



Out to launch

Pantry Café, a locally-built premium casual food concept is opening its second store, with ambitious plans to expand even further over the next few years

Pantry Café is a food destination that is all about premium gourmet upscale ingredients; high end, but casual. The brand's vision is to provide organic, good ingredients, fresh sauces and stocks to create good, healthy food to its patrons. Pantry Café sources local produce from distributors, because it is much easier for ingredient consistency and deliveries.

"Pantry Café is about good, healthy [not necessarily low fat or low calorie] but healthy as in good-for-you food, not pre-cooked, no left overs are used, there is an emphasis on fresh and definitely organic where possible. We have a very friendly neighbourhood focus. We have always tried to build CSR into our system as much as we can, so we try to give back to society. It is always something we take care of," said Pantry Café owner and Co-Founder, Yana Kalwani. "We have a

few pastas, we have burgers, and we have Asian-inspired cuisine, so it is a mix from all over the world, so there is not one cuisine that we do focus on."

Kalwani began working on the concept in the summer of 2011 and, at that point there was a niche in the market for such restaurants. According to Kalwani there were very few players in the market at that time for premium casual dining.

For Kalwani, the use of fresh ingredients makes Pantry Café stand out above the rest of its competition, although there are now many players in the same dining segment such as Tom & Serge, Jones the Grocer, and More Café. She says however that not all use very high end ingredients.

"We find the best ingredients we can find for each dish. Also we are an approachable brand. It has a neighbourhood feel and we focus on local communities, so when

there is a run in Safa Park, we encourage the runners to come and visit us and have coffee after. When there are local charity events, such as K9 Friends adoption days, we help to do that. When a new designer wants to show off their brand, we are able to help. We want to help local brands and charities. Our location is great and we have good service," said Kalwani.

EXPANSION

Pantry Café had been looking for a second location in the right area for the brand to take off for approximately a year before deciding on opening a branch in Bay Square, Business Bay. The first branch that was opened is located on Al Wasl Road adjacent to Safa Park.

"Finding the right second location involved a learning curve for us, we did have our teething issues, which we ironed out. We

have learned a lot along the way, a year down the line. When we were just learning and first opened the Al Wasl branch we couldn't open more, now that one is well established and now we can open another branch and are ready to move on," said Kalwani.

Initially when Pantry Café was looking at expanding, Kalwani was interested in exploring the franchising option, however, she said franchise wouldn't work for her as a concept as she wants full control of the brand image, so for now she is keeping the new branch within the company.

"Our Business Bay branch opened in May, we decided to open in Business Bay because it has a different portfolio of people living there and there are different people than on Al Wasl Road, it is close to Downtown and it is a great location with a lot of offices so it is in an area of good catchment for Downtown residences. We are very fussy when we are looking for a location. We need high windows and ceilings and also the location here is lovely because of the number of businesses in Bay Square," said Kalwani.

Kalwani and her husband have always had a vision to not concentrate on just one store and always wanted to expand the Pantry Café brand.

"For Pantry we want to open five stores in the next few years, but again in different neighbourhoods in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, but beyond Pantry Café, our holding company

for Pantry Café has expansion plans already for this year. We have a new concept coming out in Abu Dhabi called Bu!, which is going to be in the World Trade Centre in Abu Dhabi at the end of this year, it is a leisurely and high end, premium casual concept, and a licensed venue, then we have another concept coming up, again licensed," said Kalwani. "Over and above that we want to stabilise this before we think of further expansion, in the next five years we will do more projects."

PRICING

Food prices are escalating across the UAE as the cost of living increases, these rising costs are also affecting the food and beverage business. According to Kalwani, initially Pantry Café had customers complaining about the cost of its food. Kalwani said that she justified it by the fact that the brand was not willing to compromise on food quality.

"We wouldn't compromise on quality, I think now in fact a lot of the different restaurants and cafes are in a similar price range, so customers have accepted the new price shift that has happened in Dubai. It is produce and land rent and those are our expenses. In terms of the direction the F&B market is going, it is expanding rapidly right now. A lot of new brands and similar concept to us are now coming into Dubai," she said. **FME**

LOCAL F&B BRAND PANTRY CAFE SETS SIGHTS ON UAE EXPANSION

Following the success of the first outlet in Al Wasl Square, local eatery Pantry Café has opened the doors to its second branch in Bay Square, Business Bay. The new venue has over 200 covers and is a total of 5,500 square feet; larger than the original Pantry Café. The new café is open for breakfast and lunch, seven days a week.

"We are delighted to be opening a second Pantry Café in Business Bay. As a local start-up, being able to open a second branch is a testament to our business model. We have carefully considered our options and Business Bay is the perfect fit for our second outlet. Pantry Café prides itself on serving local and organic produce where we can in our dishes – which is at the heart of our business vision. Following the opening of the second Pantry Café, we look forward to future expansion in the UAE in the coming years," said Vice Chairperson, Retail & Beyond, Yana Kalwani.

The first Pantry Café opened its doors in 2012 in Al Wasl Square and with its open kitchen and on-site bakery soon proved a favourite with UAE residents. Gourmet cafes and delicatessens are increasingly popular in the UAE and home-grown local chains have been a trend in the F&B dining scene with an upsurge in the number of deli-style outlets. Pantry Café is the first concept eatery to be opened by Dubai-based, Retail & Beyond which is set to open two further concept dining venues in 2015. The upscale licensed restaurants, Bu!, a Pan-Latin lounge which will be launched in the World Trade Center, Abu Dhabi and a Japanese-Peruvian fusion restaurant which is set to open on Palm Jumeirah following the two Pantry Cafes.



Yana Kalwani, Co-Founder of Pantry Café has plans to expand her brand across the Emirates.