



One to one with
**Mazen
El Zein**

*CEO of Crystal Group, and the man
in charge of the most happening night
spots in Beirut and Dubai*

Staying on top of the nightlife industry is quite the challenge considering the short lifespan that clubs have and the short attention span that people have acquired in this day and age. Times are changing, people's taste in music is changing and even their concept of space is changing. Since old venues lose the popularity battle to new ones by the second, maintaining a distinguished reputation now requires innovative ideas and that certain something that people are going to be talking about and remembering even decades later. In the Gulf and Middle East, the equivalents of Studio 54 the most famous New York city club of the 70's, have secured a spot for both regions on the international nightlife map. a&e wanted to meet the people behind the nightlife industry; the ones with the influence and the entrepreneurial mind that keeps them one step ahead of their competitors. Mazen Al Zein, the CEO of Crystal Group which holds the infamous Pier 7 in Beirut and People in Dubai under its umbrella of venues, had some interesting things to say to us about his work and success:



For those who don't know who the Crystal Group is, tell us about who you are and what you do?

Crystal Group is a niche pioneering hospitality operator, who was behind landmark concepts that have marked the entertainment industry not only in the Middle East but also in Europe. We specialize in lifestyle concepts such as clubs, bar, lounges, restaurants and beach club. We have developed through the last 10 years an extensive portfolio with a presence in 4 countries. We are a team composed of young talents, creative minds with rich experience in the F&B business. Our mission statement is to turn incredible and true moments into unforgettable memories. Our belief is that hospitality is in the details and our strength is the passion we put in each one of our projects.

We are putting the spotlight on successful men for this issue, tell us about your work and what you like most about it.

While as CEO of the company, I am naturally dedicated to define the strategy of the group, overseeing its growth and monitoring its profitability, but I like to be involved in every aspect of each project and in this sense I put all my passion into my work. I cannot define a typical routine or day of work, as not only do I travel a lot to discover the latest trends in F&B and entertainment but I also have lots of office work and I have to check on our outlets day and night. There is of course a natural reward in my type of business as you get to travel, meet people, socialize and work on challenging projects, the combination of all of this while being very hectic remains (even if very hectic), yet the biggest reward is seeing that all your efforts and passion translated into a successful venue that guests enjoy relentlessly and become addicted to the magic you created.

Tell us about working in the nightlife industry of Dubai? Of Lebanon? What are some interesting situations you've encountered in your line of work?

The nightlife industries in Dubai and in Beirut are very different and probably the only common point is the very high level of competition in both markets. Dubai nightlife scene is very much regulated, as alcohol licenses are restricted into hotels or certain free zones, there is also a limitation in the trading hours and type of entertainment. Beirut is more of a nightlife destination in this sense and the level of entertainment is much more advanced given the more lenient laws. Yet, the magic of the Dubai scene comes from its cosmopolitan crowd and the fact that you face international operators and not only local ones as in Beirut, which makes the challenge even bigger. From a pure business point of view, average spending is higher in Dubai. I love working in both cities, along with London. I have had the most enriching work experience. Interesting situations come always from interesting people, and in hospitality you get to meet a lot of different people, coming from different cultural and social backgrounds. In one night with the music and the energy we all become one and this in itself is unique.

What was your recipe for success?

Recipes of Success: maintaining the 5 pillars of quality: quality of the crowd, quality of the music, quality of the Food & Beverage, quality of the service and quality of the innovative ideas that you introduce every season.

How do you maintain a balanced and healthy lifestyle?

It is actually one of the biggest challenges that someone can face in



Pier 7 in Beirut



this industry, my recipe is to be focused on the one hand and on having a clear cut between work and my private sphere on the other hand. I find refuge in reading, sports and movies.

What stresses does your job entitle and what are some of the challenges you face?

The biggest challenge we encountered is the unfortunate instability of our home base; Lebanon, the tough moments we went through and very high level of competition which actually made us much stronger. We're always looking for the competitive edge and never taking anything for granted.

What does it take to survive in this industry?

To survive in our industry you need to have a very flexible organization that can adapt to a very fickle and fast changing business environment. Hospitality is all about people and it is the strength of the team you have that makes your organization invulnerable to fast evolving trends. Being a true believer in quality gives you the best tool for survival.

From your point of view, what does it mean to be "successful"?

Success is multi-dimensional and cannot be limited to work, money or fame; for me it is a combination of elements that lead you to be proud of your achievements regardless of their importance as long as they are self-satisfying. Success is to be defined by the added value you brought in your society. In this sense happiness is my only gauge of success.



People Crystal Dubai