



In 2010 Emirati friends Buthaina Al Mazrui and Alamira Noor Bani Hashim had planned to run their own business for a number of years, but wanted something completely different in the food and beverage industry. They wanted somewhere for people to relax, enjoy company along with amazing, high quality level food without having to be part of a hotel chain.

Hardworking, and dedicated, Buthaina and Noor set about planning the perfect place. They researched suppliers, locations, partners and this was all taking time – they did not wish to rush things and get the target market wrong, but equally they were very impatient to have something to show for their work.

This is how they came up with a plan to launch a secret Dinner Club in the build-up to launching their own café. The idea is that dinners are held in secret, strange locations, guests don't know each other and attend via invitation only, and the theme of the dinner is never repeated. Dinners have been held in amazing locations, such as constructions sites, the desert and camping areas.

"The whole point is that we want to create an entirely new experience," says Buthaina. "The first dinner was held at a construction site. There weren't any windows or doors, just a concrete structure, rock and rubble. To contrast with the surroundings, we set up a very fancy, elaborate table with cloths and fine china. When they arrived, people were really shocked; that area is still being built and as they approached all they could see was the candles flickering. Now every time we want to top ourselves."

The night was a roaring success, with the hostesses finally persuading their guests that at 1am, it was time to leave. Moving on from their urban fairy tale theme, the next dinner was held in an empty swimming pool, complete with custom-made benches. On another occasion, a bus parked up near the fish market at Mina Zayed was cleared of all its seats and set up for dinner, with a somewhat beguiling blanket of fresh flowers lining the ceiling.

Both women say that although they also have full-time jobs, they are entirely hands-on: from sourcing the crockery and ornaments from their homes for the event, to setting the tables, preparing the food and clearing away afterwards.

"We literally do everything," says Buthaina. "Serving people at the table and then sitting down to eat with them gives us a great opportunity to see which dishes people respond best to." This approach has ensured that No.57 already has a signature dessert: named *ermahgerhds*, after the sound that people make when first tasting it - er-mah-gerhd - it consists of pound cake soaked in chocolate milk topped with toffee digestives and marshmallows.

The food is all prepared at home, before being transported to the site. Much like everything else, it changes each time but has an eclectic, international feel to it, with past menus featuring

*kasir* (Turkish tabbouleh) alongside pecan crusted sweet potatoes, truffled mac 'n' cheese and baked sea bass with ginger and lime.

"The cafe is a work in progress. With the dinner club we're able to promote it and get people excited about the idea. It means that they become familiar with the brand and the style of food and it's also a really good opportunity for us to meet people," says Noor.

Finally, on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2014 No. 57 Café opened its doors. The friends felt the time was right after spending 2 years on the Dinner Club, getting to know their target markets' needs and desires well and building up a great network of suppliers and partners.

This does not mean that the job is finished however, it has only just begun. The ladies both say that there are operational challenges every day that need to be resolved, but the Dinner Club allowed them to learn as they progressed.

One of the items both Buthaina and Noor say is important is excellent people to work with. For example they describe their chef Gavin Gleeson. Buthaina said "He's Irish. He was at Monte-Carlo Beach Club before, and before that, at Wheeler's. He's amazing. His presentation skills, I've never seen anything like it. We sat down together and he said: "Tell me what you want." I did and he thought I was crazy. He admits it now. I told him the top dishes I wanted. It was a long list. He said: 'We'll have to narrow it down'. So we did."

When asked about any weaknesses they have, Buthaina answered "Noor and I are not built to handle [negative feedback] – we take it personally. We've worked so hard on this. I don't know if people know how much effort we put into this. We're hands-on, even though we both have full-time jobs – plus we have the Dinner Club to take care of. But we're passionate about what we do and we want to make sure that everything's perfect. Negative feedback gets to us but it makes us want to work even harder.

What makes No. 57 Café unique? Buthaina and Noor continue to be very passionate about their business – the café and The Dinner Club, which still continues to this day. "This isn't typical cafe food. And we're here a lot. There are some cafés where you will see the owner – that inspires us. You want the owner to be part of it. It adds a personal touch. And I think that's the point of No. 57. We respond to every single person. We don't have a marketing company. We do everything on our own."

Visit the website: <http://no57.co/>

## Questions:

1. How do you think Buthaina and Noor used the Loyalty Ladder Tool? Describe each stage with examples.
2. What is the Dinner Club's Unique Selling Point?
3. What characteristics do you feel Buthaina and Noor show? Why?
4. Which of Schumpeter's innovations do you feel are at work here? Why?