

#7- Making More Meals More Moroccan - The Story of Mina

Founder: Fouad Kallamni



Interviewer: Adam Amin

Date: 8.19.24

Intro

Fouad Kallamni, inspired by his mother's culinary legacy and Morocco's rich food culture, founded Mina 2010 to bring authentic Moroccan flavors to the global market. Mina offers a variety of Moroccan food products, from their signature harissa chili paste to ready-to-heat Moroccan meals, and aims to make Moroccan cuisine accessible and enjoyable for the vast American market.

Background and Inspiration

Growing up in New York City in a Moroccan family whose lives revolved around meals at the dinner table, Fouad found a deep connection to food early in life, "Food is a big part of our lifestyle...we're always hosting, we're always feeding," Fouad explained, highlighting the cultural significance of food in Moroccan households. In the 60s, his mother Mina left Morocco for Paris to attend the best culinary school in the world, pursuing her dream of becoming a chef. She relocated to New York City in 1967, and quickly became one of the most sought after caterers in the city. After a long and successful career, she retired in 2010. That's when Fouad realized there was a gap in the U.S. market for an authentic yet modern Moroccan food brand. "I noticed there was a void for Moroccan food, which is just as delicious and diverse as other global cuisines," he told me.

The Creation of Mina

Mina was born to fill this market gap and honor Fouad's mother's legacy. The brand launched with a family recipe for harissa, a Moroccan chili paste, and gradually expanded to include other

traditional products like shakshuka sauce, tagine simmering sauces, preserved lemons, olives, and more. "Our mission was to make more meals more Moroccan," Fouad said.

Product Development and Market Reception

Mina's products are deeply rooted in authenticity, with recipes that stay true to traditional Moroccan cooking. "Whenever we launch a product, it's so true to my mother's recipe that if she doesn't sign off on it, we won't go into production," he continued, "it's one thing to make a recipe for a few people, and it's a whole other story when you commercialize it, and you're making it for hundreds of thousands of people, for millions of people." The brand's commitment to quality and authenticity has resonated with consumers, both Moroccan and American. For first-generation Americans who can't or don't have time to cook like their parents did, "[Mina] offers that solution...they could have that same [Moroccan] experience in an easy way," Fouad explained, noting how Mina's products have made Moroccan cuisine more accessible.

Challenges and Strategic Decisions

Mina's rise to shelves across America wasn't easy. Launching and growing a food business comes with significant challenges, from finding reliable co-packers to sourcing quality ingredients and managing financial commitments. Fouad emphasizes the importance of differentiation in the market: "You have to bring something special to the table...if you're just coming with another 'me too' product, it's going to be really hard." Mina's success is also rooted in its dedication to natural, preservative-free products, which align with current consumer trends toward clean eating. "Our customers know, with Mina, its quality they can trust," Fouad stated.

Impact and Future Vision

Mina has created a substantial impact by introducing Moroccan cuisine to a wider audience in North America, with over 30 products on the market. "We've put Moroccan food and Moroccan cuisine on the map...and diversified [consumers'] culinary portfolio," Fouad said proudly. The brand's influence extends beyond the U.S. as Mina prepares to expand globally with a new production facility in Morocco. This step is huge for the company, as Mina is "going to be vertically integrated, with farmers really close by." With lower priced ingredients, packaging and labor costs, Mina is able to rapidly bring their products to new markets. "We want to be a global brand...making Moroccan cuisine accessible for people all over the world,"

Conclusion

Mina is more than just a food brand; it's a bridge between cultures, bringing the rich and diverse flavors of Moroccan cuisine to tables around the world. By staying true to traditional recipes and focusing on quality, the Kallamni family has successfully filled a gap in the market, making Moroccan meals more accessible and popular across different demographics. As Mina continues to grow, it remains committed to its mission of making "more meals, more Moroccan", both in the U.S. and beyond.

You can find their products at mina.co, or at your local grocery store's condiment aisle!

Adam's takeaway

What stood out to me the most from this interview was the challenge Fouad described of scaling a product while keeping the quality. As he said, it's one thing to make a meal in your kitchen for a small group, but when turning it into a product, it requires much larger production with many more hands involved. This complexity is something many consumers don't realize when purchasing a product at the grocery store. I also saw this play out with Daniel and Antonio Cabellero's Fillos.