

Food with an Eclectic Flare

By Family Flavours

Celebrity Chef Joe Barza chats with Sana' Qusous 'Awad, author of our Quick & Easy corner, while he cooks a few of his favourite dishes against a scenic view of the Dead Sea.



Known for giving traditional Middle Eastern recipes a modern twist with colour, flavour and artistic flare, Barza says he owes all that he knows about cooking to South Africa. "I learnt how to think and how to cook in the six years I spent in South Africa," he states, sporting a black Fedora.

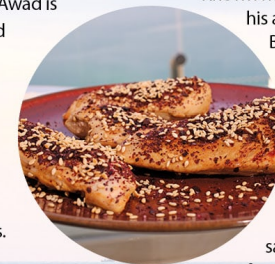
"The way he adds unconventional ingredients to traditional recipes is so interesting," says 'Awad. "Like adding pesto to maftoul" she explains. 'Awad is surprised at how he mixes European and Middle Eastern ingredients together.

Cooking: A reflection of life
Barza's style of cooking is a reflection of how he lives his life – spontaneously, with no one day ever the same. "People are fed up with being served the same traditional dishes over and over," he says.

The celebrity chef shows 'Awad how he transforms a typical musakhan chicken and onion dish into *fatet musakhan* with a bread topping rather than a bread base. "Interestingly enough, he uses crispy roasted bread pieces drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with sumac as the last layer on his *musakhan*," describes gourmet food enthusiast 'Awad, who's inspired now to use the same crispy bread recipe with a dip.

Both cooks continue preparing dish after dish as they chat away and Barza shares his recipe for *maftul* the Barza way. "I'm surprised at how he drops the grilled chicken into the hot stock to keep the chicken juicy; we don't usually do this when cooking *maftul*," notes 'Awad. Barza's use of basil pesto in this recipe also leaves her dumbfounded.

Known not only for his tasty concoctions but also for his attractive food colours and presentation, Barza adds basil pesto and tomatoes to *hommos* to "satisfy the visual senses", as he puts it. "I want people who taste my food to savour each flavour and to leave with an aftertaste to remember!" the jubilant chef states.



That special aftertaste
"I strive to give each ingredient its value," says Barza, throwing in spices here and a sprig of parsley there. He insists that 'Awad sample the food as they cook to see if the sauce is up to par.

Barza prefers to cook savoury dishes, as desserts require more "mathematical thinking and specific measurements."

The father of two just likes to go with the flow and is spontaneous when cooking. You will see him adding a bit of salt, plunging his spoon in the sauce to taste and then adding some more spices.

Family Chefs

Family and health

Barza cooks every day, especially when his two grown-up children visit; they have both been influenced by their father in terms of their career paths – Noura works in food filming and is her father's marketing manager, while Karim is studying hotel management.

This father's love affair with food was not planned. Originally working as a bodyguard, Barza found himself in the middle of a civil war in Lebanon and needing a way out. Food was his refuge.

The tan, robust chef, who sports a neat, white trimmed beard, is a staunch believer of eating well and living well. He works out (swimming and walking), pointing out that chefs must look after their health and maintain a healthy lifestyle both in the kitchen and at home. "I focus on local vegetables and use a lot of olive oil in my dishes, forsaking butter altogether," says the trendy chef. A silver fork and knife earring shine from his left ear.

A tough business

The outspoken chef admits that the "kitchen is very tough." Travelling extensively at least five times a month, it's been a long 30-year journey.

Barza also runs his own culinary consultancy firm, has served as a judge in the Emmy Award-winning television show *Top Chef* Middle East version and is the recipient of international culinary awards. He owes his success, he says, to "Hard work, very very hard work."



The celebrity chef is known for adding unconventional ingredients to traditional recipes

And what does our own foodie Sana' Qusous 'Awad have to say after her encounter with our celebrity chef? "The combination and flavour of his food have me itching to experiment with ingredients!"



'Awad sampling the food to see if the sauce is up to par



People are fed up with being served the same traditional dishes over and over, says Chef Joe Barza

Chef Joe Barza's signature Lebanese dishes are now available at the newly opened Hilton Dead Sea Resort & Spa.

Beetroot Salad

(Serves 4)

Ingredients

200 g cooked beetroot, cut into cubes
200 g romaine lettuce
200 g bakleh leaves
20 g fresh basil leaves
1 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp lemon juice
Salt to taste

Marinate the above ingredients in the below for four hours

For the marinade

100 g olive oil
50 g balsamic vinegar
20 g orange zest
10 g salt
10 g sugar
20 g tahini
20 ml orange juice
10 ml lemon juice
100 g white onions, sliced

For the yoghurt sauce

400 g labaneh
100 g yoghurt
Pinch of dry mint
Salt and white pepper to taste
Mix all of the above

For garnish

2 segments orange, peeled
20 g roasted pine seeds
Onion slices
1 pinch sumac
Couple of drops of olive oil

Directions

1. Toss romaine lettuce in a bowl with bakleh, basil, olive oil, lemon juice and salt
2. Add beetroot, then the yoghurt sauce and onions; sprinkle with sumac and drizzle with olive oil
3. Garnish with pine nuts, orange segments and onion and sprinkle again with sumac





Maftoul

(Serves 4)

For the chicken

4 pcs chicken breast, each 100g, cooked and sliced

Ingredients for the base sauce

50 ml olive oil
200 g peeled tomato
200 g tomato
100 g tomato paste
25 g chilli paste
2 ½ cups water

Blend all the ingredients together

For the sauce

80 g chopped onions
10 g garlic
10 g coriander seeds, crushed
50 g pomegranate molasses
20 g salt
6 g allspice
1 tsp paprika to taste

Directions

1. Sauté onions, add garlic and keep sautéing, then add salt, paprika and allspice
2. Mix in the base sauce, salt and coriander seeds
3. Remove from heat and blend using a blender
4. Add the molasses and blend again

For the feta cheese topping

50 g feta cheese
10 g onion, chopped
7 g fresh mint
10 g mustard
1 tbsp lemon juice
20 g red vinegar
Salt to taste
1 tbsp sugar
1 clove garlic
4 tbsp oil olive
100 g corn oil
Pinch of citric acid

Blend ingredients (except for the oil) in a blender; add the oil gradually

For sautéing the maftoul

60 g olive oil
1 cup hot water
4 g paprika powder
1 pinch chilli powder
8 g mint leaves, chopped
8 g parsley, chopped
1 tbsp pesto sauce
5 g coriander seeds, crushed
600 g raw maftoul
250 g tomato, chopped (for garnish)

For garnish

250 g fresh tomato, chopped
1 stem parsley, chopped
Pinch of roasted sesame seeds



Directions

1. Cook maftoul in 40 g olive oil using a pot with a wide base and stir until it turns golden
2. Add the hot water and 200 g of the maftoul sauce
3. Cook covered for about 20 minutes on low heat, stirring a little
4. Halfway through the cooking (around 10 minutes), add paprika, 20 g olive oil and chilli powder
5. Add water as needed until the maftoul is soft enough
6. Remove from heat and add chopped mint, parsley and pesto
7. Mix and adjust the salt to taste
8. Serve maftoul in a serving bowl, cover with chopped tomatoes, feta topping and maftoul sauce; garnish with parsley and sesame seeds



Fattet Musakhan

(Serves 4)

Ingredients

400 g cooked yellow mansaf rice
200 g boiled chickpeas
300 g grilled chicken, julienne cut, seasoned with sumac and sautéed in onion
10 g roasted pine seeds for garnishing
Paprika for garnish

For the yoghurt tahini mix

500 g yoghurt
40 g tahini
5 g garlic, finely chopped
100 ml chicken stock
20 g olive oil
100 g roasted shrak bread (see below)
Salt to taste

For the shrak bread

1. Sprinkle olive oil on the bread, then three pinches of sumac and roast in the oven

2. Break the bread into pieces (2 cm each)

Directions

1. Using a glass or stainless steel ramekin, add the rice, then the chickpeas, then the chicken
2. Pour the yoghurt tahini and add the roasted shrak; garnish with pine seeds, olive oil and a sprinkle of paprika

