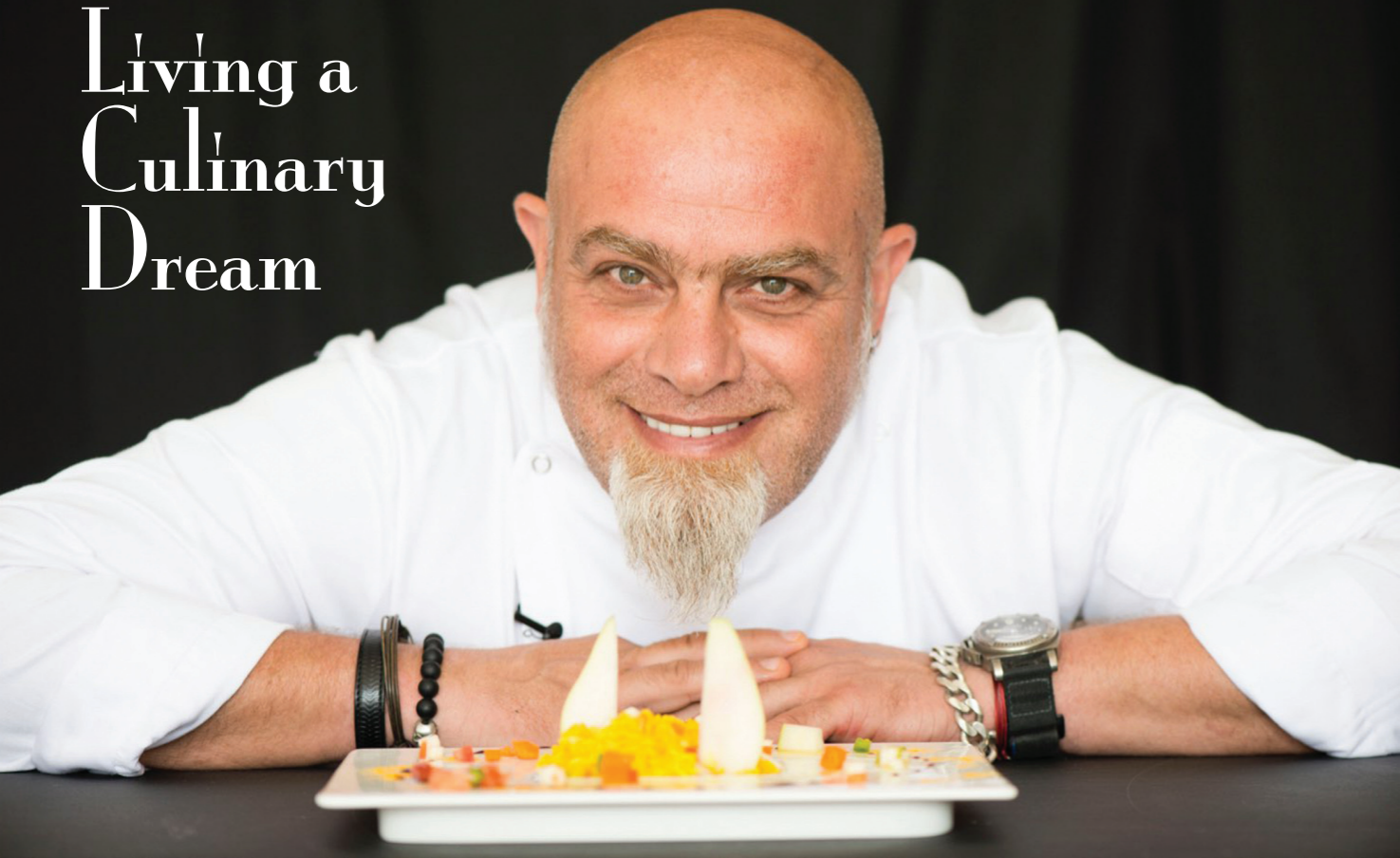


Living a Culinary Dream



Interview with Chef and Culinary Consultant

Joe Barza

Behind that man dressed in black wearing a cowboy hat with an undistinguished beard, lies an amazing story of a man who left his job as a bodyguard to seek his luck in the food industry. His journey was not at all easy. His early steps in the food industry saw him move from one war zone to another by leaving Lebanon in the early eighties for South Africa. Notwithstanding all the challenges he came across, his perseverance and determination led him to develop into an internationally respected chef, culinary consultant and TV personality. Chef Joe Barza takes us through his journey in the food industry and shares with us his views on Lebanese food as well as his experience of spring.

Who is Joe Barza?

I am a Lebanese Terroir Chef who lives a dream. My professional career is driven by my passion for food, the attachment to my roots and homeland (TYR –Lebanon), the place where I grew up and the nostalgia of my fishermen ancestors.

Your first steps in the culinary world were in a very tough geopolitical setting. How did you find your way through such an environment?

It was not easy surviving and making a name for myself in such an environment. When a man has a strong will, faith, receiving things with an open heart, taking advantage of the positive sides and accepting negative ones, it surely can lead to the right way. Later on, I left my country heading to South Africa to start a new challenge. I worked hard, learned and shared my passion with other chefs. My journey as a chef was full of experiences and this exchange of culture and knowledge made me grow on all levels. Today I am grateful for it because I found my way successfully into the culinary world.

Tell us about your style of cooking.

To master traditional Lebanese Mediterranean cuisine, is to believe in the values of our heritage. I am in constant search of the right ingredients and I always try to capture its fabulous flavours into my plate, keeping it healthy and tasty at the same time.

In what way have you revolutionized Lebanese cuisine?

Indeed, my goal was in revolutionizing the Lebanese cuisine and what I did is lifting up the Lebanese cuisine from the box by combining the old and modern cuisine and introducing new culinary trends. My passion, love for terroir food is a reflection of my insights and a recognition to my ancestors.

Lebanese cuisine is considered to be among the five most recognized cuisines in the world. What is so special about it?

In Lebanon, we have four different seasons which make our land rich by producing a variety of seasonal vegetables



and ingredients. Our rural farmers in different villages in Lebanon still eat from what they harvest and each season they prepare their Mouneh - home processing seasonal foods – to be consumed during the winter season and/or all year long. As a chef, I take advantage of this as there is a lot of potentials behind it. Like for example, when I introduced the “Freekeh” to my dishes - today known as the new Quinoa (the roasted green wheat with a smoky flavour) was like a new discovery for the market.

We should not forget that we also share a lot with the Middle Eastern and Levant countries and I find myself influenced by the mixture of those cultures and all values around.

How would you describe the Middle East and Lebanese culinary developments at the moment?

Lebanese cuisine today competes very well on an international scale and is ahead of many world-class kitchens when it comes to taste and quality. In my opinion, Lebanese culinary developments and the Middle East is like a snowball regardless what is happening around, what a man can do another can do. As a chef, when I travel around the world I always try to initiate and →

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spread to others the values and richness of Lebanese Cuisine.

Can you share with us the concept behind Bioland?

“Organic food” is not a trend, it’s what our ancestors used to eat and simply called it “food”. That’s why in Bioland we own our farms to grow organic food, focusing on Lebanese terroir and make it accessible to all, i.e. good quality for good prices. Beside this, we also organize school visits to our farm restaurant in Batroun-City in North Lebanon – in order to prepare our little future green minds to respect and value nature, environment and eat healthier.

Unlike other chefs, you chose to open a consultancy company rather than a restaurant. Why?

Before opening my consultancy company, people used to consult me knowing my passion and love for the food and cuisine. So I was being consulted but not in an official way, ignoring that one day this will be the start and launch of my own business as a chef. Now I find it very challenging and exciting to travel, explore and introduce new food trends.

How does Spring effect Joe Barza’s mood in the kitchen?

In so many ways, every year Spring is the queen of seasons and a new beginning for nature, for life. The freshness and smell of flowers inspire me a lot as a chef, and as the green plants and beauty of the flowers please the eyes, I also love to please the eyes when looking at my plates. For me, each season has its own impact as well on my dishes’ creation.

What are your plans for this year?

I am actually the Regional Brand Ambassador for the “HILTON Group” in GCC & Africa and will be promoting/introducing new signature dishes. I will be as well working on the Hilton DEAD Sea –Jordan and other projects in Saudi Arabia and Europe. My presence also on many international culinary /gastronomic events keeps me busy all year long.



My passion, love for terroir food is a reflection of my insights

