

FROM LEBANON TO MOUJINS

June saw Chefs Joe Barza and Charles Azar represent Lebanon internationally at the 12th edition of the Moujins Gastronomy Festival, which took place in France.

The festival has been a culinary icon since 2006, with chefs and food specialists from all corners of the globe coming together to share their knowledge and catch up on the latest industry techniques and ideas. Moujins boasts over 100 chefs in attendance and 120 demonstrations every year, with Barza being a regular and Azar attending for the first time, to bring the best of Lebanese cuisine to the international stage.

"When we first began going, it was just to represent Lebanon and display our knowhow and then I started introducing the chefs and visitors to Lebanese ingredients and products. One time I took kishik, another 'freekeh', 'sumac', rose water, 'tahini', 'dibis' and this year I took burghul," Barza said. "Every year we take something new for the others to discover. When we made 'moughribieh', Chef Frédéric Anton from Pré-Catalan went crazy over it."

This year, Barza gave demonstrations and workshops for school children and visitors on the uses of 'burghul', with the aim of boosting demand for Lebanese products by familiarizing the world with national



ingredients. "I used 'burghul' to make them the world-famous Lebanese salad, 'tabbouleh', and I also made potato 'kibbeh', with black olives and tomatoes," he said. "For the main dinner, I made fish 'kibbeh nayyeh'."

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Chef Charles Azar participated in the sweets and pastry section at the festival, demonstrating traditional Lebanese desserts, such as 'knefeh' and 'lataife'. "I wanted to give them something they hadn't seen before," Azar said. "I made a fusion dessert of an apple tartin with caramel, with 'mohalibieh' cream, flavoured with rose water and crunchy 'ismalieh'."

Among their aims, Barza and Azar were keen to see how they could bring Moujins and Lebanon together, looking at

techniques and ideas that they could take home to improve culinary knowledge.

"I'm always learning new things there," Barza explained. "We're going to bring techniques back with us focused on improving our jams and cheeses, and how to make our products better with a view to promoting them abroad."

Azar was impressed with the dedication he witnessed in teaching young people how to cook and introducing them to the culinary world from an early age; something he felt is currently lacking in Lebanon.

"They were there peeling apples and making caramel, learning to cook with their own hands," he explained. "We don't have this in Lebanon and I believe it's something we should do. It's important to let children see cooking done this way and to inspire the next generation of chefs."

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