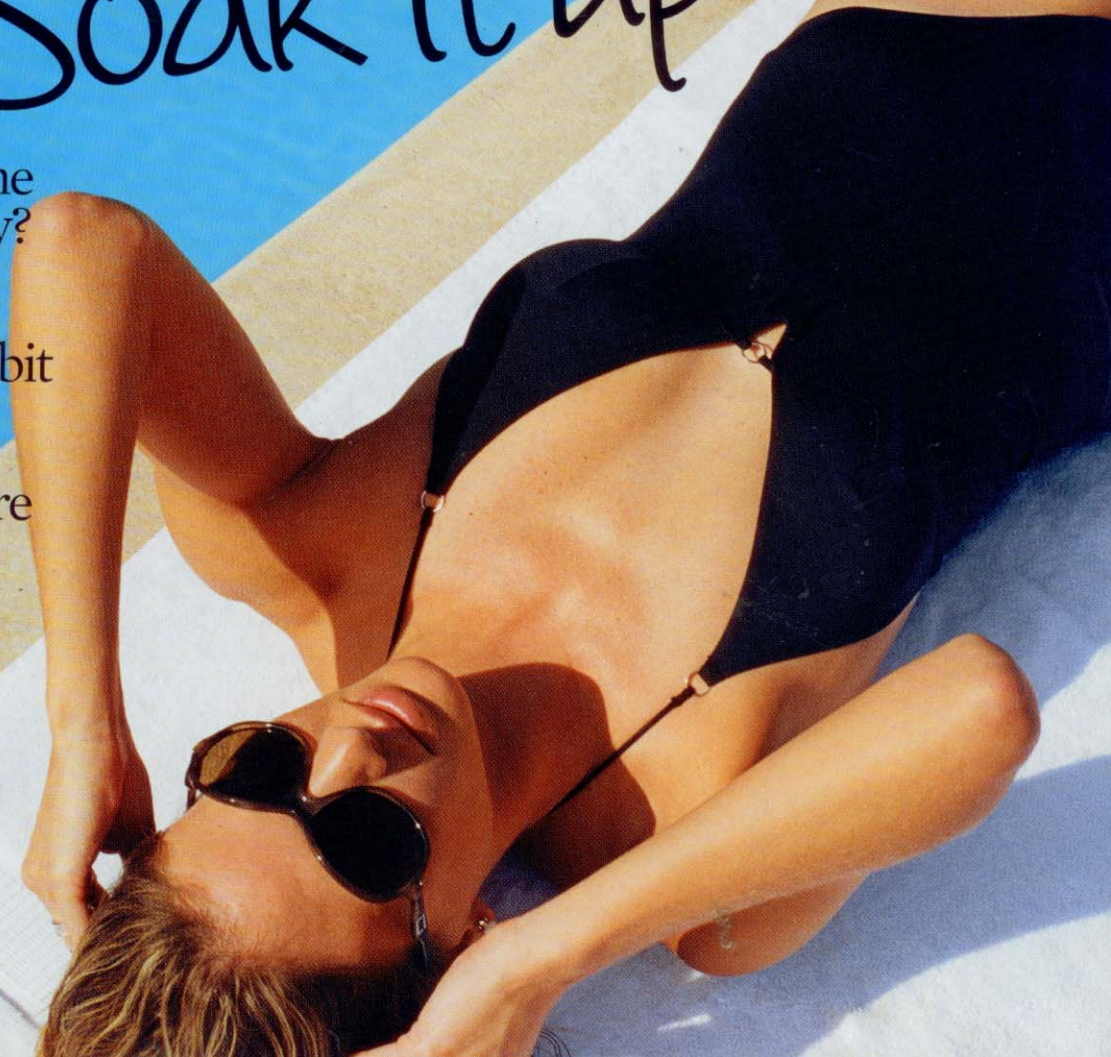
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Dining Out

TOAST + TRIÃ + FOGO DE CHÃO + RAISING CANE'S + DAM PISTRO | EDITED BY ADAM PLATT



Saffron

Salmon and clam tagine is one of the many winners at Saffron, the acclaimed new Warehouse District eatery. Peter Lilienthal says it can't be beat. See page 354.

DiningOut

Review BY PETER LILIENTHAL

Saffron

Address 123 N. 3rd St., Mpls.,
612-746-5533, SAFFRONMPLS.COM

The Scene

This former Warehouse District home of Café Solo and Jazzmine's has taken on a Mediterranean theme via a fresh coat of ochre and beige paint—the colors of saffron before and after processing—and a collection of Middle Eastern lanterns known as *fanoos*. Aside from these modest touches, the interior remains the classic warehouse model with a high ceiling, sturdy columns, brick walls, exposed ductwork, and polished wood floors. There's a long bar along one wall and a collection of white-clothed tables that, unfortunately, were pretty empty as the restaurant entered its second month. I hope the good word is going to spread, because this place deserves to be packed.



Our Take

As I gazed out the tall windows that afford a view of crowds coming and going from 112 Eatery across the street, I was struck by what a challenge it is for a new restaurant to

achieve visibility. Saffron's compact menu of small plates, a smattering of Middle Eastern hors d'oeuvres called *meze*, and a handful of entrées is competitively priced and every bit as inspirational as that of its neighbor. And there's no lengthy wait for a

3 Great Plates



Lamb Shoulder Oven-braised lamb emerges so tender, aromatic, and flavorful it's an absolute treat to savor. Ditto the home-cured lamb bacon and seasoned chickpeas that round out the dish.



Scallops Every restaurant takes a run at scallops, but you won't find any better than these succulent beauties, sided with fried clam poached artichoke, and saffron sauce. I guarantee it.

table. Nonetheless, I had hardly heard a word about the place. Suffice it to say that if you enjoy lovingly prepared and smartly plated food, Saffron is definitely worth your patronage. Whether it's the incredible foie gras encrusted with chopped pistachios and served with a floral rose-petal jam; the three varieties of housemade yogurt cheese almost lighter than air; the crispy beef *kubbeh* cigars encased in bulgur and paired with a cucumber-yogurt-mint sauce; or the unusual salmon-and-clam tagine cooked with tomatoes, fennel, garlic, and olives—the experience here is a culinary adventure of the first order. An uncompromising commitment to the best organic ingredients results in a couple of oddly expensive dishes (such as an exotic *dukkah*-seasoned half quail for \$11), but most of the items are well worth their price. When it comes to service, the Saffron staff is about as friendly, cheerful, and eager to please as any in town.



Sameh Wadi

Who's in the Kitchen?

Considering the overall quality, creativity, and presentations here, the logical conclusion is that a veteran chef heads the kitchen. The surprise is the discovery that the talent behind the stove is twenty-three-year-old Sameh Wadi, who most recently studied under Tim McKee at Solera. Wadi's family, in addition to backing him at Saffron, owns Holy Land Deli, the source of the restaurant's baked goods. ▲



Cauliflower Flan This heavenly preparation of cream and egg, topped with caramelized cauliflower and ringed by cilantro purée and *charmoula* made with twenty spices is just one of several bargain *meze*.

FINE PRINT

GETTING THERE,
GETTING IN: There's a city parking ramp a block away on 4th Street and metered parking on the nearby streets. Reservations are not needed.
HOURS: M-Th 11 A.M.-12 A.M., F 11 A.M.-2 A.M., Sa 5 P.M.-2 A.M., closed Su.
NOISE LEVEL: Low to moderate.
KIDS: No special menu.
CARDS: AmEx, Discover, MC, Visa.
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