

# LOCAL DELICACIES FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN

REVIEW BY MELISSA JOSUE  
PHOTO BY VIVIAN JOHNSON

Glass lamps hang from the ceiling and glow like constellations against a deep crimson sky surrounded by walls the color of marigolds. Plush, modern lounge chairs surround small, shallow tables. Sweet Eastern spices drift from an open kitchen while tea candles flicker against dark mahogany. They call it the jewel of the Mission and their exotic Mediterranean fare will pamper your palette indeed.

Sumptuous and tempting flavors, combined with prompt and friendly service, intrigue the senses and welcome even the most timid stomachs. After almost nine months keeping afloat amid the abundance of multi-star cafes, bistros and eateries in the heart of the Mission, Medjool dared them all and surfaced with a winning menu complete with both ambiance and affordability.

Much like the lobby of a mod hotel, the restaurant opens to a spacious lounge beneath the loft-like balcony overlooking the main dining floor. The main floor can lend itself to noisier groups who can dine or congregate in the lounge next to the bar. Quieter and more intimate tables can be found toward the perimeter and the upstairs lounge.

The whole place has a delicious glow. From the olive-almond relish to the orange-saffron butter, one could be seduced just by the foreign names and promise of exotic flavors on the menu. And even in a full house they deliver those promises with excellent attentiveness and reliability.

Take the Medjool Mistress (\$8), which is a light lime-colored cocktail brought in a salt-rimmed glass. The drink is filled to the brim with what tastes like your standard margarita, but with a bit of spice toward the end.

Within minutes, a fresh-out-of-the-oven warm flat bread sprinkled with just enough salt, pepper and parsley, is put on the table — a nice change from the cold, boring French roll that most people in other restaurants get before their main dish. The drink was good, but the bread was impressive. Their secret? Small dishes packing tons of rich flavors.

The lamb kefta with pinenuts and tahini (\$10) is no exception. This Mediterranean meatball, which looked more like rolled sausages, sat in more oil than expected. But the fragrance of steaming spices, infused with the perfectly tender and juicy lamb, only added to its stunning flavor. It looked like an appetizer, but the three medium-sized meatballs would leave little room for ensuing dishes. In this case, it was scallops.



Although the seared scallops with preserved lemon gremolata and sunchoke puree (\$11) did not have the melt-in-your-mouth quality that lightly sautéed scallops might, beneath the seared surface lay soft meat next to a warm puree that complimented the seafood flavor. Again, the dots of green over the meatballs and the scallops seem to indicate an almost religious usage of fresh parsley flakes.

However, the apricot baklava (\$6), which took a little time but was well worth the wait, was instead lightly dusted with powdered sugar. For the price, three generous triangles of baklava came piping hot and sitting in warm honey. The apricot mixed with pistachios and wrapped in crisp filo dough had a pleasantly perfumed aftertaste, but the pool of honey tended to drown the already sweet apricot filling.

The menu changes daily, leaving the visitor many choices of new dishes. And the intense flavors combined with the visually appetizing surroundings make the restaurant a hidden jewel without the pretentious prices. If one is hungry for an epicurean journey from North Africa to the Middle East, Medjool will take you there.

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