

Essaouira 2014: New restaurants up the culinary stakes in the Windy City

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I can't believe how this Windy City is moving! I already wrote about [new openings for 2014](#) back in March and now there is more to report! Get ready – there are some new kids about to shake up the block and they are injecting some serious culinary imagination and decorative pizzazz into the [Essaouira](#) eating scene!

Umia

Chef Bibi and front-of-house manager Jamal are no strangers to the Essaouira dining scene. Bibi's career has included Jardin des Douars, Au Bonheur des Dames and Les Jardins de Villa Maroc. Finally, she has established her own business and not before time! Since it opened earlier this year, Umia – nestled in behind the scala ramparts – has been the talk of the town. Featuring a daily-changing menu of local ingredients prepared simply in an open kitchen to exhibit their full flavor and freshness, Umia draws in a clientele of foodie expats and tourists. Like the food, the restaurant is beautifully presented and features dove grays, retro furniture and a gnaoua mural by a local artist. The setting is understated and welcoming, like the menu and the service. Serving lunch and dinner, those in the know head straight for the dessert menu: the chocolate fondant with salted caramel ice cream is to die for! No alcohol licence at present.

Umia, 26 Rue de Skala, Essaouira. Reservations recommended, phone: 05247-83395

One Up

Not only is the décor absolutely gorgeous, the menu is pretty fabulous too. Property developer, interior designer and hairdresser John Quinn chopped his magazine cover apartment in two, worked his interior magic on the fixtures and fittings and brought in a top chef from Marrakech. Before you could say “this is exactly what Essaouira needs”, bingo! A new venue and place to be seen was created – in the former British Consulate building, no less. Frankly, I'd be happy to sit and stare at the interior design, but if you are feeling peckish, the [menu](#) features European classics with a twist (pan-fried and fresh foie gras; smoked and cooked salmon burger with lattice fries) and a wonderful selection of desserts including a citrus take on the Moroccan classic, *pastilla au lait* featuring citrus-flavoured *crème patissière* and super-light filo pastry. The alcohol licence is pending, the terrace is due to open in autumn, but those are not good reasons to try out One Up without delay!

One Up, 1 Rue Laalouj, Essaouira. Reservations by phone: 06 34 92 02 01



The Loft

This café, restaurant and gallery was opened by friends Ottman and Omar ahead of the 2014 Gnaoua Festival. Ottman – probably the funkiest guy in town – has a jewellery and artifacts shop on Rue Laalouj and – like the shop – all the décor in the Loft is for sale. After a few teething troubles during the opening days, the menu has been re-designed to feature Moroccan and Middle Eastern inspired starters and mainly fish and chicken mains, with the promise of seasonal updates. You’ll spot it straight away in “tajine alley” by the old piano outside the door and the stream of bohemians, hipsters, surfers and artists through the door. No alcohol.

Loft Café, 5 Rue Hajjali, Essaouira, Essaouira. Booking not essential, but advised for larger groups on 05244-76389 or 0638949793.



Le Simoun

The Casablancon family behind this new opening are so smart, it’s hard to know where to start. Unlike its neighbours, the restaurant, is set over 4 floors and a terrace has views which fly over the ramparts and out to sea – making it a perfect sunset-viewing and daydreaming location. The menu is short, reasonably-priced and full of a variety of drinks without a panini in sight, meaning it appeals to locals and tourists alike. The coffee crowd can relax with a cuppa, use the wifi and catch up on the gossip while the hungry traveller can get a three-course meal without a tajine or

grain of couscous in sight for the price of the prix fixe of the tourist traps. There are plenty of comfy nooks and crannies for snoozing, reading, net surfing or people-watching, as well as the roof terrace for the sun worshippers. See if you can spot the tajine turret and the crumbling bell tower of the Portugese Church while you are up there! Book in advance for sushi or groups. No alcohol.

Le Simoun, Rue Skala, Essaouira. Tel: 05244-76423

La Fromagerie

I’ve mentioned [La Fromagerie](#) before since it relocated from Meskala, but it is going great guns in the countryside above Essaouira. Now with a dining room and lounge as well as the artisan cheesery and al fresco dining, cheese producer Abderrazzak and chef Jawad are now able to offer goat tajine, goat mechoui (spit roasted in a charcoal pit) as well as a selection of delicious salads and cheeses. It just keeps getting better and the fact that it has bumped Umia off the TripAdvisor top spot is evidence that this little secret has finally got out! Wines are served and if you can resist a siesta after your feast, camel and bike rides in the surrounding thuya and olive groves can be arranged.

La Fromagerie, Route de Safi (1km after the first roundabout on the Marrakech road from Essaouira). Reservations essential: 06 58 83 99 99 or 06 66 23 35 34



Loft

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