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## Little Marakesh celebrates fifth birthday with special Royal Feast

By: Frank D. Quattrone

**Under the flowing orange canopy, as the sinuous strains of Middle Eastern music fill the room, they emerge - five tribal belly dancers known, for reasons soon to become obvious, as Hipnosis.**

Wearing diaphanous veils of apricot and black, they begin - first as five, slowly splitting into pairs or threes, bodies undulating in impossible twists and turns, swaying in measured, unchoreographed steps, faces serious, smiling or serene, arms upraised and lowered like sweet serpents trained to dazzle and delight.

Tempos rise and fall. The lovely ladies of Hipnosis, improvising like a great jazz band, feeding each other visual cues and curves, never fail to answer the call.

And with tables full of family and friends, by turns applauding and mesmerized, the moment of truth arrives. One of the sultry tribe reaches out for your hand and entreats you to join her on the magic carpet. From out of nowhere, a fez appears and perches upon your head as you find yourself - how, you'll never guess - on the floor, moving in ways you never thought possible.

My friend, you have just been Hipnotized!

Lost in the moment, the so-called real world a distant memory, you have been transported to Little Marakesh, Dresher's wonderful family-owned and operated Moroccan restaurant, now celebrating its fifth year in business.

And what a business it is!

It is the mission of the brothers Manfaa - Tariq (better known as Terry), who greets guests and sets the tone of exotic civility and hospitality for which Morocco is legendary, and Momen, a wizard in the kitchen who works side by side with their talented mother, Haja Hafidi, conjuring up traditional Moroccan delicacies she learned from her mother and grandmother, passing on the torch to her sons - to help you put traffic, bills and the workplace behind you for a few hours of exotic adventure.

And it's not just the weekend belly dancing that lends itself to this vision of escape. The restaurant itself, located in a strip mall anchored by an Acme market, has been designed like a typical Moroccan living room. Red and white brick walls, lighted by golden globes, are adorned by seductive prints, tapestries and carpets from North Africa.

Sitting around beautifully polished round brass tables called tablas, at booths bedecked with colorful stuffed pillows, guests enjoy (on weekends) their seven-course Royal Feast. At \$25 per person (add another five when the Tribal Bellies come to call), that's a huge bargain. And on the weekend of Friday and Saturday, Oct. 6 and 7, to thank their faithful regulars for their patronage - and to entice those who have not yet experienced Moroccan hospitality - Terry and Momen are offering a second Royal Feast at half-price for every one bought at the regular price.

And what an opulent feast it is! After Terry or one of his attentive servers washes your hands with rose water poured from a tass, you are ready to begin your culinary journey. Utensils are provided, for those who insist, but there's plenty of warm, freshly baked pita on hand to dip into most of the courses, as the Moroccans do.

Your meal begins with a refreshing Casablanca Salad, a zesty mix of chopped fresh tomatoes, cucumbers and green peppers, seasoned carrots, Moroccan eggplant and hummus served with pita. As you pour yourself a glass of your favorite wine or brew (it's a BYO), your server next plants an Atlas Bastilla on the tabla. This aromatic Moroccan Warqa (filo dough) stuffed with shredded chicken, spiced eggs crushed almonds, baked and garnished with powdered sugar and cinnamon, is a personal favorite of this writer and a centerpiece of his annual New Year's Eve family dinner.

For your next course, you'll probably agree that chicken never tasted so juicy and tender as it does with this Berber Tagine, with braised chicken enhanced by garlic, saffron, onions and lemon and served with green olives and pita. Don't be afraid to ask for a doggy bag, as you still have two entrees remaining before your dinner-capping sweet.

Next on your tabla is Casbah Couscous, Little Marakesh's version of Morocco's national dish of steamed semolina topped with caramelized onions, raisins and chick peas. And those expecting some sort of kabob won't be disappointed, as next up on the menu are Shish Kabobs of beef, chicken, lamb or vegetables, marinated in Moroccan spices, grilled and skewered for your pleasure.

Finally, served with a cup of fresh mint tea, your Moroccan Baklava arrives - that delectable sticky sweet pastry comprised of layers of filo dough stuffed with nuts and honey.

With breaks to enjoy the tribal belly dancers, and visits from Terry and his staff, you feel satisfied but not stuffed, still reveling in your exotic departure from the everyday.

These days, guests at Little Marakesh often choose to top off their meal with a few puffs on the hookah (\$15). Also known as a nargila or sheesha, this 500-year-old Turkish invention is a waterpipe that compresses smoke through water acting as a cooling filter.

The amount of tobacco used is minimal (and no tar is contained), as the blend is largely fruit-flavored molasses. Think strawberry, apple, banana, orange, peach, apricot, mixed fruit, vanilla cappuccino, mint and the like. Water in the base filters out any trace nicotine.

A communal affair, the hookah can accommodate from one to six smokers aged 18 or older. The restaurant also offers a variety of hookahs for sale in its colorful bazaar of Moroccan gifts. Terry Manfaa, who came to America 19 years ago and who also teaches languages in public school, says that the hookah has really caught on at Little Marakesh.

But his overriding attitude about his experience in America to date, which includes a happy marriage with his lovely American-born wife Lorri and the birth of their now 4-year-old son Adam, is this: "It's a blessing. We just wanted to bring some of the authentic Moroccan experience to our new friends and neighbors.

"But it's obvious that, after five years of successful business, we've gotten so much more. And we hope to continue giving back to the community for many years to come."

Little Marakesh

Fairway Shopping Center  
1825 S. Limekiln Pike,  
Dresher, PA 19025  
215-643-3003 or 3993  
www.littlemarakesh.com

**HOURS:**  
Dinner only:  
Tuesday - Sunday,  
5 - 11 p.m.

Reservations recommended.  
All major credit cards.  
BYOB. Non-smoking,  
except for hookah.  
Facilities for handicapped.  
Children welcome.  
Available for catering  
& exotic, fun private parties  
on and off premises.  
Royal Feast: \$25.  
Vegetarian Feasts available  
by request.  
Belly dancing, live  
entertainment weekends.  
A la carte entrees:  
\$10.95 - \$15.95.  
Info on Hipnosis:  
www.tribalbellies.com.  
Next visit to Little  
Marakesh: Oct. 21.



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