

Hodema news #12

Outlook 2017-2018



Celebrating 15 years of Hodema and counting ...

Written by Leena Saidi, journalist and producer

Companies have different approaches to measuring their worth. Some tally success in dollars or endorsements. Others count the problems they've wrestled to the ground or the high-profile projects they've led across the finish line. For others still, it's about the coolest strategies they can invent or the best team they can build. But sooner or later, in one way or another, most of them will look back and wonder, what will the company's legacy be?

Ultimately, leaving a mark for a company means contributing to its employees, the professional field or even the world, through the best use of its talents. Hodema Consulting Services is such a firm. Despite being located in a region known for its instability and a country that has faced more than its fair share of challenges, Hodema has figured out how to make a difference. This year, the company celebrates fifteen years of commitment to serve the region's hospitality, retail and real estate sectors through its services.

Hodema marks this milestone in the knowledge that the company remains firmly at the leading edge of quality in the hospitality business advisory sector. Founded by partners with extensive experience in the region's hotel, food and beverage, retail, real estate and tourism industries, the company started out as a small Beirut-based boutique consulting office. It has since built an enviable reputation among clients firmly grounded in local knowledge and experience in the Middle East and Africa.

Highlights of a challenging journey

"We pride ourselves on our independence and objectivity. We're able to tell clients what they need to know to make sound investments resulting in successful projects, says Nagi Morkos, Hodema's founding partner. Our recommendations are implemented at the highest level for vital decision-making". The slow financial growth of the last years has not just led many sectors to face challenging times but fueled predictions that 2019 could be a year of an economic slowdown in Lebanon. However, the touristic and commercial sectors have battled and succeeded in remaining a major stronghold of the country's economy. After reaching a record low of 3.67 points in Global Competitiveness in 2015, according to the World Economic Forum, Lebanon stood at 57.7 points in 2018. Between November and December 2018 alone, the number of tourists and expats visiting Lebanon increased by 10.4%, with a growth of around 27,500 visitors landing on Lebanese grounds. Hodema not only withstood these challenges but has come out with even stronger expertise. Over the past 15 years, it has successfully expanded its operations from Lebanon to the rest of the Middle East and Africa. The company's team of consultants and analysts has grown from 2 to 25 and has overseen more than 400 projects come to fruition, creating over 150 brands and helping around 100 franchises establish themselves in 22 countries. Bringing their know-how to shape Hodema's future, senior consultants Nada Alameddine and Toufic Akl became partners in 2015. Alameddine is in charge of business development, while Akl handles operations.

Hodema deep industry knowledge meets extensive experience in local and regional markets to ensure that the partner-led services are tailored to individual client's requirements. Advisory projects range from small to large-scale mixed-use developments and properties.

"The entire team is immensely proud to be part of the company's rise to become one of the region's most highly thought of strategic industry advisors. Without our clients' support this would not have been possible," says Toufic Akl. The company has not shied away from addressing hot topics, such as that of equal opportunities in the industry. In 2018, along with Lebanon's central bank Banque du Liban and the country's national carrier Middle East Airlines, Hodema co-organized the two-day conference Tone from the Top - Regional Corporate Governance in the presence of Dr. Riad Salamé, the bank's governor. And, with increased global concern over the representation of women at board level, Nada Alameddine moderated a panel entitled Women in the Board Room and their Impact on Governance and Performance - along with an animated break-out session whereby recommendations were shortlisted for the hospitality, banking and aviation sectors and were sent to the Governor's office. Hodema also prides itself in being part and parcel of a community, and its Corporate Social Responsibility missions attest to this. Among the latest projects was Beirut National Museum which appointed Hodema to create the concept for a café to be housed in an extension of the museum and to include an outdoor space as well as multi-purpose rooms. "Giving back to the community is pivotal for us at Hodema. CSR policies are a core and inseparable component of our overall service offering," explains Alameddine.

Education is another cornerstone of the company's priorities. Hodema and La Sagesse University's Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management, have launched a number of surveys on Beirut's Lebanese cuisine restaurants. This collaboration led to the elaboration of a report that was presented by Hodema team and La Sagesse University to the Minister of Tourism, H.E. Avedis Guidanian.

Apart from its involvement in working in the education sector, Hodema is proud to have become a consultancy school with many of its employees working in the hospitality sector in Lebanon and abroad. "We are proud of all the people that passed by us and left us to make their way in the industry. They are our alumni" says Morkos.

Testimonials

One such success story is that of Ezzat Ellaz, a former employee, who now co-owns Muito BEY, a Lebanese cuisine restaurant in Lisbon. Ellaz believes that his time at Hodema taught him how to study and preview restaurant trends in a specific market, how to adapt a restaurant concept to the local demand, and most importantly how to operate a restaurant in a foreign business environment. In other words, Hodema is an institution that forms its employees, as well as its clients, to be ready for the day-to-day F&B challenges.

Wassef Haroun, an Hodema client, is another success story. He and his wife Racha co-own Mamnoon, a Levantine restaurant in Seattle, USA.

The Haroun worked with the team at Hodema to create a concept, which would offer a taste of Levantine culinary heritage and culture. "Racha and I started with an idea, a bit of capital and some general background but no field experience and no specialized resources. However, we were able to form a viable concept, learn best practices in the field and connect with absolutely the best resources that Lebanon has to offer. Within a year, Mamnoon has become the best restaurant in Seattle. I don't know how we could have done it without Hodema's support," says Haroun.

However, even successful concepts often need a helping hand to develop their full potential. Despite the huge demand, Em Sherif restaurant was not planning to franchise. "It is thanks to Hodema that we finally opted for the franchise model and started considering partnerships outside Lebanon," explains Dany Chaccour, Chief Executive Officer of SGR Offshore. "Hodema assisted us in producing the franchise and training manuals for Em Sherif restaurant and Café.

Strong expertise in the F&B industry and knowledge of market trends, as well as the operators present locally and internationally, have led Hodema not only to help individual projects but also commercial centers such as Lebanon's ABC Malls. "We brought them in as consultants for a new F&B strategy for our Ashrafieh and Dbayeh malls, including a review of the current mix along with a specific new scheme to select new brands," explains Tania Ezzedine, Deputy CEO of ABC Group. "We also appointed them as part of our consultant team on ABC Verdun," she added.

Hodema's team is instrumental in orchestrating the thinking process and in sourcing the right information to facilitate its client's decision making. "As a team, we needed to address key crossroads like what should the brand develop into," explains Nader Bassit, CEO and board member of Wakira Investments, adding, "By answering the many fundamental strategic questions - such as whether it should be a delivery-focused or a casual dining concept, be automated or chef-led, target only the Indian community or the world - Hodema helped us redefine Kulcha King, our latest acquisition," he adds.

Note of gratitude

Drawing on their challenging yet successful journey, Hodema takes pride in its track record and is looking forward to new exciting endeavors that will widen their horizon and further enrich their knowledge of the industry. Morkos conveys his appreciation for the achievements of partners and staff. "It is, at times, challenging to deliver consistent sound business advice to our much-respected clients, in what can be a difficult and turbulent regional market place. It is to the credit of all concerned - team and clients alike - that the company stands strong today and ready to build upon the hard work of the first 15 years."

Interview: Athanasios Kargatzidis

Founder of Tastykitchens Hospitality Consulting - Head Chef & Co-owner of Baron Beirut



Athanasios Kargatzidis is a creative and results-focused “chef-auteur” who complements a proven hospitality background with ownership, corporate-level experience, leading change, improvement and profitability across multi-brand operations on an international stage.

He leads major launches, brands transformation and growth projects, and drives culinary and service innovation by developing industry-leading menus not only in Lebanon, but also in Canada, Europe, GCC, North Africa and Asia.

He founded “Tastykitchens Hospitality Consulting” in 2010 which is specialized in menu development, kitchen design and implementation, opening and ongoing operational guidance, as well as management services with currently a portfolio of iconic restaurants and food businesses in Lebanon and the MENA region.

Tell us more about Baron restaurant.

Baron is not a concept as per say, it is a passion project for us. It's a proving ground.

In your opinion, what is the success behind Baron?

That's an actual Chefs' project. We wanted the product to stand out on the local market, and we didn't listen to anyone telling us what we should do or not do. As a chef, my aim is to constantly enhance the customer experience across a range of culinary concepts. Also, for Baron, we fully trusted our architects and branding agencies and allowed them to interpret our manifesto. Yes, I wrote a manifesto for Baron...

As a Greek/Canadian chef, did you have to adapt your recipes to the Lebanese customers' taste?

Not at all. I have always felt that making adjustments to the market place takes away from the final product and alterate the real product that guest have been drawn too. And this strategy has proven right, considering the success of Baron since its opening. However, in all the countries I led operations in, I strive to bring a strong regional and cultural awareness for developing

brand concepts while incorporating both international standards and regional identity.

What is your favorite cuisine?

I do not have a favorite cuisine. For me food is all about moments.

What are your future projects in Lebanon and abroad?

Opening a wine bar (Bar à Vin) that will showcase wines from Lebanon and the not so common wines of northern Europe, Greece, Cyprus and the Balkans. We will have a retail shop with an amazing 18-seat wine bar/resto in the evening. We also have another location next door that we are currently developing that will be showcasing my love affair with Asia. And in 2020, I will open my first European restaurant in Lisbon!

What was Hodema's added value in the development of your project?

Our idea for Baron -as well as our new project- always comes from a side that no one would expect, but again, that is totally familiar for us. Hodema understands this. The team does not just give you what you are asking for, but they actually challenge your ideas.

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Projects

Food and Beverage project

Al Khobar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hodema studied the Food and Beverage market in the cities of Al-Khobar and Al Dammam prior to developing the concept and financial study for a mid to high-end all-day breakfast café-restaurant.

Flagship theme park

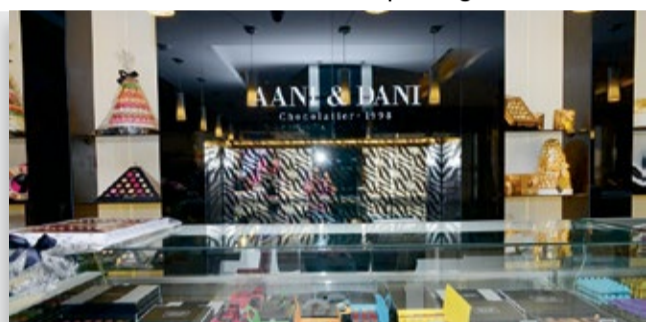
Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hodema was appointed to develop a flagship theme park in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia spread over a plot of land of 30,000 sqm, with the objective to expand it in the kingdom. Hodema performed a market study of the Food and Beverage industry in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Eastern Province, as well as on the Food and Beverage components inside these cities' theme parks, while focusing on American Quick Service Restaurants, international casual restaurants and Food and Beverage kiosks. Based on the market findings, Hodema developed ten F&B concepts for the theme park.

Aani & Dani Chocolatier

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hodema was appointed to perform a general assessment on "Aani & Dani Chocolatier". This retail concept was established in 1998 and currently operates 30 outlets in Riyadh, and a central production unit in the city's industrial area. Hodema presented a set of recommendations for improvement. At a later stage, Hodema created the brand's set of operating manuals.



Culinary Boutique

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Hodema assessed "Culinary Boutique", a homegrown concept in Dubai gathering several components and services under one roof: café, cooking classes and catering. We kicked off the mission by assessing the operations and conducting a competition analysis prior to preparing the brand for franchising. We set up its franchising department, strategic development and geographical planning inside and outside UAE, and performed a financial analysis of a typical all-in-one concept. Hodema also elaborated the brand's franchise and training manuals.



Market study

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hodema assisted an investment company in KSA in its venture into the Food and Beverage industry in the kingdom. We performed a study of the F&B industry in Jeddah, Riyadh and Al Khobar-Dammam, identified the market gaps, and proposed several F&B concept directions.

Food and Beverage project

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Hodema developed the concept, feasibility study, and competition analysis for a Saudi café-restaurant planning to open in Dubai and serving mid-end Saudi Hijazi specialties.

Flagship bakery

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hodema developed the concept of a flagship bakery in Riyadh, assisted its owners in the menu creation, brand uplifting and provided them with ongoing support in the opening phase through technical assistance, review of the interior design and kitchen drawings, as well as training sessions of the kitchen staff.



Kulcha King

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Hodema performed a general assessment on the eight outlets of "Kulcha King" across the UAE, and provided a set of recommendations to enhance their operation. The brand specializes in Northern Indian cuisine with a focus on kulcha. Hodema's mission also included the analysis of the brand's quantitative and qualitative customer behavior in UAE, and assistance on "Kulcha King"'s rebranding, interior revamping, and menu and business model creation.



Hala's Treats

Amman, Jordan

"Hala's Treats", a cake shop and eatery open in Amman since 2015, appointed Hodema to assess its flagship outlet prior to expanding the brand outside Jordan. Hodema created "Hala's Treats" franchising department, developed its strategic and geographical planning outside Amman, elaborated a financial analysis of the projected franchising income and the brand's set of operating manuals.



Em Sherif Café

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hodema is assisting "Em Sherif Café" in launching its franchise outlet in Riyadh. We reviewed its business plan and financial projections, analyzed its competitors in the market and assisted the franchisee in the recruitment process for the key positions.

M'oishi

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Hodema was appointed by the owners of "M'oishi", a homegrown Japanese ice cream and confectionary concept in Dubai, to assist them in the brand's expansion plan inside and outside the UAE. Hodema assessed the first two outlets and assisted the team in the franchise process through the creation of the brand's franchise manuals and brochure, and the development of its geographical expansion strategy and financial projections. Following that, the brand was able to sell the franchise and open five new outlets in Riyadh.



Sicilia's Pizza Cuts

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hodema performed a general assessment on Sicilia's Pizza Cuts located in Riyadh, to improve its operation and prepare the brand for franchising. Hodema set up its franchising department, elaborated the brand's franchise manuals, strategic planning and geographical distribution in the GCC, and presented a financial analysis of a typical franchised outlet.

Le Palais

Kinshasa, Republic of Congo

Hodema assessed "Le Palais", a restaurant in Kinshasa serving international cuisine and provided the client with a set of recommendations to optimize its operation.

Flagship sandwich project

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hodema developed the concept of a flagship sandwich outlet in Riyadh with the objective to expand it later in the kingdom. A feasibility study including a competition analysis was also performed.

Sushi restaurant

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hodema was requested to review the financial viability of opening and operating a sushi restaurant project in Riyadh.

Fairouz Garden

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hodema was appointed by the owners of Fairouz Garden, a Lebanese restaurant in Riyadh, to help them improve the outlet's operation and support them in their expansion plan: we performed a general assessment on the outlet and reviewed the central kitchen drawings, elaborated the brand's set of operating and training manuals, and assisted the owners in several trainings -Back of House and Front of House, sequence of service, greeting and hosting, among other sessions.



Meliartos

Athens, Greece

Hodema performed a general assessment on "Meliartos", a Greek franchise that was acquired to be developed in the GCC and Asia. The project gathers four concepts under one roof: a coffee house, a pie shop, a creamery, and a sandwich and pastry corner. Hodema presented a set of recommendations to the client before he exports the brand to Dubai. Hodema also elaborated "Meliartos" franchise manuals.

Zooba

Cairo, Egypt

Hodema reviewed and assessed "Zooba", an Egyptian "upgraded" street food concept operating several outlets in Cairo, and provided the clients with a set of recommendations prior to franchising the brand outside the country. Hodema provided the owners with the franchise support needed and created "Zooba" set of operating manuals.

Siraj

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Hodema was requested by the owners of Siraj, a restaurant serving Levantine Emirati cuisine located at Souk el Bahar in Dubai, to assist them in exporting the brand outside UAE. Hodema created Siraj's franchising department and set of franchise manuals, developed its strategic planning and geographical distribution outside UAE, and presented financial projections for a flagship franchised outlet.



S'wich

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Hodema assessed "S'wich", a fast casual concept operating three outlets at Marina, Jumeirah and Business Bay in Dubai, and provided its owners with a set of recommendations to improve the operation before expanding the brand outside Dubai. Hodema assisted the team in the set-up of S'wich franchise department, conducted a financial analysis for the franchise, and elaborated the franchise manuals and the strategy for the brand's expansion.

Shababik

Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hodema assessed "Shababik", an all-day restaurant in Jeddah serving traditional Lebanese cuisine and provided the owners with recommendations prior to expanding the brand outside the city. Hodema assisted in the set-up of "Shababik" franchise department, elaborated its strategic expansion plan outside Jeddah, and developed a financial study of a typical outlet performance. Franchise manuals were also elaborated for the brand.



Day beach

Egypt

Hodema created the concept of a beach and restaurant in Egypt's Northern coast and elaborated the project's business plan and financial projections.

Interview: Hala Jalbout

Owner of Hala's Treats



Since the age of 6, all that Hala Jalbout ever wanted was to immerse herself in the world of food. Although she never made it to cooking school but instead received a psychology degree, she continued to cook and entertain her family and friends who constantly encouraged her to make a career out of her passion.

She was “catapulted” into this industry when she received a phone call from her brother congratulating her about her new business website that he had created behind her back.

And so it began. She started catering out of her house to close friends, and eventually found herself serving numerous clients she had never met before. With this growth came confidence, and years later, the next natural step was the launch of her dream shop.

How and why did you start “Hala’s Treats”?

I’ve always been passionate about food and its extraordinary ability to bring people together. Over the years, I have realized that baking has helped my family and friends create wonderful memories, and I started Hala’s Treats as a means of sharing that same joy with a wider audience.

What makes “Hala’s Treats” different from other pastry shops in Amman?

What I hope differentiates us from others is our team’s unwavering commitment to quality and creativity, as well as our efforts to create an environment as welcoming and warm as possible.

What are the main challenges you faced during the development phase of the project?

As we continue to grow and develop, my greatest challenge has been to stay true to the essence of

the brand and keep it close to who I am. My top priority remains the same: offering a customized experience for my guests whereby they can truly feel all the love and care that is insuflated in each of our products.

Are you planning to expand your brand? If yes, in which countries?

We are currently in the process of expanding the brand. We would love to reach a greater number of people in the Middle East and beyond.

What was Hodema’s input for Hala’s Treats project?

Hodema’s input was valuable for our expansion project; they created the entire franchise package for Hala’s Treats. They developed a financial model and a preliminary market study.

It was an absolute pleasure working with such a professional company. We would highly recommend Hodema for their professionalism and value for money for the work entailed.

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Projects

Food and Beverage project Tripoli, Lebanon

Hodema was appointed by the Order of Engineers and Architects of Tripoli to assess the space they planned to allocate to Food and Beverage. Following the assessment's findings, Hodema developed several concept directions.



Beit Trad Kfour, Lebanon

Hodema was appointed by the owner of a domain spread over 17,000 sqm in Kfour to assist her in turning her Lebanese family home into a guest house. Hodema defined the concept consisting of 11 rooms, and elaborated the project's business plan and financial projections. We also participated in the recruitment process and elaborated the guest house service training manuals.



Em Sherif Café Beirut, Lebanon

Prior to franchising Em Sherif Café, its owners appointed Hodema to develop the human resources, operations, sales & marketing, and finance and control manuals, as well as detailed training manuals for the Front of House and Back of House sections of the café.



Mixed-use project Mansourieh, Lebanon

Hodema performed a market study of the mixed-use projects in Greater Beirut, and assessed the client's location prior to developing a mixed-use concept on a plot of land in Mansourieh spread over 7,000 sqm. Hodema recommended a mix of Food and Beverage, recreational activities and retail. We elaborated a feasibility study for the project.

Casual restaurant and bakery Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema created the concept for a flagship fast casual dough-based Food and Beverage concept, with the objective to expand the brand inside and outside Lebanon. We studied the supply of casual dough-based F&B concepts in Beirut, assessed the location selected by the client, and studied the project's financial viability.

Central kitchen Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema developed the concept for a central kitchen in Beirut preparing high-end baked and pastry goods, along with a boutique catering with an on-site dine-in area. A feasibility study was also elaborated for the project.

Mountain resort Dhour El Choueir, Lebanon

Hodema was appointed by the owners of a hotel in Dhour El Choueir which was built in 1932 over a plot of land of 12,000 sqm, to perform a market study of the mountain mixed-use projects in Lebanon. We also developed the feasibility study and concept of the new project.



Bkerzay Village Baaklin, Lebanon

Hodema performed an overview of the mountain mixed-use projects in Lebanon and assisted the client in developing the concept of "Bkerzay" Village by creating the facilities programming of the entire venue in terms of units' size, price, positioning, space allocations, etc. Hodema also elaborated a business plan and financial projections for the project that were compiled into a bank file for a green loan request.

ABC Dbayeh Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema was appointed by ABC Group to evaluate the Food and Beverage portfolio mix at "ABC Dbayeh". Hodema assessed the existing Food and Beverage offer, and provided a set of recommendations on "ABC Dbayeh" Food and Beverage overall strategy and optimized Food and Beverage portfolio mix.



Flagship grocery Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema assessed a location in Badaro spread over two floors with a total surface area of 500 sqm prior to developing the concept of a flagship neighborhood grocery. A financial feasibility was also elaborated for the project.

Mexican restaurant Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema analyzed the Mexican cuisine restaurant supply in Beirut, assessed the location selected by the clients prior to developing a new Mexican concept in Gemmayzeh along with a feasibility study. Hodema assisted the clients in the implementation phase.

Mixed-use project Jbeil, Lebanon

Hodema conducted a market study of the commercial centers, retail stores, offices, Food and Beverage outlets, and sports and leisure centers in Jbeil. We also assessed the project's location and elaborated three concept directions prior to the development of a mixed-use project spread over a plot of land of 5,000 sqm with a Gross Leasable Area (GLA) of 6,250 sqm including over 20 retail shops and office units.

Food and Beverage project Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema developed the concept of a casual restaurant serving Asian cuisine in Mar Mikhael. Hodema assessed the financial viability of the concept.

European bakery Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema elaborated the financial feasibility study for a European bakery in Downtown Beirut which includes a pastry section, retail corner and dine-in area.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

"In Our Kitchen" Lebanon

As part of our corporate social responsibility program, Hodema collaborated with "Cenacle de la Lumière", an NGO working in the field of development and prevention for youth and society, as well as rehabilitation for people suffering from drug and alcohol addiction, to perform a general assessment on their Food and Beverage brand "In Our Kitchen". The latter prepares and sells among other items, pizzas, wraps, salads, kaak and beverages during fundraising events and social activities. Hodema provided a set of recommendations to improve its operation and increase revenues.

National Museum Cafe Mathaf, Lebanon

Hodema collaborated with the National Heritage Foundation to create the concept of a coffee shop in the building extension of Beirut National Museum, including a terrace and multi-purpose rooms that will increase the Museum's revenues. Hodema also reviewed the project's financials and the location's architectural layouts.

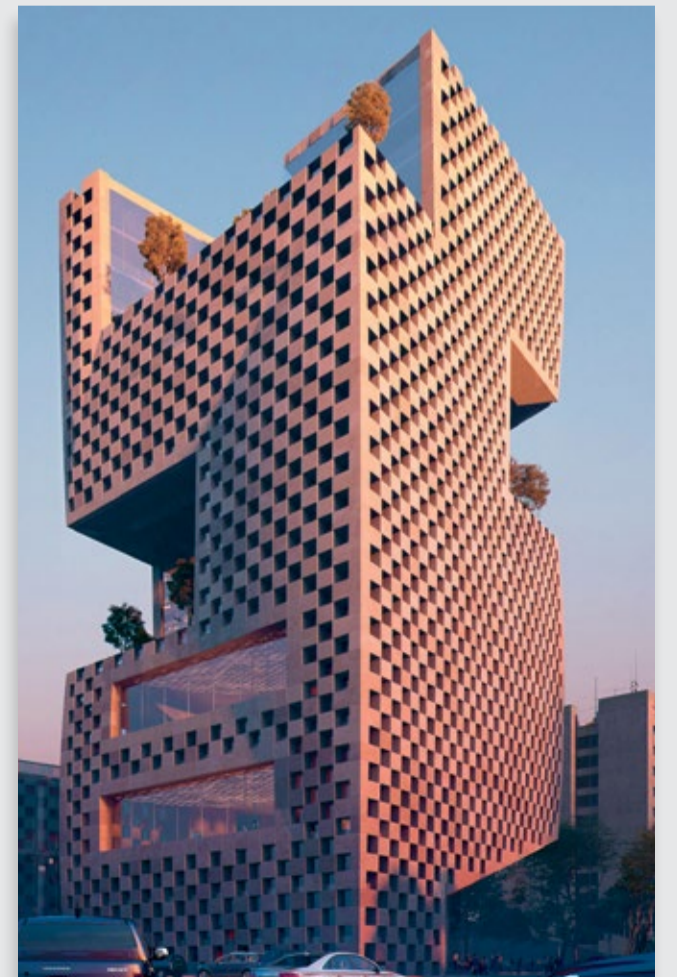


Flagship Food and Beverage retail project Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema developed the concept for a flagship Food and Beverage retail outlet in Beirut serving gluten-free products. Hodema assessed the project's location, developed the concept and elaborated the project's feasibility study.

BLF headquarters Food and Beverage projects and gym Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema was appointed by Banque Libano-Francaise to develop the F&B spaces, cafeteria and gym at its new headquarters in Beirut. Hodema reviewed the architects' drawings for the F&B spaces and created concepts for a coffee shop, as well as a corporate cafeteria catering for up to 600 employees.



Interview: Nader Bassit

CEO and Board member of Wakira Investments



Nader Bassit is Wakira Investments' CEO and board member, and a seasoned executive with many start-ups and launches under his belt. At the age of 16, he launched his career parallel to his studies, starting his own cars trading business. At 18, he worked for Xerox. He joined Procter & Gamble after graduation and for 9 years, launched brands and businesses throughout the region.

At the same time, he developed and lectured an Aftermarketing MBA course for several years at the AUC and London City College. He joined Danone and launched it in Algeria, GCC and Levant countries. Appointed CEO of Savola Egypt, he led the Savola Global business development and M&A in growing the company's portfolio while serving on the Global lead team, and was on the board of several Savola companies. Today, he is a founding member of Nawah Investments Holding in KSA and the One Billion AED Wakira Investments in UAE & KSA. He led several acquisitions in the F&B among which restaurants such as Kulcha King, Nom Nom Asia, Elgreco, Ghinwa, and SDG Catering.

Can you present Wakira Investments?

Wakira Investments was founded mid 2016 in Dubai. It is the result of a common vision between the founding partners, Alsaghyir family of Saudi Arabia, and myself, to build the next integrated branded food platform in the region by acquiring home-grown brands and taking them from the UAE to the world. To date, out of 200 acquisition opportunities, we have acquired five brands: Kulcha King, Nom Nom Asia, Elgreco, Ghinwa, SDG Catering, all based out of Dubai and operating in 20 locations. Our key values are TRACCS (Trust-Reliability-Accountability-Commitment-Consistency-Service).

What is the story behind the acquisition of "Kulcha King"?

Kulcha King brand was built by an Indian Dreamer living in Dubai, who reached his limits six years later and could not continue investing in it. We fell in love with this brand from day one and were the first to detect that it was starting to get in trouble. We decided to acquire it very quickly despite a very complicated process. Right after, three different buyers showed interest to buy the brand from us, which comforted us that we were on the right track.

What are "Kulcha King" differentiation factors among the Indian restaurants in Dubai?

Kulcha King serves an Indian-inspired everyday food. It is the very first chain to champion the Kulcha, a product that can be consumed for breakfast, lunch and dinner with a multitude of fillings and tastes. We believe it can become the next Pizza of the world, and are striving to adapt its taste to the global consumer to become an everyday easy food for all. The delicious Kulcha we sell deserves to go globally viral and set a new culinary trend. The brand's name -Kulcha King- stipulates that any follower brand will come second. Last, Kulcha King could become the first Indian-inspired regional chain before going global. We

have seen this happening with Pizza, an Italian invention championed by American companies to go global, so why can't a UAE-based company champion an Indian invention to the world?

How did Hodema assist you in the development of your project?

Hodema helped Wakira Investments redefine Kulcha King and answer many fundamental strategic questions. As a team, we needed to address key cross-roads like what should the brand develop into? A fast casual delivery-focused concept or a casual dining concept? A large or a reduced menu? Pricing positioning? Authentic vs Inspired Indian cuisine? Automation or Chef led operations? Target only the Indian community or the world? Where did we lack in operations? What choices to be made in capital and operating investments/expenses? How to position Kulcha as a champion? Hodema's team was instrumental in orchestrating the thinking process and in sourcing the right information to make decisions.

How do you describe Dubai's F&B market?

The most competitive cut throat market in the MENA region with \$21 Billion in sales. Dubai is a big melting pot of cultures and trends and the region's largest shopping showcase where new fashions and concepts are launched. With 18 million visitors per year on top of its 3.1 million highly aware residents, Dubai allows only the best to survive.

The operational costs are among the highest in the region, so operators are not allowed to make too many mistakes and well educated and traveled consumers expect the top notch service and quality. Since 2017, the market has been declining and statistics show that at least 22% of restaurants closed down and market sales dropped by minimum 30%. Kulcha King grew by 23% thus beating the market by far and proving that in such tough conditions, only brands with a compelling story and excellent operations can survive.

What are the future plans for "Kulcha King"?

Expanding in the UAE by adding new stores and covering additional delivery areas across the country to reach 20 locations. In 2020, we are eyeing international expansion through either corporately owned stores or/and franchising in Saudi Arabia, rest of GCC and Egypt. We are also excited to launch a new menu and a heavy radio and social media campaigns celebrating the first anniversary of the brand's relaunch and new identity.

What are the future plans for Wakira Investments?

We will close two acquisitions in 2019 and another 2 before end of 2021. Wakira aims at becoming the mothership for up to 10 concepts, offering them shared services, synergies and the necessary financing to grow. Now is the right time to invest in strong homegrown brands from the East and help them win the hearts of consumers in the West. We trust that by 2021, some of our brands will start popping up in London, Paris, and New York. Last but not least, we target for Wakira Investments to become a One Billion AED company within the next five years.

Hodema's team was instrumental in orchestrating the thinking process and in sourcing the right information to make decisions.



Projects

Al Helbawi

Beirut, Lebanon

The owners of "Al Helbawi" chocolate and roastery established in 1970 and currently located in Haret Hreik, requested from Hodema to assess their brand and support them in franchising it inside and outside the Lebanese borders. Hodema set up their franchise department and elaborated "Al Helbawi" set of franchise manuals.



Al Mouajjanati

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema performed a market study of the fast-casual Food and Beverage concepts in Beirut, with a focus on outlets serving dough-based products. Following its market findings, Hodema provided the client with a set of recommendations, developed a bakery concept along with a financial study, and assisted the client in the implementation phase.

City Center Beirut

Hazmieh, Lebanon

Hodema assisted Majid Al Futtam Properties to get a better understanding of the Lebanese Food and Beverage market and trends, and provided advice to optimize the mall's space and Food and Beverage portfolio mix.



Furnished apartments

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema evaluated the option of converting a building located in Hamra into a venue combining dorms for students along with furnished apartments. Hodema also elaborated its business plan and financial projections.

Kahwet Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema performed an overview of the Food and Beverage market in Beirut focusing on Shisha cafés prior to developing a flagship shisha café concept along with a financial study. As a second phase, Hodema assisted in the set-up of "Kahwet Beirut" franchising department, defined its expansion plan outside Lebanon, and completed a set of operating manuals.



Mixed-use project

Damour, Lebanon

Hodema presented an overview of the private beach compounds, beach resorts and day beach clubs in Lebanon's coast from Saida to Tripoli, to evaluate the opportunity of creating a beachfront gated community in Damour. We assessed the project's location, developed the concept and facilities programming of the beachfront gated community and its clubhouse. Hodema also elaborated the clubhouse feasibility study and provided the client with the optimal commercial terms for the project.

Colonel Beer

Batroun, Lebanon

Hodema was appointed by the owner of Colonel Beer in Batroun to assess his restaurant concept. Hodema also created the brand's human resources, operations and training manuals.

F&B concept in a beverage store

Lebanon

Hodema created the concept of a Food and Beverage venue to be integrated inside a beverage retail store in Lebanon. We also developed the financial projections, and the brand's strategic development across Lebanon while providing the client with ongoing support.



Slate

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema developed the concept of Slate, a Mediterranean bistro and grill, located in Mar Mikhael. We also created the investors' file including the business plan and financial projections of the concept. Hodema assisted the client in the menu creation and pricing by performing a detailed competition analysis, and liaised with the branding agency and interior designer.



Innocent Minds

Beirut, Lebanon

The owners of "Innocent Minds", a nursery currently operating 3 branches in Lebanon, appointed Hodema to assess their brand and provide support in the set-up of their franchising department. Hodema also elaborated "Innocent Minds" set of franchise and training manuals, while developing its strategic expansion plan outside Lebanon in addition to a financial analysis of the projected franchising income.



Nursery

Choueifat, Lebanon

Hodema was commissioned by the client to develop a nursery project in Choueifat. Hodema analysed the competition analysis in Greater Beirut and developed the project's concept based on the identified gaps. Hodema also reviewed the nursery's architectural layouts, developed the business plan and financial projections, drafted job descriptions for all the positions, and coordinated with the third parties in charge of the branding and interior design.

T-square

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema was commissioned by the owner of T-square to conduct a general assessment on the outlet located in Sodeco area prior to expanding the brand outside Lebanon, and to develop its set of franchise manuals. Hodema proposed a franchise development plan, developed its franchise brochure, worked on the brand's franchise commercial terms and provided guidelines for the development of the Head of Terms and franchise agreement.

Mixed-use project

Khalde, Lebanon

Hodema studied the locations' demographics and psychographics of Hadath and Khalde areas with the purpose to create a mixed-use project. The location in Khalde spread over a plot of land of 2,300 sqm, was then selected for the concept development. Hodema also elaborated the financial study and the project's masterplan in coordination with the architect.

Beirut Parks

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema was appointed by the owners of Biel to develop "Beirut Parks", a mixed-use project including exhibition halls and banqueting, a family park and kids' playground, a Food and Beverage cluster, and a green park with water ponds and an outdoor track. The venue, spread over 43,000 sqm in Tahwita, is scheduled to be launched progressively in 2019. Hodema reviewed "Beirut Parks" master layouts and mix, and performed a market study of the banquet halls, retail, Food & Beverage clusters, as well as leisure centers in Beirut prior to creating the concept for the mixed-use project along with a financial study.



Mum & I

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema was appointed by the owner of Mum & I to set a development plan to franchise the brand inside and outside Lebanon. Hodema developed the franchise brochure, worked with the client on the brand's franchise commercial terms and provided guidelines for the development of the Head of terms and franchise agreement. Hodema also elaborated a feasibility study for a central kitchen and several outlets.



Muse Chocolate

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema assessed "Muse", a high-end chocolate shop in Beirut and assisted in the franchise department set-up. We elaborated a franchise brochure and developed the brand's strategic expansion plan in the GCC. A financial analysis of a typical store performance was also presented to the client.



Shtumpf

Lebanon

Hodema was appointed by the owners of Shtumpf to assess its three outlets located in Jounieh, Dbayeh, and inside Le Mall Dbayeh, in addition to its central kitchen in Jounieh outlet. The assessment covered the premises, concept, operations, branding, communication and marketing, financial performances, and strategic vision, followed by a set of recommendations presented by Hodema to improve its operation.

Kitchen Lab

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema was requested to assess "Kitchen Lab", a concept consisting of a professional kitchen for cooking workshops and a retail area selling cooking and tableware accessories. A financial study was also elaborated for the "Kitchen Lab" new location in Monot.



Interview: Sarah Trad

Owner of Beit Trad guesthouse



Co-Founder in 2003 -and actual President of Skoun, an outpatient center for the treatment and prevention of addictions in Lebanon, Sarah Trad is also the co-Founder of Yoga Souk, a yoga studio in Beirut's Saifi Village. In 2018, she ventured into hospitality with Beit Trad, a family house in Kfour, rehabilitated into a guesthouse. She earned a Masters in Clinical Psychology and Psychopathology at the René Descartes University (Paris V) in Paris and later got an Executive Masters in Business Administration at the American University of Beirut. She has lived in Jeddah, Paris, New York and Lebanon.

How do you describe "Beit Trad" guesthouse?

It is a 200 years old Lebanese family house in the mountains. It is home to 9 rooms welcoming guests all year long. All the rooms have the same rate, including breakfast; however, the price varies if the client chooses half or full board, with an open table for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and an open bar. Once you choose to stay in the house (whether for breakfast only, half board or full board), you can forget everything and just sit back and enjoy.

Tell us about the story behind the project

My mother was looking for an old Lebanese house in the mountains, and my father bought it in the beginning of the 80s. They were living in Saudi Arabia at the time. We spent our summers in this house, with my mother always throwing invitations and making sure it was full of friends and family. When she passed away in 2013, I stopped going to the house. It deteriorated so quickly that I had to decide either to sell it or restore it... I thought the best way of saving it is to restore it into a business. That is how "Beit Trad" was born.

Hodema team helped us all along from the conceptualization of the project to the business plan and the recruitment process.

What makes Beit Trad different from other guesthouses? And what is the key success factor?

The architecture of the house is unique, with its surrounding gardens and little forest. It also has a very particular soothing energy. We decorated and furnished the interior as we would do for our personal home, and not as a regular hotel or business. We selected the highest quality ingredients and products, whether for food, room amenities, or bed linen. I believe that Beit Trad success factors are quality, flexibility and warmth. We really work hard on all the details to please our guests as much as we can, bending to their slightest needs to make them feel at home.

How do you overcome seasonality? And when is the peak season at "Beit Trad"?

Every season at Beit Trad has its charm. Summer is all about the outdoors, the vegetation, the trees, the terrace and the pool. Winter is about cozy interiors, fireplaces. Peak season is from May to October, as well as holidays. In the winter we worked better than expected, and I believe the more we

stay open, the more people will take the habit of coming up to Beit Trad. This is still our first year of operation... Organizing activities and themed weekends are healthy entertainment to attract guests; we already had detox weeks and yoga retreats.

What marketing tools do you use to promote it?

Instagram, Instagram, Instagram! And it's working quite well, we already reached the 19K followers! We are also listed on TripAdvisor and l'Hôte Libanais; and the magazine Air France Madame chose us as one of their favorite guesthouses in the world in their Gold List issue.

How did Hodema assist you in the development of your project?

Hodema team helped us all along from the conceptualization of the project to the business plan and the recruitment process. They also elaborated the guesthouse's training manuals.

What are your future plans for "Beit Trad"?

Reaching financial profitability. We have plenty of ideas, so we want to develop our house's potential as much as possible. We are also considering taking on the management and development of other guesthouses in Lebanon, and maybe abroad.



Projects

Edelweiss

Faqra, Lebanon

Hodema was approached by the owners of Edelweiss real estate project in Faqra to develop the concept of its commercial area spread over 2,000 sqm. We reviewed the project's layouts, and defined the optimal Food & Beverage and retail tenant mix. Hodema acted as the owner representative by searching for operators and negotiating rental agreements. After Edelweiss was launched in July 2018, Hodema reviewed and re-evaluated the commercial area in terms of circulation flow, leasing agreement, and tenant manual.



Retail coffee brand

Lebanon

Hodema assessed the concept, communication, branding & marketing, and strategic vision of a coffee brand. We conducted a market analysis of the HORECA coffee industry including competitors' benchmarks, and a financial study for the project's viability.

Flagship sandwich project

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema studied the Food and Beverage market in Beirut with a focus on sandwich concepts prior to developing a new idea for a flagship outlet in Gemmayzeh serving Lebanese sandwiches. We also elaborated the project's feasibility study.

Flagship Food and Beverage project

Naccache, Lebanon

Hodema was approached by the owner of a villa spread over a plot of land of 1200 sqm in Naccache to assess its potential as a hospitality destination. Hodema developed concept directions for the project and a feasibility study was elaborated for each direction.

Flagship F&B retail

Lebanon

Hodema was appointed by the owners of MEDCO to perform a general assessment on their MedMart stores. Hodema developed the concept of a flagship Food and Beverage retail outlet that will operate inside their gas stations in Lebanon, in addition to a feasibility study for the project.



Mixed-use project

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema developed the concept for a mixed-used project in Jisr elWati spread over a plot of land of 1,100 sqm and consisting of retail outlets, restaurants, offices and a health club. Hodema also presented the project's business plan and financial projections.

Food and Beverage project

Lebanon

Hodema developed the concept of the Food and Beverage outlet located in the vicinity of a winery, including a wine retail area. A market study of the winery restaurants in Lebanon was performed along with a feasibility study for the Food and Beverage outlet.

Flagship diner

Greater Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema performed a market study of the Food and Beverage industry in Greater Beirut focusing on smart casual concepts serving international cuisine. Based on our findings and identified market gaps, we developed a concept for a flagship diner with its feasibility study.

Grill house

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema performed a market study of the grill house restaurants in Beirut along with an assessment on the client's potential location, before developing a concept and business plan for a flagship grill house concept.

Furnished serviced apartments

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema analyzed the furnished serviced apartments market in Beirut and assessed the client's plot of land prior to developing the concept for a 4-star furnished serviced apartments' project. A feasibility study was also elaborated.

Concept store

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema performed a competition analysis of the high street women clothing retail and unisex sportswear in Beirut, in order to create a concept store in Lebanon. At a later stage, Hodema also reviewed the project's financial study.

French bakery

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema performed a market study of the French bakeries supply in Beirut prior to developing the concept for a mid to high-end French bakery providing take-away and delivery services for fresh bread and "viennoiseries". Hodema also developed the project's business plan and financial projections.

Bank Audi corporate cafeterias

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema conducted mystery site visits to Bank Audi cafeterias located in Plaza, Palladium, and MI buildings in Beirut to monitor their food consistency and quality as well as the hygiene of their cafeteria premises. Visits also included the central kitchens of the caterers in charge of each cafeteria. Hodema spot checks took into consideration HACCP practices and requirements, premises and maintenance, staff service standards as well as the quality of the food and beverage served.



Flagship Food and Beverage project

Greater Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema developed the concept for a sandwich outlet in Lebanon serving international food with a limited dine-in area, and providing delivery and take-away services. A feasibility study was also elaborated for the project.

Food and Beverage catering

Metn, Lebanon

Hodema developed an online food retail concept in the Metn area, offering ready meals with a central kitchen of 400 sqm serving daily platters. A feasibility study was also elaborated for the project.

Health club

Dbayeh, Lebanon

Hodema performed a competition analysis of the health clubs projects in Greater Beirut prior to creating the concept of one that is located in Dbayeh. Hodema also developed a business plan and financial projections for the project that were compiled into a bank file for a loan request.

Fine-dining restaurant

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema created the concept for a fine-dining restaurant in Beirut. A business plan and financial projections were also elaborated for the project.

Mixed-use project

Jbeil, Lebanon

Hodema performed a market study of the mixed-use projects from Jounieh to Tripoli prior to developing the concept of a mixed-use venue in Jbeil spread over a plot of land of 40,000 sqm. Hodema assessed the location, proposed three concept directions and elaborated a flash feasibility study for each concept prior to selecting the final concept that Hodema further detailed along with a financial study.

Liza

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema was commissioned by the owners of Liza restaurant to conduct a general assessment on their two outlets located in Beirut and Paris. Their aim was to standardize the operations and procedures between both outlets prior to initiating a franchise plan.



Mixed-use project

Dbayeh, Lebanon

Hodema studied the furnished serviced apartments market in coastal Metn prior to developing the concept of a mixed-use project in Dbayeh, and a financial study.

Forty Four commercial area

Sin el Fil, Lebanon

Hodema was approached by the owners of Demco to assist them in defining the pricing strategy of "Forty Four" commercial area spread over 8,000 sqm in Sin El Fil and consisting of 43 units. Hodema analyzed the benchmarks on rental/sales prices in the neighborhood catchment area in terms of retail, Food and Beverage and offices, and provided a set of recommendations.



Mixed-use project

Maasser El Chouf, Lebanon

Hodema developed the feasibility study and financial projections for a mixed-use project located in Maasser El Chouf and consisting of a hotel of 20 rooms, a guesthouse of 6 units, a restaurant, a bakery and a retail shop selling local products.

Sporting Club

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema performed a general assessment on the Sporting Club Food and Beverage components, and studied the franchise potential of their beach and restaurant facilities.



La Vie Claire

Lebanon

Hodema was appointed by the owners of "La Vie Claire", a French brand open in Lebanon as a franchise since 2014, to assist them in the set-up of their sub-franchise department. Hodema developed the brand's franchise brochure, and presented its strategic expansion in Lebanon, KSA and UAE. A financial analysis of a typical outlet performance was also elaborated.



News & Events

Horeca 2017 and 2018

Beirut, Lebanon

For the 13th and 14th years in a row, Hodema took part at Horeca, the annual hospitality and food exhibition that took place in April 2017 and March 2018 in Beirut. Hodema also co-organized the Annual Hospitality Forum (AHF) in both years, in collaboration with Hospitality Services, gathering key players of the hospitality industry around several themes such as Lebanon's nightlife, Food and Beverage mix in malls, Digital influencers, Hotels' General Managers' debate, Food and Beverage clusters, the Guesthouse experience and New trends in Food and Beverage.



Special report on Lebanese cuisine restaurants in Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema and La Sagesse University's Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management conducted market surveys on the Lebanese cuisine restaurants in Beirut as part of the Faculty's curriculum. This merger, a premiere between a private company and a university, was an added value to the students' academic course, and led to the elaboration of a report that was presented to the Minister of Tourism, H.E. Avedis Guidanian.



Saudi Horeca 2018

For the 6th consecutive year, Hodema participated in Saudi Horeca which took place in November 2018 at the Riyadh International Convention & Exhibition Center.



BDL – MEA conference 2018

Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema co-organized with the Lebanese Central Bank and Middle East Airlines the "Tone from the top regional corporate governance conference", under the Patronage and in the presence of Dr. Riad Salamé, the Governor of the Central Bank, on November 13th and 14th 2018 at the Middle East Airlines Training & Conferences Center. The sessions focused on the Financial services, Aviation, and Hospitality sectors. Nada Alameddine, partner at Hodema moderated a panel entitled "Women In The Board Room and Their Impact on Governance & Performance – The Business Case", and shared the experiences of her speakers Raya Raphael, General Manager and Director of Banque Libano-Française, Tamara Salha, Hotel Manager at Phoenicia Hotel Beirut - Inter-Continental Hotels Group, Merima Zupcevic, Corporate Governance Program Lead for Europe and Central Asia at International Finance Corporation (IFC), and Asmahan Zein, Chairperson of the Lebanese League of Women in Business. Nada also animated a break-out session to identify recommendations for the financial services, aviation and hospitality sectors.



GRIF 2017

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Hodema was a Gold sponsor, speaker and moderator at the Global Restaurant Investment Forum (GRIF) which took place in April 2017 in Dubai. More than 300 industry professionals attended this event that featured a stimulating conference program debating the investments, trends, challenges and opportunities in the F&B industry. Nada Alameddine, partner at Hodema, moderated a panel entitled "Spotlight on the Middle East" whereby she presented the key trends emerging in the regional market along with the successful models used to drive growth from franchising to creating local concepts. She also animated a round table tackling the role of consultants, particularly in the Middle East. Toufic Akl, partner at Hodema, moderated the session "Demystifying restaurant development" revolving around the opportunities and challenges of the restaurants development process and the investor's perspective on how to get the highest return.



Interview on Finnish TV YLE 2017

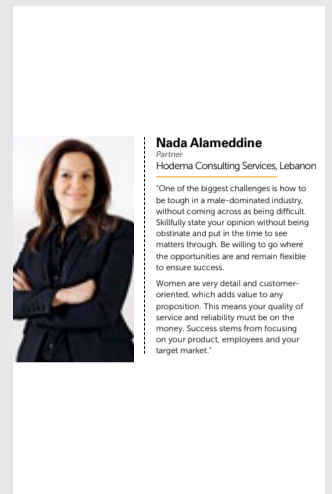
Beirut, Lebanon

Hodema's managing partner Nagi Morkos was interviewed on Finnish TV YLE in December 2017 to talk about the Lebanese Tourism. The discussion highlighted the various aspects of the tourism industry in Lebanon and its impact on the country's economic sector.



35 most influential women in hospitality

Nada Alameddine was featured on the cover page of Hospitality News magazine dated June-July 2018 as one of the 35 most influential women in hospitality in the Middle East.



LFA initiatives 2017

Beirut, Lebanon

As part of the College of Experts in the Lebanese Franchise association, Hodema visited Prime Minister Saad Hariri at the Grand Serail in February 2017 and H.E. Mohammad Kabbara, Minister of labor in March 2017 along with various members of the Association, to discuss means of support and improvement for the franchise industry in Lebanon.



Special issues on Beirut Food and Beverage market 2017 and 2018

Beirut, Lebanon

For the past 9 years, Hodema has authored and published special issues on the Food and Beverage market in Beirut, in collaboration with the Lebanese economic magazine "Le Commerce du Levant". Issues tackle the main F&B trends, identify and describe the F&B landmarks and zones in the city, and publish interviews with key players in the hospitality industry.



Best of Instagram @hodema



RESTAURANT TRENDS FOR 2019

August /September 2018

This article was published in "Hospitality News" - N°119, August /September 2018 by Toufic Akl from Hodema

Last time we looked, there was a global battle underway, targeting gluten, refined sugar and dairy. This trend remains ongoing, supported by two new, key phrases, which are 'clean eating' and 'environmental sustainability'. However, predictably, some ideas have also failed to pass the test of time, such as the trend for activated charcoal, which was used to infuse our croissants and lattes, blue cocktails and wine.

Clean eating

The healthy eating drive has inevitably prompted an entire range of variations across the food landscape on the theme of what's good for us. 'Clean eating' is the most highly anticipated trend for next year, bolstered by renowned chefs, such as the UK's Jamie Oliver, who are championing the concept, which involves adhering to a combination of criteria when preparing a dish. As expected, fried and processed ingredients are a no-go, while fruits, vegetables, non-refined sugar and plant milk are among the ingredients given a green light. Dishes are then prepared using healthy cooking techniques. With several clean-eating projects in the making in Beirut, momentum is expected to build in this segment.

"Free-from"

The 'free from' trend has found its place in the sun, thanks, in particular, to the rise of gluten-free mania. Its popularity will continue to grow on the back of ever-increasing awareness about allergies and intolerances.

A move among some consumers to drastically reduce gluten intake, rather than omit it altogether, is driving up sales of slow dough breads, such as the 'pinsa' pizza, which is easier to digest than regular pizza varieties, thanks to its longer fermentation process. Dairy also remains under scrutiny, with a growing number of studies revealing the benefits of going dairy-free and indicating that adults don't need lactose. Moreover, research suggests that about 75 percent of the world's population is genetically unable to fully digest milk. Going dairy-free is also thought to help prevent digestive disorders and encourage clearer skin. The final villain is refined sugar, which has now been linked to heart disease, obesity and bladder cancer, when consumed on a daily basis. Many have blamed the sugar industry for downplaying these risks over the years.

Organic



We're gradually saying farewell to pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, antibiotics and growth hormones. While organic ingredients have been around for some time, their prohibitive cost was often a deterrent for many mainstream consumers. Fortunately, a global, booming market is finally making produce more affordable, although the region's restaurants still face a number of challenges, including inadequate supply and problems obtaining certifications they know to be trustworthy, via the authorities.

Mediterranean ingredients

If you're not big on tofu but still keen to be kind to your body, there are plenty of broader alternatives to the vegan options. Mediterranean cuisine is undoubtedly a current buzz-phrase, chalking up a loyal fan base of over a billion people globally. Proven to be one of the world's healthiest diets, this way of eating is leading to shelves well beyond the region brimming with pomegranates, zaatar, sumac and turmeric.

Plant based



For lovers of all things green who want to take the concept further, plant-based foods are causing a buzz. The veganism trend is now in full swing and booming globally, even finding a niche in major fast-food chains, such as McDonald's and A&W, which are now offering a vegan burger. Pizza Hut has followed suit in the UK, alongside ice-cream giants Ben & Jerry's and Häagen-Dazs, which have added new, dairy-free and plant-based frozen dessert options to their menus. Alternatives to milk are also taking the world by storm, with almond milk now edging the longtime leader soya milk from the number one spot. Given these trends, customers can expect to be able to request yogurt, latte and even cheese to be made with alternatives to dairy, such as almond and perhaps even coconut milk. Plant-based foods also have the added bonus of leaving a much smaller environmental footprint, which is currently a hot global topic. And for those who still think that vegan eating is boring, look out for some of the creative dishes currently making waves, which range from zucchini noodles, mashed cauliflower and squash blossom risotto to zucchini crust pizza. Buon appetito!

More bowls

Another more recent trend showing signs of catching on is food bowls. Beginning with the Hawaiian Poke Bowl, the concept has now extended its reach to the point where bowls of all varieties are available all day long, with diners able to select the ones that suit their taste and mood. While bowls usually consist of vegetables, rice and seasoning, some feature chicken, beef, shrimps and even fruits, seeds and yogurt.

The artisan way

Artisan cuisine is a phrase on every chef's lips right now. For those still unsure what it entails, this concept makes the care, expertise and quality of the ingredients a key priority, similar to the approach adopted by an artisan working with a wooden cabinet or a piece of jewelry. The trend stems from a growing demand among consumers to know more about the origins of their food and their desire to consume fresh, local ingredients. While the 'farm to table' idea, where restaurants obtain their fruits and vegetables directly from the producer, is already a familiar concept to many, the 'butcher to table' concept, which is just one interpretation, takes the trend to another level. Advertised as fresh and homemade, the range of artisan food and drink is expansive, from juices and beer to bread, made using natural ingredients and prepared in a traditional way.

Instagrammable

This is not a trend anymore; it's here for good and restaurants have got it. Instagram has contributed to a food revolution, with the mobile app shining a spotlight on an additional aspect of food - its styling and design. Colors and set-up are now as important at times as the taste of a dish. The Instagram element has become such an integral part of our lives that some cooking schools are including photo classes in their curriculum.

When eating is a state of mind

It's worth mentioning that researching restaurant fads this year has forced us to look beyond our plates, and, once again, it's all about health and environmental sustainability. Food waste is a big concern and one that is rising rapidly, indicating a growing awareness about food values. Higher numbers of requests for doggy bags to take home leftovers show that people want to act in a more responsible way when eating

out. Responsible sourcing is also high in the trending charts. Knowing where the ingredients on your plate come from makes a big difference nowadays, with the established link between the carrot being eaten, its producer, the community and the local economy seen as a pivotal part of the eating-out experience. People are also giving greater thought to supporting the protection of both plants and animals, and the welfare of farmed and wild species, while displaying a wish to champion social benefits. In addition, they are showing themselves keen to avoid contributing to climate change and damaging or wasting natural resources.

And what's in our crystal ball?

Now that we've got 2019 covered, there's a few slightly more unusual trends that could still find their way onto our radar in time. While processed food, saturated fat and sugar tend to dominate today's snacks, future varieties will include ice creams, vegetable desserts, mood-enhancing ingredients and protein-packed chips.

Brain food is also likely to make its entrance in restaurant dishes next year. Traditional sources of power, such as eggs, spinach and berries, will be in greater evidence, as well as less common options, such as turmeric, sage, lion's mane mushrooms and holy basil.

And finally, ready or not, cannabis is becoming legal in an increasing number of countries, which has given a number of chefs, ideas and inspiration. Space cake, pot chips, happy pizza and love cookies are already appearing on menus in the US. LA-based renowned chef Andrea Drummer has even published a book titled 'Cannabis Cuisine: Bud Pairings of A Born Again Chef'.

Paleo, possibly?



Drawing on a trend that has been around for a while, 'paleo' dishes are made from what is presumed to be the foods eaten by early humans, such as meat, fish, vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds. Dairy and cereal products are excluded, as, of course, is processed food. The concept has been given a lukewarm reception by some, with its intermittent popularity questioned by several observers, who point out that many ancient fruits and vegetables have long disappeared. Nevertheless, this trend could prove to be a popular passing fancy with the more adventurous among us.



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