



With concern, Elliot Donovan, 2, of Des Moines watches dad descend a sledding hill.



Frederique Boudouani and Brian Bruening of Schera's Restaurant

"Dad! Oh, no! Dad!"

Mike sits up, spits out a mouthful of snow and gives

SIDETRIP TO MOROCCO

Backbone State Park cabins don't have fireplaces, which is disappointing. So if eating next to a roaring flame is your favorite winter activity, head 20 miles to the antique beauty of Elkader, specifically to Schera's Restaurant, perched on the edge of the Turkey River overlooking a stone arch bridge—courtesy of the same masons who built Elkader's lovely stone Catholic church.

Schera's, named for the heroine in "1001 Arabian Nights," draws from North African, Algerian and Mediterranean cuisine to fill its menu, thanks to co-owner Frederique Boudouani, who is of French-Algerian descent.

"When we first moved to Iowa, the dining choices were meat and potatoes or more meat and potatoes," says Boudouani. "We wanted to break that mold."

A colorful Moroccan décor—and a decent fireplace—make the restaurant a great side trip.

Boudouani and his partner, Brian Bruening, met at MIT in Boston then moved to Iowa, where Bruening grew up. They ultimately settled in Elkader, because of its namesake, 1800s Muslim war hero Emir Abd El Kader.

El Kader's international claim to fame is this: While in exile in Damascus (for the war hero stuff) he saved the lives of 12,000 Christians and Jews from mobs incited by the local Turkish governor. El Kader's benevolence was recognized around the world—a Muslim helping thousands of Christians and Jews was big news. Abe Lincoln even sent him a pair of dueling pistols.

"The kicker is that in the 1800s, the most precious thing to the leaders of this town was to name it after someone from another part of the world," says Boudouani.

Another part of the world that also brings us a nice Couscous Royale—veggies and sauce over couscous and skewers—and a fine hummus-like appetizer called Cade, served with a basket of bread and harissa, a Tunisian hot sauce.

Schera's Restaurant, 107 S. Main St., PO Box 726, Elkader, 563/245-1992; www.scheras.com