

Building & CO.

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THE FINE ART OF COOKING AND DESIGNING

Celebrity Chef Maroun Chedid Collaborates With Interior Design Consultants Bleu On A Challenging Renovation Project In The Heart Of Beirut

Sabina Llewellyn-Davies

Celebrity chef Maroun Chedid is a man of many talents. This year, he launched Top Chef Middle East, an adaptation of the world-famous reality culinary competition television series. He grew up in a tiny village in the Bekaa Valley, a fertile region known for its vast vineyards and lush orchards and went on to be the holder of the prestigious title of International Chef of the Year awarded by the Toques Blanches du Monde.

In this exclusive interview for Building&Co he shares his passion for culinary art at the site of his new venture Ritage, a dining venue and concept space housed in a beautiful 200-year-old Beirut heritage building renovated with the support of Bleu, a team of qualified and diversified interior designers specialized in hospitality projects from concept to construction. Bleu offers consulting services striving to achieve project goals and objectives, creating spaces and well planned facilities.

- 1 - Domaine Maroun Chedid, The Academy - Classroom 2.
- 2 - 3 Domaine Maroun Chedid, The Bistro.
- 4 - Renovation of the 200-year-old Beirut heritage building.
- 5 - Façade Board, Entrance - Elevation - General Plan.



Chef Maroun Chedid, why did you decide to become a chef?

I come from a small village, Saghbine in the Bekaa, where there are few work opportunities apart from farming. It was 1987, I was sitting with a friend and complaining about school - I hated maths - and he told me that he was moving to Beirut to go to a hospitality college as he wanted to train to be a chef. When he told me that I did not need to be good at maths to get in I decided that this would be a good move for me as well. So, I left the village to attend the college and never looked back. Becoming a chef was the best decision I ever took in my life.

How would you class your cuisine?

Mediterranean cuisine with a Lebanese influence. As a chef I have, of course, learnt the basics of French and Italian cuisine, but, in my country we have the best cuisine in the world, so why should I ignore it.

What fascinates you most about cooking?

I love what I do and my ultimate objective is to create a legacy. There is a lot of stress in this line of work and I face many challenges. But, the hope and the belief in my work, our country and the future are what get me early out of bed every morning, excited about the day ahead.





Your latest concept Ritage is set to change the Beirut dining scene. What challenges do you face adapting the interior of a 200-year-old heritage building?

Ritage is the Arabic word for the big door. I wanted to give the project an Arabic name with a meaning that will appeal to all. Ritage will open doors to the whole world. Housed in this 200-year-old building and in the 800-year-old cave downstairs, there will be the Maroun Chedid Academy and Catering as well as a boutique for culinary items. There will be a restaurant offering taste and comfort. I am keeping the old furniture from the previous owners [the building used to house Time Out, a favorite spot for Beirutis for decades], the dining chairs and tables. I am in love with this place, it is authentic and has character. Actually, when I came to take a look at this place for the first time it felt good from the start. Then I met the owner and that was it...The interior is being totally renovated, but, we are keeping it as authentic as possible.

Thankfully, I have the support of interior designer Rana Nasr from Bleu who is very passionate about the project and she is working hard to create an incredible layout, inside and out. We are also working on sustainable energy solutions with Bleu. It's a very exciting time and I can't wait for the doors of Ritage to open.

Rana Nasr, how important is technical design in such a challenging renovation project?

You cannot enter such a space without feeling its soul...Respecting and designing around the existing spirit was fundamental. We had to combine the modern look of Chef Maroun cuisine with the authentic space.

When designing a space it is about creating a balance of aesthetics and function. Tell us, how did you best utilize the existing space of Ritage?

All aesthetics were merged from functionalities, not only from the wish to make it look nice.

When designing a food service operation, how important is it to keep the technicalities of space efficiency and safety in mind?

As much as Chef Maroun Chedid and us call this project a dream, as much as we stay down to earth for all functionalities required, safety and hygiene standards need to be respected. We have designed and elaborated the requirements of the projects. Not the other way around.

