

Eco can be chic



hodema Consulting Services' managing partner, **Nagi Morkos** takes a look at why the hotel eco-

chic trend is struggling to pick up in the region



Six Senses, Zighy bay resort & spa Oman

As a green and social conscience is now worn everywhere like the latest fashion accessory, the high-end market was duty-bound to jump on the bandwagon and the eco-chic trend reached the hotel world. A new tribe of green-friendly premium customers has emerged and answers to the name LOHAS (Lifestyles Of Health And Sustainability). Their motto: Consume in an informed and ethical manner.

Until recently, luxury and environment didn't go hand-in-hand. Luxury often comes with the idea that guests paying top dollar are entitled to expect more services and thus consume more than the average customer. As for the green movement, it revolves mostly around the principle that energy and consumption should be reduced as much as possible. Their positions have then remained at opposite ends of the spectrum until the emergence of the "eco-chic" concept that defines the bridge between these two worlds, where luxury becomes environmentally friendly.



Adrère Amellal hotel Egypt

The eco-chic hospitality business has its own Tables of the Law. It needs to be financially viable, provide financial benefits to the local community, respect and highlight the culture and traditions of the area where it has established itself and minimize the negative environmental impacts

while trying to contribute positively to the conservation of natural heritage.

Protecting local heritage

More than 900 million tourists traveled in 2010 according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, making the industry one of the largest in the world. With the world becoming more environmentally friendly, investors have come to realize that, when done right, hospitality can actually be an efficient tool to help protect natural heritage and make sense for business.

A global trend

From Kenya to Bangkok, uber-green hotels emerge every day. Europe insists on eco-friendly architecture and refurbishing such as Hi Hotel and Le Morgane in France. But they have a harder time with energy saving than tropical regions. Africa leads the way in eco-chic travel, becoming the epitome of barefoot luxury. Tour operator professionals sell it well claiming it is more about the luxury of the experience than the experience of the luxury. Asia is the most crowded region, with a large number of eco-chic resorts. The Maldives is the flagship destination, followed by Thailand and Cambodia. On the South American side, Mexico and Brazil lead the way. City hotels were the last to realize the importance of sustainability, with some of the luxury brands only joining the trend in recent months such as the New York Palace of the Dorchester Collection.

Recycling & saving energy are the new mantras

For green hotel managers, the new hobby-horses are energy, waste and water-saving measures. Some resorts limit the use of water with low-flow showerheads and

electricity thanks to solar panels and wind generators. Natural ventilation replaces air-conditioning and new systems of ionized water in swimming pools reduce the use of chemicals. Some resorts even installed recycling bins inside the rooms. Another initiative is carbon offsetting, since spending several hours on the plane is far from being green friendly. And in the Maldives, Six Senses Resort & Spas has even turned its Soneva Fushi hotel into a carbon neutral complex.

The Middle East jumps on the bandwagon

Green resorts are being developed in the region, even if it still lags behind the rest of the world. The clientele is mostly composed of Westerners looking for an Arabian experience. The Six Senses Zighy Bay in Oman is a good example on how a luxurious hotel can try to blend in with its natural surroundings. Guests can take an Arabic culinary workshop, go fishing or paragliding. The owner of Six Senses has taken over the region with the Evason Ma'In Hot Springs near Madaba in Jordan. Direct competition is Starwood's brand Element, which can be found in Oman and Abu Dhabi.

Dubai has publicly spoken out for the green trend. In 2008, it launched an eco initiative to encourage hotels to cut their CO2 emissions by 20% by the end of 2011. Outside the city center, Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa promotes traditional life in the desert. Its Bedouin tent settlement offers private suites furnished with regional artwork and antiques.

In Egypt, the Adrère Amellal Desert Eco Lodge embodies eco-chic: the lodges are made of clay, the furniture is carved from local trees, an underwater stream feeds the pool and there is no electricity.

"It needs to be financially viable, provide financial benefits, minimize negative environmental impacts, respect culture and traditions, while contributing to the conservation of natural heritage"

Why Lebanon lags behind

While the Gulf is catching on to the eco-chic trend, going green in Lebanon is still synonymous with rusticity. People associate environment with outdoor activities such as camping and most of the country's beaches are in fact swimming pools with concrete decks, far from the white sand beach picture. Although the authorities haven't tried to raise public awareness yet, some operators are starting to promote the issue. A few eco-lodges have opened, such as the one in Hermel developed by the network Tarhal. They offer activities such as fishing, trekking, rafting and guests can enjoy Lebanese traditional food.

Another key explanation is that investors who have enough money to place in a high-end hotel are unwilling to take the risk of developing an eco-chic project when the local clientele doesn't seem interested in the concept and foreigners only visit the country when it is politically stable.

hodema.net

Kuwait F&B industry

Quick and casual dining flourish



Dana Salem, managing director at Acquire Foods based in Kuwait, gives the lowdown on the country's food and beverage industry.

How would you describe the restaurant market in Kuwait?

According to recent estimates, there are more than 100 ethnic varieties of food available in Kuwait. Restaurants and other eateries range from food stalls to five-star establishments. Despite the prolonged effects of the economic crisis, the region's food service industry witnessed growth in terms of units and transaction. The Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) and Casual Dining Restaurants, underpinned by market demand and lifestyle changes such as seeing eating out as part of a trendy lifestyle, have contributed much to this growth. Entry of major multi-national food service operators has led to growth in competition in the marketplace. This

Photo courtesy of Munch



stimulated the rise in the number of units, both of international and local chains.

What are your current projects?

Acquire Foods was established as a Kuwaiti shareholding company and has acquired four concepts in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region: two renowned franchises, Ribs and Rumps (Kuwait) and The Upper Crust Pizzeria, a casual pizzeria with an American flair (Master Franchise GCC/Middle East North Africa - MENA), along with two homegrown concepts,

Mama's Kitchen, home style kitchen setting and casual dining (homegrown to be franchised out to MENA regions), and Munch & Munch BBQ casual, healthy, fresh & home-made gourmet snacks (homegrown to be franchised out to MENA regions).

What is in the pipeline today?

Acquire is in the process of opening five outlets in Kuwait during 2011. We are also in negotiations with a reputable American franchise in hopes of obtaining the rights to the GCC.

acquirefoods.com

Kuwait New lifestyle hotel

Hotel Missoni Kuwait opens its doors to the public

This luxury lifestyle hotel, developed by The Rezidor Hotel Group, in cooperation with iconic Italian fashion house, Missoni, is located on Arabian Gulf Street, nestled between the entertainment and main shopping district. With a prime location at the fashionable Symphony Centre, the new property offers panoramic views of the Arabian Gulf and the Kuwait City skyline.

The hotel features 169 stylish guest rooms including 63 suites, numerous food and beverage facilities, meetings and events facilities, a Six Senses Spa including a fitness center, yoga studio, separate ladies gym, sauna, and a steam room. "Hotel Missoni offers a surprising experience of style, glamour and hospitality. The interiors are

intended to make our guests feel welcome and comfortable. The brilliant gold, turquoise and sand colors take their inspiration from the land and sea of Kuwait. I am especially pleased with the creation of a palm and cacti terrace garden reflecting the precious local nature," stresses Rosita Missoni, the brand's creative director. Rezidor Hotel Group's subsequent collaborations with Missoni include Hotel Missoni Jebel Sifah in Oman scheduled to open in 2013, Hotel Missoni Ilha de Cajaiba in Brazil currently under development, and the recently signed Hotel Missoni, Antalya in Turkey.

hotelmissioni.com



hotel team members with Rosita Missoni

IN BRIEF

Shake Shack, which serves "the only burger busy New Yorkers slow down for" will open this summer at The Avenues Mall. Master franchisee M.H. Alshaya Co. has already opened the brand's first Middle Eastern outlet in Dubai's Mall of the Emirates.

shakeshack.com

Kidzania, the award-winning family entertainment and education brand, and M.H. Alshaya Co. have partnered to develop and manage a 5,000 sqm KidZania State in Phase 3 of The Avenues Mall. This outlet is expected to open in 2012.

kidzania.com

Planet Hollywood, which offers a dining experience inspired by Hollywood glamour, opened on March 24 at the Olympia Mall.

planethollywood.com



Photo courtesy of Missoni

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A story of passion



hodema Consulting Services' senior consultant, **Cyril Fattal**, talks to Kuwait's MMC culinary development and production director Semaan Hilal about his life, his move from his home country Lebanon in 1986, and his work abroad

How did you reach your current position?

My parents' relation with food has always fascinated me. My mother was an excellent cook, and my father a good eater. The way he handled his food intrigued me. He used to observe my mother cooking and examine the food before eating it. He would eat with passion, enjoying every bite, savoring flavors and textures. It was the favorite part of his day. This increased and fed my curiosity with the desire to learn more about food.

Back in those days, all my friends were studying medicine or engineering. Therefore declaring my passion for food and cooking to my parents was a tough call, as I was going into an unknown future.

"Declaring my passion for food and cooking to my parents and friends was a tough call"

It has, however, been uphill ever since joining Dekwaneh's Hotel Management School in Beirut, headed by Khairallah Mdawar. I worked throughout my time to learn as much as I could, as fast as I could. Upon graduation, aged 19, Nouhad Dammous, who had taken over the school's management, sent me to the Riyadh Marriott. After a stint in Saudi Arabia, I traveled to France to pursue my studies attending many workshops at L'Ecole Lenôtre. From 1984 to 1986 I worked as a sous-chef at the Casino du Liban from, after which I left to Kuwait, where I still reside.

My hard work, perseverance and thirst to learn, coupled with the privilege to work with excellent chefs, are all factors that landed me where I am today.

Who influenced you?

I have worked with remarkable professionals throughout my career. Although it is very hard to mention them all, I shall start with

Saiid Abi Aad, Holiday Inn Beirut's executive chef in 1977. He taught me what working with passion and heart meant. Until today, I mirror his quest of perfection in every dish I make.

Salim Al Hashash, Moucha restaurant's executive chef and in my opinion the best Lebanese chef of his time taught me everything there is to know about this cuisine. I still live by his advice today.

In 1979, I worked alongside René Tourel, Faraya Mzaar's executive chef; a school of thoughts and abilities. For him, in order to be a leader in my own kitchen, I had to master all of its cooking styles and departments.

During my time at Le Méridien Kuwait, I worked with master chef Jacques Manière, specializing in cuisine à la vapeur and sous-vide.

I hold a lot of respect for Mishari Al Roudhan, president of MMC, the visionary who introduced Lenôtre Paris to Kuwait. His courage, will and hard work helped us reach our present status. Always looking for the challenges, which he believes he can tackle with his team. Preaching teamwork and hard work ever since 1996 allowed him to raise the food and beverage standards in Kuwait.

Tell us of milestones at MMC & Lenôtre Kuwait

Before Kuwait, there was nothing called Café Lenôtre. Lenôtre Paris was only a school, a boutique and a caterer. We opened the café in Kuwait against all odds and took this flagship to a place no one had ever imagined possible. Our success reached Paris through our clients, after which Lenôtre Paris decided to open the Café Lenôtre at Pavillon Elysée, the first in France. Today Lenôtre has an established name in the world of catering in the region. We have requests to service events all over the Arabian Gulf, from royal weddings to sport events. We have a mobile team ready to reach our guests and deliver the exceptional quality expected from Lenôtre.

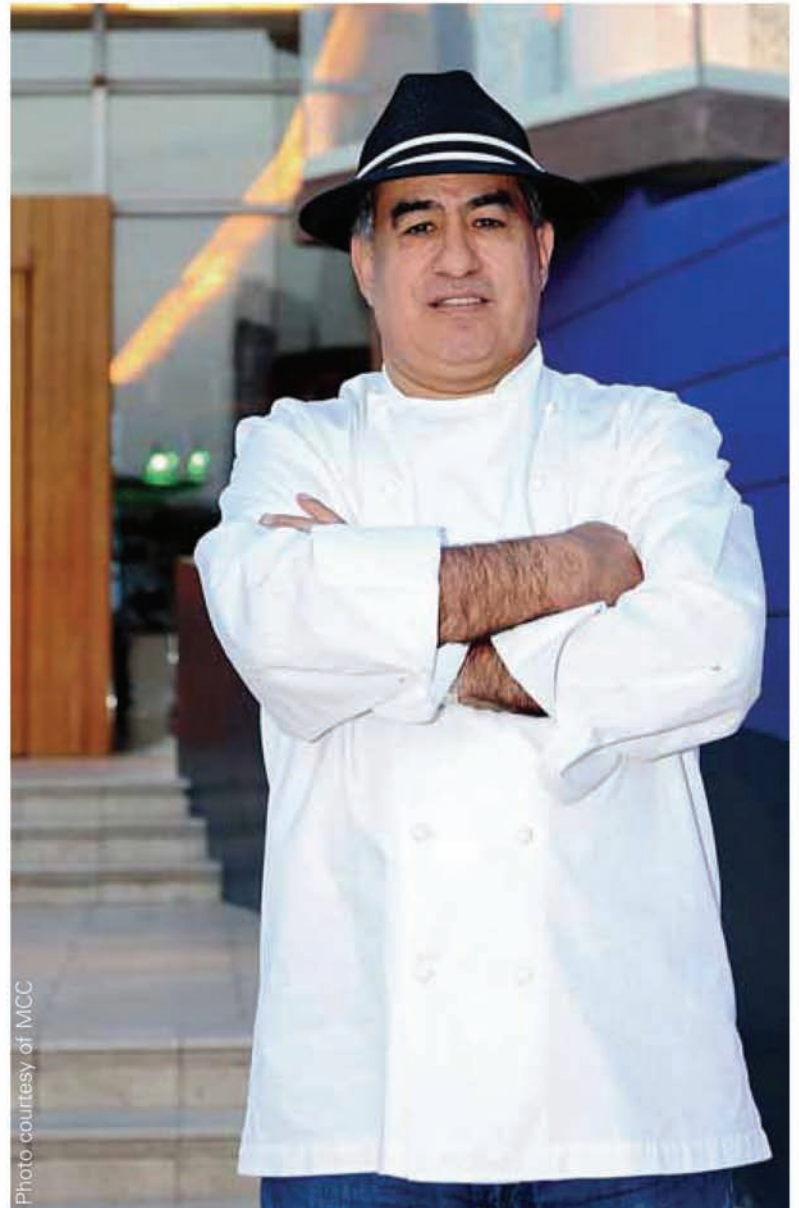


Photo courtesy of MMC

MMC is now considered a pioneer in the food business in Kuwait. We have created and added 5 concepts to our portfolio. They occupy an important growing place in the market, namely Crimson Garden, an Iranian restaurant; Rice, a restaurant where cultures are presented on a tray; Italo's Café, an Italian Café; Sawah, a modern oriental café and Café Meem, an Arabesque café.

Could you sum up your culinary vision?

Cooking is a scientific art. It is a science because it demands constant research and update. Trends come and go, cooking styles remain. Throughout his career a chef should constantly seek ways to enhance his knowledge.

It is an art because it portrays the chef's personality. My cooking must always speak on my behalf, sending messages of quality, creativity and consistency. Creating a dish is like painting; it is mixing colors, textures and shapes in harmony triggering sensual bliss.

I wish to leave a mark, share my passion with my colleagues, family members and guests, and

ensure continuity in the work I have spent a lifetime creating.

How do you envision Kuwaiti F&B in 3-5 years?

Kuwait has the potential to become a reference for creative and successful concepts. It has proven to be a worthy competitor to Lebanon and the UAE, with concepts already being exported to the Middle East and beyond. The fact that the Kuwaiti population is very well traveled and highly educated encourages new developments in the food and beverage sector. There is a strong and continuous will from Kuwaiti entrepreneurs and investors to constantly raise the standards of the industry and spearhead regional market trends.

Advice for the next generation of ME chefs?

Keep discovering. Never think that you have reached the top at any stage of your career. There is always something new to learn about or from all people that surround you. Never rest on your laurels, and always aim at being the best in whatever you do.

mmckuwait.com