

PalmBeachPost

FOOD & DINING

More mezze, bellydancing and smoking of the pipes — the Middle Eastern dining experience is spreading, this time to downtown West Palm Beach.

Leila, set for an early March opening at Datura and Dixie Highway, will be the first restaurant for Roy Assad, originally from Damascus, Syria, and Beirut. He and his wife, Evelyn, will run it.

They're world travelers who've come to appreciate the Middle Eastern cuisines and social dining experiences.

Syrian and Lebanese cuisines are on the menu, which will feature dishes such as fava bean salad, hummus, baba ghanouj, grilled kefta kebab and shrimp with cilantro.

Mezze, the traditional sharing of small plates of foods, will be a big part of the bistro-style restaurant. "It's the Middle Eastern way of dining," Roy said. It's an atmosphere similar to dining at home with friends or family, and sharing as you would with them, he said.

The entertainment they have planned at Leila (it means "exotic nights") includes performances by Joe Zeytoonian, a studio musician who works with Gloria Estefan and others, on the electric oud, a Syrian instrument. Belly dancers also will perform.

Guests will be invited to partake of the water pipe, known in Syria as the *arguileh*. Fruit tobaccos will be offered.

Their Web site has more info; it's www.leilawpb.com.

