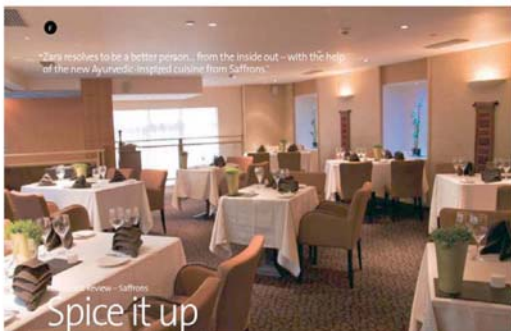


# Saffrons article.

## Source: Gallery magazine, 2008,



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We've been short-changed by curry houses. Decades of gloopy over sweetened westernized curries may have sent chicken tikka masala rocketing to the top of the 'favourite British dish' list, but it's come at a price. We've missed out on real Eastern cooking.

Saffrons, the new restaurant at the Hotel de France aims to change all that. Linked closely to the hotel's Ayurvedic spa, the restaurant mixes the Ayurvedic philosophy of balance in all things together with the best local produce, and comes up with a menu that's quite frankly, sublime. The descriptions are mouth watering, the dishes have depth and complexity, and the ingredients are the best. Quality local products like hand-dived scallops, line-caught sea bass and seasonal local vegetables come straight to your plate via the spice route. Chef Bobby Geetha became an expert in spa wellness cuisine at the luxury spa resort Taj Green Cove in Kerala, and brings the same approach to Saffrons, presenting food simply using fresh spices rather than slathering on the cream and butter. The result – lighter and healthier dishes, but still with the intense flavours that make Indian cooking so unique. All the taste but none of the cholesterol.

Ayurvedic philosophy says we're all a different combination of three doshas – or personality types – pitta, kapha and vata. When our doshas are out of balance – our health suffers, so Ayurveda is all about getting us balanced again. Many of the spices traditionally used in Eastern cooking – turmeric, cardamom, and cumin to name just a few – are also medicinal, and according to Ayurveda, blends of these spices can help get our doshas back to normal. Becoming a better person from the inside out sounds perfect to me, especially if it involves eating plenty of delicious food.

**gallery** JERSEY'S STYLE MAGAZINE

I took Scarlett, my Ayurvedic expert friend, with me to Saffrons to try the tasting menu. She's such an expert, she claims to be able to tell by a single handshake what dosha you are according to her, kaphas feel clammy, pittas' hands are hot and sweaty and vatas are cool to the touch. I'm so glad she told me I was a vata... We started with a vegetable and paneer kebab – paneer is a South Asian cheese – with a garlic rasam and mint chutney. Properly vegetarian, this beautiful dish pairs the sharp and salty paneer with soft tomato rasam. It's gorgeous – like a Bloody Mary with a kick' quipped Scarlett. After a palate cleansing lemon and lime sherbert, we tried the curry leaf scallops. Each scallop was perfectly cooked and perched on a soft coconut and rice blini. It's spicy, but with a gentle warming heat and an almost healing feel to it. I loved it. 'Of course you do', explained Scarlett. 'You vatas are all the same, all airy-fairy, you just need a bit of warming up'.

The main courses were the local sea bass and a pepper roasted lamb fillet. Seduced by the starters, we couldn't wait to see what treats we'd get for the main course. The sea bass was delicate and delicious, served with foam topped tomatoes, pickled baby artichokes and gorgeous al dente wild asparagus, and it tasted amazing thanks to the aromatic fennel. But our favourite was the lamb. Absolutely beautifully presented, this was a sumptuous dish – rich and melt-in-the-mouth, the lamb came with a deep plummy meat jus and a delicately scented mix of broad beans, chickpeas and crunchy almonds. Alongside was a witty Jersey take on sagu alio with discs of Jersey Royals sandwiched with spinach leaves. It was an incredible mix of tastes and flavours – it's been a long time since I've had a dish that good.

We were lucky enough to try a platter of mini desserts, and I would run out of space – and superlatives if I tried to tell you about them. Divine, decadent and beautifully detailed, every one was imaginative, inventive and absolutely amazing. The pomegranate and saffron espuma left Scarlett speechless for once, and the mini pear and truffle fondant... well, it was just incredible. We finished with a proper masala chai – authentic Indian spiced sweet tea – and a world away from a Starbucks chai latte. Restorative and healing, it was just like Mummy-j would make.

Saffrons' prices may seem on the high side, but that's only because we've got used to 'bargainbasement' Eastern cooking. Mixing the best local produce with individually blended unique spice favours isn't a cheap option – and it may not suit everyone. It's not meat and two vegs and it's definitely not your bog-standard Indian takeaway fare. But for a modern, fresh approach to real Eastern cooking – perfectly balanced in flavour and presentation, Saffrons is hard to beat.