



LET THEM EAT LEBANESE FOOD

By Sydnee Bryant

What do you get when you take tantalizing Lebanese food, mix it with fancy French furniture and throw in some sensational service for good measure? Why, the new Al Mourjan, of course! **QH** spoke with Mohamed Al-Sadek, owning director of Al Mourjan Restaurants, to find out the secret behind the chain's success, their plans for expansion and what their new location will offer its guests.

The new Al Mourjan is a palace. The Lebanese restaurant's second branch, located beside the Second Cup in souq Waqif, is decorated to look like a French salon or a sitting room in Versailles Palace. With delicate blue and gold chairs and glittering 25,000-dollar US bohemian crystal chandeliers adorning the ceiling, one expects Marie Antoinette or another member of French royalty to be seated at the table next to you. The floor is made of Italian marble; the bar is lined with branded coffee machines (made especially for Al Mourjan). In essence, it is a room designed for royalty. The restaurant is designed to look very artistic, very classic European and very royal, said Al-Sadek, the man behind the Al Mourjan concept.

If elegance is your thing, pull up a 1,500-dollar US chair inside the souq Waqif Al Mourjan and enjoy the best Lebanese food Qatar has to offer. If not, never fear: Lebanese food lovers have several dining options when

it comes to eating at Al Mourjan. The new souq Waqif location, which opened its doors in December 2010, actually boasts more outdoor seating than indoor; while the actual restaurant can accommodate up to 50 people, the outdoor seating area can serve over 100 guests.

Foodies can also get their fill of Lebanese cuisine at Al Mourjan's original spot on the Corniche. Al Mourjan's premiere restaurant has an entirely different, but just as appealing, vibe. The Corniche location's ambiance is Mediterranean fused with Qatari influences. The Corniche Al Mourjan, which opened in late 2008, is for people who want to completely relax, said Al-Sadek, whereas the one in the souq is for diners who like to people-watch. Each location offers the same menu and the same level of impeccable service, said Al-Sadek. Both restaurants are open from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. Al-Sadek hopes to eventually offer breakfast at the souq Waqif location.



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Al-Sadek, who owns the Al Mourjan brand, concept and restaurants with his business partner Nasser Abdelaziz Al Mesalam, plans to open two more branches in the near future, for a total of four locations in Doha. The third restaurant is slated to open in 2011; the location remains under wraps but the theme will most likely be a mix of Moroccan and Spanish, said Al-Sadek. Soon the rest of the world will have a chance to experience the Al Mourjan concept. Al-Sadek plans to open several regional branches of the restaurant in 2012 (Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Beirut) and go abroad in 2014, starting with an Al Mourjan in Paris. Eventually the restaurant will be global, with plans for locations in London and New York.

It makes sense to open Al Mourjan restaurants world-wide. The chain is already one of the top 100 restaurants around the world, with guests from countries around the globe making online reservations for the Corniche location before their trips to Qatar.

So why the intense global interest in a Lebanese restaurant in Qatar? Al-Sadek believes people are drawn to Al Mourjan because there is no other restaurant like it. “The concept is unique. I created a concept that will put Qatar on the map of the world’s best restaurants,” Al Sadek said. “We are the number one restaurant in Qatar; we are top three in the Middle East; and we’re in the top 100 around the world.”

Al Mourjan was created to challenge the best around the world, said Al-Sadek. “This has taken a lot of hard work and dedication. Endless energy has gone into making everything perfect,” Al-Sadek said. The restaurateur focuses much of his energy on attention to detail. Everything about Al Mourjan is carefully thought out, from the silverware to the music. Al Mourjan has their own brand of music chosen from around the world.

“The music that we choose to play in our restaurants is very special and is part of the concept,” Al-Sadek said.

Al-Sadek has been in the restaurant business for 15 years and has owned his own properties for 12 years. He travels the world and channels his knowledge into the Al Mourjan concept. It’s a method that’s working; Al Mourjan won five awards in 2010 and Al-Sadek hopes to capture more in the future.

The key to Al Mourjan’s success is its uniqueness, Al-Sadek said. “The ambiance we create, the service they get and the food they are served is different. Every bite has a special taste. [Guests] feel it; they feel how good it is,” Al-Sadek said. Al Mourjan specializes in VIP lunches and dinners. However, anyone who enjoys quality Lebanese food will enjoy this high-class fare.

The menu boasts traditional Lebanese food with a twist, ensuring each phenomenal bite is an experiment in pleasure. Al-Sadek is particularly proud of the restaurant’s lobster, his personal favourite. “The way we do our lobster is completely different from anyone else. It’s so special. The taste that we create is really unique,” Al-Sadek said. While he wouldn’t reveal the secret behind his famous lobster, Al-Sadek did say that the lobster is marinated in seven different secret spices that lend their flavour to the dish.

Lebanese food is all about nutrition and health, said Al-Sadek. The cuisine incorporates a lot of vegetables and heart-friendly olive oil. However, each tasty morsel is so good that you would never realize it’s actually good for you. Al-Sadek is happy to provide such tasty, authentic Lebanese for his guests. “We’ve been able to bring Lebanese food to another level,” Al-Sadek said. “We create authentic food at its best.”