

THREE OF LEBANON'S CULINARY MASTERS JOIN HANDS



Chefs Charles Azar, Alan Geaam & Joe Barza

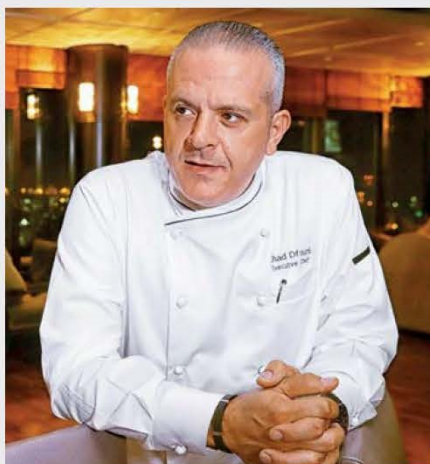
Chefs Alan Geaam, Joe Barza and Charles Azar hosted an unforgettable event at Le Petit Gris in Beirut, a Parisian-style eatery founded in 2011 by Makram Rabbath, a food enthusiast. This event

saw Geaam, originally a self-taught talent who currently heads four of Paris' most reputed restaurants, working alongside Joe Barza, a chef at the top of his game and arguably one of Lebanon's

most uncontested pioneers of fusion cuisine. Azar, another heavyweight contender lent his sweet-making knowhow to bring this formidable event to a beautiful close.

Restaurant Alan Geaam is one of the most renowned culinary destinations in Paris, and it's the namesake chef who's behind the full-star rating of the diner on TripAdvisor. Born to Lebanese parents living in Liberia, Geaam did not develop his talent in the classes or kitchens of a gastronomy star. Rather, passionate about cooking, and motivated by the desire to share, this self-taught artist took 20 years to learn, understand and, eventually, find his culinary identity. Alan Geaam now has three restaurants in Paris, two of which offer a bistro experience: AG les Halles and Nicolas Flamel. The third, 'Alan Geaam', has become the rendezvous for high gastronomy. A citizen of the world, Geaam is a French success story who, from the slices of his life spent in Liberia, Lebanon, the United States, Italy and the Czech Republic, has brought back colors, smells, products and know-how. alangeaam.fr

HILTON REVAMPS JAZZ BAR IN BEIRUT WITH CHEF JIHAD DFOUNI AT THE HELM



The five-star hotel cluster's executive chef, **Jihad Dfouni**, revealed in an interview with HN that five years after the Jazz Bar's launch, the entire menu was revisited, with more changes on the way for the remaining F&B venues.

"For the last few years, we've only made slight adjustments to the overall menu, but mid-year, our cluster GM, Naif Zureikat, informed me that we would change the whole concept, from the food to the tableware."

Set on the 31st floor of the Hilton Beirut

Habtoor Grand Hotel, Dfouni chose an international menu that pairs well with drinks and the overall ambiance of the hotel bar. "The menu is engineered to suit every palate. Our in-house guests are mainly Europeans, expats and business travelers looking for a place to relax and to have a quick bite with a cocktail. It's casual food, but the presentation is very elegant. We've engineered everything in-house; even the wood pallets for the sliders." From foie gras lollipops to fresh crab salad and asparagus wrapped with Parma ham, the menu takes finger food to a whole new level.

"If you want an elegant seated menu you can go to Le Ciel, which, incidentally, will also change once our head chef comes back from Waldorf Astoria in Paris to train with their three-Michelin star chefs. Hilton is a hotel engine of 4,600 hotels around the globe so we have the advantage of having an established network for training."

During his career, Dfouni has notched up 26 years of experience in hotels, spanning international destinations that include the UAE. Beginning his career in 1989 as an executive chef at Bayview Hotel Beirut, chef Dfouni steadily climbed the rankings, taking on roles at prestigious properties

that included Phoenicia Hotel Beirut and Dorchester Hotel. Prior to his latest role, Dfouni was the executive sous chef of Hilton Beirut Habtoor Grand, where he oversaw the entire hotel central kitchen operation, including the restaurants, monitoring all food preparation, presentation and delivery. His storied accomplishments resulted in his promotion to the position of executive chef in 2015.

Dfouni also comprised part of the judging panel of HORECA Kuwait 2016. "It was my first time judging and to be honest, as a HORECA judge, I was the novice among them. The panel was made up of renowned chefs with Michelin stars from around the world. The level of the chefs competing was also very good," he said.

Considered one of the most meticulous chefs locally, he has taken his culinary career to a point where management is the logical next step. "I think 26 years in the kitchen is enough," he said. "I started as a steward and now I'm on track for operations, but whatever I end up doing, I'll always apply the same principles I do in the kitchen – do it right and work from your heart – it makes all the difference."

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