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Samantha Wood, food
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Antoine Chassonnery,
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Norihito Muranaka,
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Ayat Abdulla, pastry
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Nawal Al Nuaimi, chef
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Nicolas Bacheyre,
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Un Dimanche à Paris

La Pâtisserie

A SWEET INFLUENCE

Catering News and Sopexa hosted 'La Pâtisserie: A Sweet Influence' at Inked in Dubai's Al Quoz on 12 January, an event organised for the French Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with Valrhona to explore how French patisserie has influenced the Middle East's dessert trends, ingredients and culture. A panel of French, Middle Eastern and expat chefs, brand representatives and experts discussed the influence of French Pastry, the role of ingredients in creating quality desserts, the impact of social media on patisserie developments, and the trends shaping the future of desserts in the Middle East and globally.

Following the debate, the panelists sat down to a

lunch prepared by Hadrien Villedieu, executive chef of Inked, with savoury dishes taking inspiration from French patisserie. Special guest, Nicolas Bacheyre, executive pastry chef, Un Dimanche à Paris – who flew to Dubai from France for the occasion – hosted a demonstration to showcase the creation of his dessert, "Just like a lime tart, refreshed with mint", which also combines sweet and savoury aspects.

'La Pâtisserie: A Sweet Influence' formed part of a series of global events under the theme "The Intersection of Food Cultures", which aims to encourage cooperation and the exchange of knowledge between France and culinary cultures around the world.

How do international chefs combine French know-how with their own innovations?

Nicolas Bacheyre: I think there are a lot of foreign chefs that come to France to learn the classics. Some of them stay. In Paris we have chefs from Mexico, they've opened their own restaurants and pastry shops with a twist of where they've come from. Others go back to their countries, but the problem is pastry evolution is fast, it changes every six months so when you leave France, you lose something.

Antoine Chassonnery: You see Japanese people going back to Japan and their skill level is higher than it was in France.

Elizabeth Stevenson: French pastries are adapted in the Middle East. Everyone uses classic recipes here and then gives them their own twist. But I think that means it's important to have a strong culture and identity to latch on to. I think the most important thing in this region is for Emiratis to learn the trade and just start to make things and remove the cultural barriers. That gives it more legitimacy. There's so much going on in Paris it does influence people internationally, but a successful project or idea can take aspects of that and apply it to another culture.

Ayat Abdulla: In Bahrain, we are a bit more open than the UAE. Recently a government fund was introduced for Bahraini chefs to go and choose whatever professional certificate they want and the government will pay for it in full. A lot of people are going to Le Cordon Bleu or the other famous schools, but when they come back, they may not find the audience locally, and they often change back to the old recipes – I feel sorry for that.

Norihito Muranaka: Working in another country makes things easier. I was working in Tokyo and France before, so I know the working style of both countries. When I came here I was working with other nationalities like Indians, Filipinos, etc., but I had already worked in France, so I'd already experienced different cultures and influences.

Nicolas: Wherever you're from, you have that culture inside you. A few years ago, it was cool to do

things that looked Asian and Japanese but I think only Japanese chefs can make what they're making. Otherwise it's just a fake Japanese dish or a dessert that looks Japanese. Japanese chefs can use matcha and it's normal; for us it's like putting something Asian inside but not knowing how to use it. I think if you've not been trained by a French chef or a French school you can only do something that looks French.

What role do ingredients play in creating quality desserts?

Zeyneb Larabi: Ingredients play a key role in a chef's inspiration. Culinary gastronomy became so sophisticated that we lost the ingredients. In the pastry and the cuisine in general, chefs are going back to the ingredients and how they can highlight and balance these rather than hiding them.

Nicolas: I think it's too easy to use things like lobster, caviar and things like that. For me, you're really going to see the creation of the chefs that make a three-star Michelin plate with something as simple as carrots.

Zeyneb: Yes of course, it's a combi-

nation. A good chocolate can also be badly used and this is where the training comes in. For chocolate and cocoa in general, we need to have the best terroir and our mission is to go from the beginning and to have the entire value chain working together to provide the best ingredient. This is where the chef comes in with the final plate.

Nicolas: Chocolate is something particular that we eat every day. People coming into the shop don't taste different chocolate, they don't compare it. Whenever you sell a chocolate cake in France you don't say if it's made with Valrhona.

Samantha Wood: But here in the UAE some chefs do; I think that's also a trend that's changing. You're actually seeing the ingredients, the suppliers being mentioned in menus, on social media as a proof of quality. Consumers are demanding it as well, they'll ask where you've sourced the chocolate.

Nawal Al Nuaimi: I like Valrhona and mentioning that in my menu and on social media. If my customers ask 'what is so special about your dessert?' I might say I'm using Valrhona chocolate and this





is a good selling point for me, and maybe it helps educate people about chocolate.

Coming to education, do you feel that there is a need for more training in the region?

Ayat: People that want to learn something just want to jump to the last step, they want to know how to do bonbons. They don't find the basics interesting. Before having French pastry shops here, a lot of shops were doing things in the wrong way and just thought this was the product. When you give them the real one they will experience it and then know the difference.

Nawal: This is what happened when I opened my shop. I hired people with experience who didn't really know how to do things. In the Middle East it's all about taking shortcuts and not doing things from scratch, but that's where education plays a major role. Taste and quality will then be different.

Honorine Reach: I think we need to bring a lot of skills and techniques because many hotels and restaurants are looking for French pastry chefs because we have

all these things we learned at school and knowledge of products that we can share with our teams so we can help develop other chefs in Dubai. We find people here want to do the latest trends but they don't know how to cook sugar for macarons.

Nicolas: It's too focused on the visual aspect and not enough on taste. You buy based on what it looks like but you'll come back if it tastes good. If customers don't come back, you'll have to shut down.

Ayat: In the GCC people are crazy about social media, so they go to the restaurants where they can take photos that will amaze other people.

Samantha: I think people order based on what will look better on social media.

Zeyneb: Restaurant managers are saying that customers are not even looking at the menu. They are just showing the picture they saw on Instagram so they are really relying on the feedback they get from pictures.

Samantha: I think we'll see a move where social media will replace the menu in restaurants.

Nawal: It already has to an extent.

Nicolas: Some owners ask us to do desserts but make them very visually appealing before thinking about the taste. It has to look nice on the pictures because we want people to come for the pictures. It's the wrong way around.

How has social media impacted pastry chefs and consumers?

Samantha: I think that desserts get more likes and engagement than any other food. I see it when I post on Instagram – it doesn't matter if it's good or not it will get more likes. Anything that has over 500,000 hashtags is considered a trend and 'pastry' has 3.3 million posts while 'savory' has 100,000 so that's just evidence that pastry and desserts are more popular; they are more photogenic.

Ayat: I recently went to do a menu for a pastry shop in UAE and the lady was just browsing Instagram accounts asking for things she was seeing. If you want to copy others, why am I here? Just go into the



shop, give the picture to your pastry chef and ask them to do it.

Nicolas: In France people want to see everything that happens in the kitchen. When I post videos of something like piping the meringue on the lemon tart, it gets thousands of likes even though it's just something very basic I do every day.

Samantha: It's because you're showing something interactive on social media and that will get more engagement than if you had posted a photograph of the piping. The beauty is that you're going back to basics, you're educating people and 10 years ago you didn't have social media to be able to do that so people would never know.

Nicolas: These influencers just have to post one picture of your cakes and then you can be sure that within an hour your shop will be full. That's crazy.

Nawal: I hired someone to take it off my hands for a week and my audience noticed immediately and I got direct messages from them saying 'who's that?' I'm

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- NICOLAS BACHEYRE -

not going to lose it again. It's a connection between me and them and that's how I build my business.

Samantha: I think it's very obvious from an outsider's perspective if it's the person behind that brand that's posting or if it's a company or someone that works for them.

Ayat: But people want to go inside your life. People complain to me, 'why are you not taking photos of your real life?' When I'm in the house I'm a mother, when I'm at work, I'm a chef.

Samantha: But that's where authenticity comes in.

What are the major trends in pastry in France and in the Middle East?

Nicolas: We're going back to the basics of pastry with pie bases, St. Honoré, eclairs, etc. I think there is a generation that forgot the basics and that wants to go for something really sophisticated. It's about doing the products very simply but very well.

Ayat: I think when we talk about trends in the GCC, we've got to talk about Kuwait because they are the masters of trends – they love food and travel a lot. A trend in Kuwait will last two to three months maximum but then it will be adopted by other GCC countries for one or two years.

Elizabeth: It's also possible to cook from home in Kuwait, so there's a phenomenon of women that produce from home and they even do their own packaging.

Ayat: A lot of products come from homes and they have the license to export it outside and often they have only one product. Now they have factories of this one product and they just export it to other GCC countries.



Nawal: I just came from Kuwait last week and it was just to try food there. I tried maybe 15 – 20 shops and it was about tasting not eating. Japanese cheesecake is the trend in Kuwait now. They call it cotton cheesecake – it's very soft and fluffy.

Ayat: But it's also about going back to basics in Kuwait. It's about the very traditional sweets their grandmothers were doing.

Zeyneb: Coffee sweets are very specific to Kuwait. They are also quite open to mixing things so you can have zaatar chocolate for example. There were a lot of franchises before but now it's the opposite in Kuwait – they are creating their own brands and opening them outside of the country.

Nawal: I took all of the ingredients of the traditional Arabic kunafa – pistachio, kunafa dough, saffron, sugar syrup, rose syrup – and made a tart. It was about taking a classic Middle Eastern dish and

turning it into something that nobody is doing or has tried before.

Samantha: I think the healthy dessert, gluten-free, vegan is a trend. I've just come back from Australia and every dessert was gluten-free or vegan, and this was in top, fine-dining restaurants.

Zeyneb: The healthy part is very important because it's not going anywhere. Brands and chefs are consistently trying to remove sugar, to replace the gelatin with other ingredients and techniques. You see less buttercream in desserts and replaced with white chocolate or different techniques and even in the restaurants you see the 'à la minute' thing so we'll do the choux in front of you, the mille-feuille is the same. It's how pastry chefs and professional chefs can elevate the culinary industry by proposing healthier things, less sweet, more technically ori-

ented to have a better taste and texture.

Nicolas: I'm working as much as I can with gluten-free. If I can just replace the gluten flour with another one, I'll do it, but if it has to change the recipe and the techniques and I have to train all my team I won't do it.

Ayat: In Bahrain people are crazy about gluten-free.

Antoine: I don't think in Dubai or Kuwait they are ready yet; maybe in a few years. I've tried to create items reducing the sugar or removing the gluten.

Elizabeth: I think it's a trend to replace wheat flour with gluten-free flour. In my opinion it's never as good as the original but the approach shouldn't be to replace the original but to change it. So keep pastries with flour as they are, but come up with something new that uses a different type of sweetener and don't label it gluten-free, why does it have to be?





Tuna mille-feuille, avocado coulis, crème de wasabi



lunch was prepared by Hadrien Villedieu, executive chef of Inked, and comprised savoury dishes taking inspiration from French patisserie



Duck and potato entremets, notes of mustard

Ayat: For me I want to eat the original thing.

Samantha: If you're going to have dessert, go for it. If not, then have cheese. I think nowadays social media accounts for something becoming global because it can go viral in minutes whereas it took longer before. So a trend can stay a trend for more than a year if people are sharing it on social media, and sadly I think it doesn't necessarily need to taste good.

Zeyneb: Fast moving trends are also pushing brands to innovate a lot. We have a very strong research and development department and innovation is very important. We're trying every six months to have something unique developed by our planters, our R&D specialists, so it's key to provide that to the industry.

Ayat: Yes, and our innovation as chefs depends on what the brands make available.

A LESSON IN LA PÂTISSERIE

Chef Nicolas Bacheyre, executive pastry chef, Un Dimanche à Paris demonstrated the creation of his sweet and savoury dessert, “Just like a lime tart, refreshed with mint”

Please explain the dessert you demonstrated?

This dessert is my interpretation of the lemon tart, which is made of sweet dough, lemon cream and meringue. I wanted to keep all the bases of this and transform it. The sweet dough is made with almond crumble and a pinch of lime zest, while the lemon cream is made of lemon, a pinch of ginger and yuzu. It's cooked like a pastry cream but at the end instead of butter, I used olive oil. Then there's a meringue made with lemon juice and I bring in a touch of chef's cooking with the pesto. Originally, it's made of basil, olive oil and pine nuts so I changed everything. I took out the pine nuts and used mint instead of basil and then just a touch of olive oil and sugar. This is a real mix between savoury and sweet; it's really fresh with an acid flavour.

Do you often mix savoury and sweet?

Yes, I like to play with savoury flavours like spices, herbs, vinegar, salt flour, pepper, tea, etc. I always tell my team not to stick to what they know but to walk into the kitchen, open the drawers and use what they find. Just try it!

How has French know-how been spread into the international culinary world?

There's one sentence the first chef I worked for told me when I was an apprentice: gastronomy is worldwide but pastry is French. For me, everything new pops up first in Paris and then it spreads all over France, then Europe, then the world.

What trends are you seeing in France?

Young chefs are opening shops with a mixture of street food and luxury des-



Chef Nicolas flew to Dubai from Paris for the event



serts, building them in front of you to offer fresher things. They are taking the essentials of the desserts and removing everything that's not important. It's having all the experience from hotels and fine dining restaurants and now just concentrating on a simple raspberry tart, but making it perfect.

What are French consumers demanding in pastry?

A lot of chefs are going back to the French classics. If you know how to make a pie base or a St. Honore perfectly, with good cream and good texture, then you can do whatever you want that's more sophisticated. For me the shop of tomorrow in France,

will be something that provides what people want, like lemon tart, éclair, mille-feuille, because they know those cakes and for sure they're going to buy them.

So how can chefs continue to be creative?

You always want to prove you can do complicated things but most people don't see it because they aren't pastry chefs, they are customers. The hardest thing in pastry is to make something simple. If you know how to make something simple, then you understand everything. Creativity is about the cream I'll use, maybe the shapes won't be classic, but the texture is going to be perfect.

Recipe

This plated dessert is created with lime and mint glaze, lime and almond crumble, yuzu and ginger cremeux, hazelnut and mint pesto, lime and cottage cheese sorbet and a lime meringue. It's decorated with ice mint powder and lemon cress. Made with beef gelatin, it is 100% pork-free.

LIME AND ALMOND CRUMBLE

- 250g Almond powder
- 250g Butter
- 300g Rice flour
- 200g Sugar
- 5g Lime zest

Using a paddle, mix together in a bowl the softened butter with the sugar. Add the almond powder and mix again. Add the rice flour and mix until a solid dough is achieved. Finish by adding the lime zest.

Spread the dough to 5mm and bake at 180°C for 15-18 minutes. Let it cool and keep it for plating.

LIME AND MINT GLAZE

- 450g Neutral glaze
- 27g Fresh mint leaves
- 15g Fresh lime zest

Combine all the ingredients together in a blender until smooth. Put the mixture into a piping bag and keep it for plating.

HAZELNUT AND MINT PESTO

- 80g Fresh mint leaves
- 100g Roasted hazelnut
- 140g Virgin olive oil
- 12g Sugar

Put the mint leaves, roasted hazelnuts and sugar in a blender and start to blend while adding the olive oil until the texture resembles pesto. Put the mixture in a piping bag and keep it for plating.

LIME MERINGUE

- 90g Lime juice
- 7g Egg white powder
- 80g Sugar
- 80g Icing sugar

Briskly whisk the lime juice and egg white powder. Add the sugar slowly while continuing to whisk until a hard-peak meringue texture is achieved. Finish mixing by hand with the icing sugar.

Spread the meringue with a spatula on a silpat to a 1 - 2 mm layer. Place the tray in the oven for minimum three hours at 80°C. Once the meringue is really dry, break parts off and keep it for plating.

YUZU AND GINGER CREMEUX

- 200g Yuzu juice
- 350g Lime juice
- 8g Ginger powder
- 14g Lime zest
- 75g Sugar
- 20g Elsay powder
- 5g Citric acid powder
- 45g Gelatin
- 150g White chocolate
- 260g Whole eggs
- 32g Virgin olive oil

In a pot, combine the yuzu, lime juice, ginger powder and lime zest and bring to the boil. In a side dish, mix the sugar, elsay powder, citric acid and whole eggs and blanch the mixture. Once the mixture has boiled, add the side dish and keep whisking and cooking it, like a pastry cream. Take the pot off the stove and add the gelatin. Pass the cream into a strainer on top of the white chocolate. Blend the mixture and slowly add the virgin olive oil. Place the cremeux in a different piping bag and keep it for plating in the fridge for at least four hours.

LIME AND COTTAGE CHEESE SORBET

- 230g Water
- 230g Sugar
- 2g Stabiliser
- 70g Lime juice
- 6g Lime zest
- 500g Cottage cheese
- 20g Mint leaves

Place the water, sugar and stabiliser in a pot and bring to the boil. Take off the stove, add the lime juice, lime zest and fresh mint leaves and cover for 30 minutes with a plastic wrap.

After 30 minutes, pour onto the cottage cheese and blend everything together until well mixed. Put the sorbet mix into a paco jet bowl and place in a freezer (-20°C) for minimum six hours and keep it for plating.

PLATING

- Spread some lime and mint glaze on the side of the bowl
- Place a spoonful of almond and lime crumble in the centre of the bowl
- Pipe six balls of yuzu and ginger cremeux
- Inside each ball, pipe some hazelnuts and mint pesto
- Slice three lime supremes and place them on top of the cream in the middle
- On top of the supremes, put a scoop of lime and cottage cheese sorbet
- Break off four or five big pieces of lime meringue and cover the whole dessert
- Add a pinch of ice mint powder, a fresh lime zested and four lemon cress leaves.

