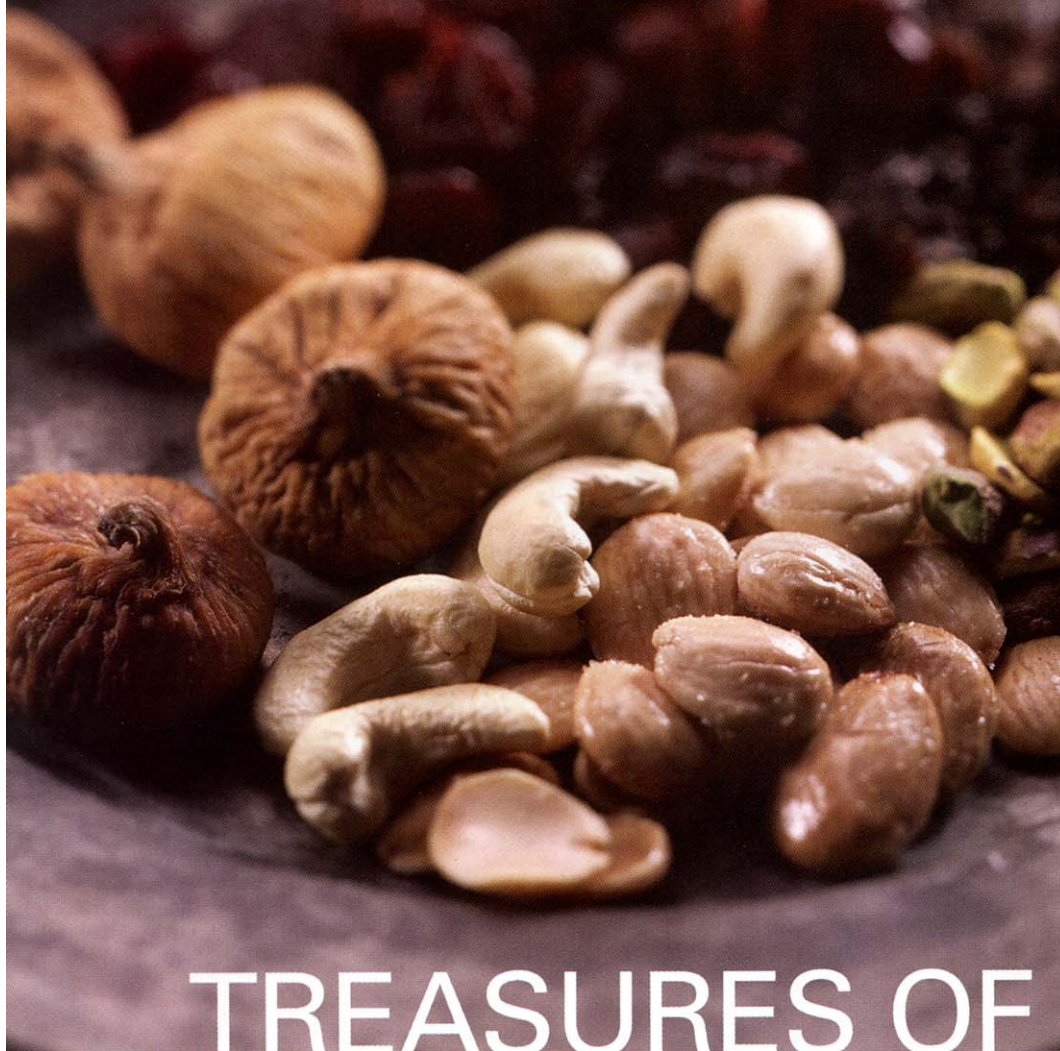


Why not turn your next party into an exotic soiree by borrowing some tastes—and temptations—from this North African gem **By Alice Lesch Kelly**

Photographs by Francine Zaslow ■ Food styling by Catrine Kelty
■ Prop styling by Angela Groff for Ennis



TREASURES OF **Morocco**

WHEN YOU'RE READY TO CELEBRATE THE ARRIVAL OF WARM WEATHER, YOU'RE READY to think about throwing a party. And, of course, you want your bash to be so captivating, so entertaining and so original that, when Monday morning rolls around, your party dominates water-cooler conversations all over town.

A surefire way to wow guests is to plan an exotic theme party, says Janie Haas, executive planner at Hopple Popple, Inc., a party-planning firm in Newton. "Picking a theme is a great way to do something that's festive and different," says Haas. "It allows you to really cut loose and demonstrate that 'Come party with me!' attitude."

MEDITERRANEAN MEAL

The staple food of Morocco, *couscous* is often served with *tagine*, shown here on a curved Tiki amber-glow plate, \$60, Cocoon, with grilled vegetables cooked in saffron; a small capiz bowl, \$9, Cocoon; a glass with a Moroccan motif, \$8, Anthropologie, Chestnut Hill; and a striped Indian bedspread, \$75, Ten Thousand Villages, Brookline.





BREAKING BREAD

Assorted nuts and *matoula*, or country bread, complement any traditional Moroccan feast. Flat bread, courtesy of Tangierino, Boston, is surrounded by tiny bowls of figs and peanuts. Bread is served in a twisted spun-bamboo bowl, \$85; figs and peanuts in amber-glow saki cups, \$75 for the set including a tray; and a shell spoon, \$90; along with spices in stacked spun-bamboo bowls, \$18 each; wooden spoons, \$4.95 each, and wooden forks, \$5.25 each; and a medium spun-bamboo bowl of fruit, \$38, all available at Cocoon, Boston. Turn to page 129 for shopping information.

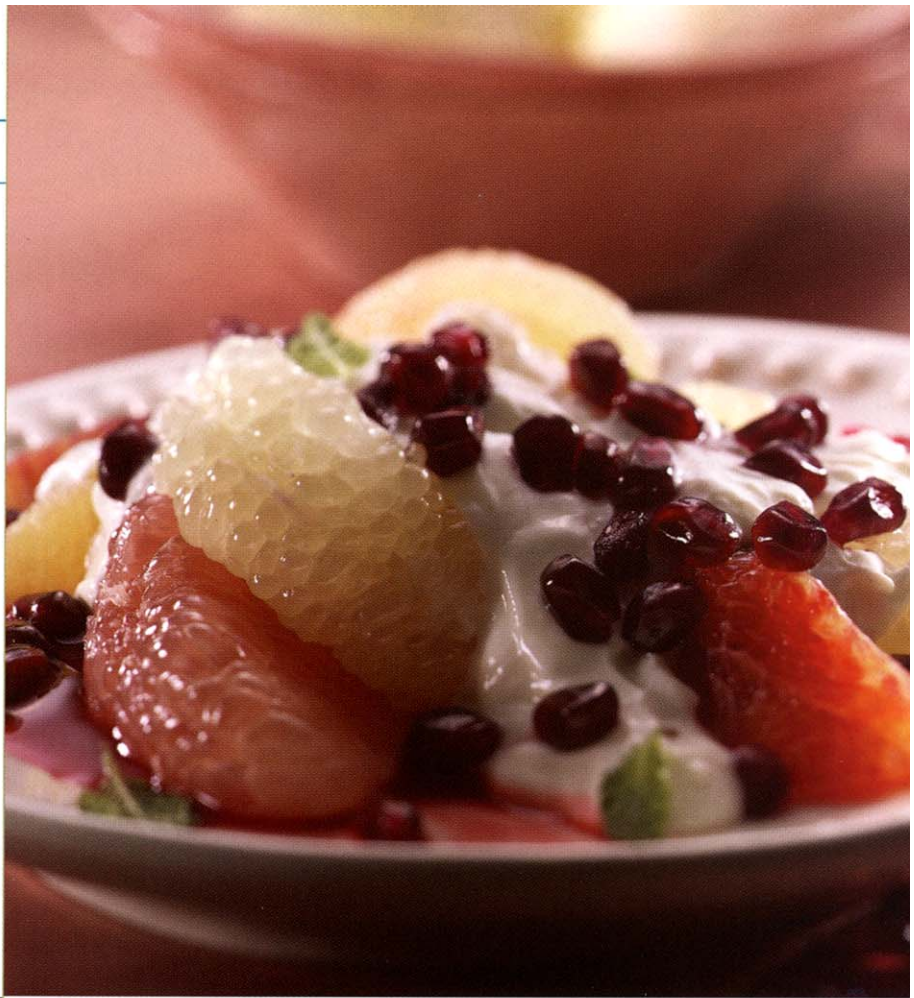
FINISHING TOUCHES

Send your guests home with a small gift—an incense burner, a beautiful colored perfume bottle—wrapped in colorful paper and tied with a length of raffia. “They will have gone on a journey for one night,” says Roberts. “It’s an experience, not just another party.”

Seat guests on overstuffed cushions or pillows covered in silk or crushed velvet—and create a sumptuous feeling that invites them to linger after the meal, sultan-style.

Turn your pool into a desert oasis with floating candles surrounded by wreaths of red, yellow, and orange Gerber daisies.

Serve dinner Moroccan-style by putting the entrees for each table in large ceramic bowls at the center of the table.



SWEET AND LIGHT

Barwat ba louz, or almond triangles, provide a bittersweet ending to an exotic menu, ABOVE, courtesy of Tangierino, served on a Lemongrass square plate, \$24, Cocoon. For a lighter alternative, sweet treats of Greek yogurt are topped with pink and yellow grapefruit, blood oranges, pomegranate seeds and mint, TOP RIGHT; pink capiz shell bowl (in background), \$18, and a nectar table runner by Feathersound, \$200, available at Cocoon.

Among party planners, culturally inspired theme parties are especially hot lately, Haas says. Throwing a party that celebrates another culture allows you to use exotic food, drink, decorations and music to take your guests on a one-night-only journey to faraway lands.

To get you in the spirit, Emma Roberts, owner of Capers Catering in Stoneham, has helped create a Moroccan theme party that can be adapted to create an intimate dinner for six or a festive fête for 500. Either way, your party is guaranteed to capture your guests’ imaginations—and leave them raving long after the couscous runs out.

Setting the stage To create a scene that really says “Morocco,” start with a sultan-style tent. If your party is large, rent a canopy-style tent; if it’s small, you can create your own nomadic shelter with fabric and a few upright poles. Once your tent is up, drape it with lots of shimmering silk or gauzy organza in colors typical of Morocco such as saffron, red and purple, with accents of cobalt blue.

Next, create an exotic atmosphere with wrought-iron pendant lanterns. (If you’re using candles, be sure to hang the lanterns far enough away from the tent and fabric to prevent a fire.) You also can tuck strings of tiny white lights into lengths of organza or another sheer material and wrap the glittering fabric around the tent poles, or use strings of lights covered with colorful miniature paper lanterns. Add a few large garden torches or some additional pendant lanterns outside the tent to illuminate walkways, and round out the desert look with a few palm trees (many florists sell or rent them). *(continued on page 112)*

Treasures of Morocco

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“We’re trying to create a sense of casual elegance and mystery that makes you feel like you’re in Casablanca,” says Roberts. “With the flickering light, billowing fabrics and bright colors, it all comes together—with a lot of romance to spare.”

If you’re serving dinner, seat your guests at very low tables with oversized pillows or cushions instead of chairs. If you’re renting tables, look for models that can be set very low. Choosing long rectangular tables rather than round ones



CULINARY CORNER

Party Planning. You can get help in planning a Moroccan (or other themed) party from Hoppie Popple, Inc., in Newton (617-964-6550) or Capers Catering in Stoneham (781-279-5100).

Decorating. Two Cambridge stores offer authentic Moroccan dinnerware, textiles, lamps and other household items: Nomad (617-497-6677) and Moroccan Bazaar (617-661-0644). And you’ll find Moroccan and other international music at Mystery Train in Gloucester (978-281-8911) or online at www.cdnw.com.

Food. For ideas and recipes, check out *Couscous and Other Good Food from Morocco* by Paula Wolfert (HarperCollins, 1987) or *Moroccan Collection: Traditional Flavors from Northern Africa* by Hilaire Walden (Soma Books, 1998). For authentic ingredients and spices, check out Middle East Halal Meat & Grocery in Everett (617-381-0402) and Middle Eastern Grocery & Halal in Quincy (617-773-2285). If you’d rather have a catered event (or pick up your ready-made Moroccan dishes), contact The Jewel of Newbury in Boston (617-536-5523).

will create a real banquet-at-the-bazaar feeling. To give your setting texture and depth, cover the tables with elaborate tablecloths—fringed, silk-screened cloths, multi-colored and mirrored textiles or linen panels embroidered with gold. Sprinkle petals of red, burgundy and deep-yellow roses down the center of each table. Arrange white or red pillar candles in groups of varying heights amid the petals, or use several burnished oil lamps.

To complete the effect, scent the air with sandalwood (burn a few small sticks of incense), and load the CD changer with authentic Moroccan music. Look for recordings in the Andalusian style, which dates to the 10th century and incorporates tambourines, drums and several stringed instruments, with lyrics sung in classic Arabic or the Andalusian dialect (look for Aïcha Redouane’s “Vocal Arabesques”). For a more modern feel, try Gnawa, a style that traces its roots to sub-Saharan Africa (try Nass Marrakech’s “Sabil a Salaam” or “The Gift” from Hassan Hakmoun, combining Moroccan sounds with jazz).

A Magical Meal

NOWHERE WILL THE MOROCCAN INFLUENCE shine more brightly than in your party menu. Here are a few suggestions:

To reflect the bright colors of North Africa, serve vibrantly hued martinis made with blue curaçao. For appetizers, serve toasted flat breads, eggplant dip, fava bean puree, grilled vegetables, stuffed figs, bowls of olives and spiced nuts. Create a salad of Bibb lettuce topped with julienne carrots, sliced oranges and a honey dressing.

For dinner, offer grilled leg of lamb marinated in yogurt and a *tagine*, or stew, made with meat, olives, preserved lemons, eggplant, zucchini, and red and yellow peppers served with couscous. Try a hearty red wine, such as shiraz. For the perfect ending, serve rosewater ice cream, almond cookies, honey and date phyllo kisses with mint tea and Turkish coffee. ■