



# Natasha Sideris

CEO and founder of Tashas Group

## INTERVIEW YI-HWA HANNA

**Y**ou've been described as a maverick of the casual dining scene. Why is this type of dining so valuable? Diners

have and will, for a long time to come, still want something that is premium but still accessible. That's what Tashas is - beautiful food made on order, with the freshest ingredients in a stunning environment that is not too stuffy and is also relatively reasonably priced. It's the kind of experience I personally enjoy, and I hope our customers feel the same way. It's accessible luxury, exclusive but doesn't exclude.

**It's often said that being a chef is one of the most stressful jobs in the world. How do you navigate this aspect of your role?** I

don't consider myself a chef, as I lack formal training. Instead, I am a restaurateur. There's a fantastic book by Nicholas Lander called *The Art of the Restaurateur*, where he likens the role to that of an orchestra conductor - a comparison that deeply resonates with me. As a restaurateur, I'm involved in every aspect: the food, the interior design, the people, and the overall business operations. Just as a conductor aims to create harmony among musicians, I strive to blend all elements of the dining experience into something unforgettable for our customers. It's stressful, but I truly love every moment.

**What is the most important aspect of being a successful business leader in this industry?**

I think resilience is the most crucial trait. It's challenging, with constant highs and lows. To thrive, I feel that you must be able to bounce back from setbacks, handle stress and hardship, and continue moving forward, growing stronger from each experience.

**Your brands have incredible multinational reach. What's the secret to bringing a concept to a new country?** Firstly, [it's] about doing

first-hand research of the market - not reading reports, but actually visiting the country or city, and understanding the market, what other similar brands are doing, what do the



customers want, and what is the opportunity. Once we understand that, it's about tailoring our offering to suit the market and, at the same time, staying true to our core DNA of what has made us successful in other markets.

**You've conquered South Africa's food scene, then Dubai, and now, Saudi Arabia. What excites you about these markets?** Each of

these markets is unique. South Africa, where we began, still embraces our innovation. Even after 19 years, the response to our latest Johannesburg opening at LXX is humbling, and the market still has growth potential. The UAE, with one of the world's most dynamic food scenes, has seen exponential growth over our ten years here. The rise of homegrown brands, both by expats and locals, many with international potential, is particularly exciting. Saudi Arabia is an emerging market with great promise. While fine dining may initially face challenges, it's a perfect fit for premium casual dining. I believe Tashas will do well [in Saudi], as the audience is sophisticated and aligned with this accessible premium offering.

**What's next for you?** We are launching Nala, our first foray into the fast-casual concept, which will open this year in Alserkal, Dubai.

"Pretty hasty and very tasty" is how I like to describe it. It will be very different to typical fast-casual concepts. We are also opening Avli in Bahrain; Tashas in Riyadh, Athens and Cape Town; as well as a Le Parc by Tashas in Johannesburg.

**What's your fave restaurant globally?** Matsuhisa Athens in the Four Seasons Astir Palace. It's my favourite hotel in the world, serving my favourite food with a spectacular view.

**If you could visit three countries to pick up one food ingredient from each, what would those be?** Greece for olive oil, Spain for tomatoes, and Brazil for coffee.

**What's the first thing you do when you arrive at a new destination?** I find out where the locals like to eat!

**What are three things that you always pack in your suitcase?** A good book, AirPods, and a pair of sneakers.

**What is your earliest memory of a holiday as a child?** A holiday in Mozambique with my mum, dad, and brother, Savva, when I was very young. I remember eating clams at the Costa del Sol restaurant like it was yesterday.

**What's been your most memorable trip so far?**

To South America, where I visited Argentina and Brazil. We ate at the most incredible restaurants, and the street food was also unbelievable. The coastline of Rio felt touched by the hand of God. Brazil is also where I got the inspiration for our Bouzios sandwich that we serve at some Tashas locations.

**What is your go-to choice of in-flight entertainment?** Definitely documentaries.

**How do you spend your air miles?** To upgrade!

**What countries will you be travelling to next?** Greece, UK, Spain, and Serbia.

**What's one travel experience you'd rather forget?** Flying back home to Dubai from South Africa the day that COVID lockdown started. It was the worst and most haunting feeling.

**What's your ultimate bucket list destination?** Anywhere in Asia. I would love to go to Vietnam, Thailand, and Japan. **BT**