

## Coffee with the 'Bride of the Sea'

*For four generations, the Haifawi family's grocery store has been an integral part of Jaffa's Ajami neighborhood. Now they are opening their home to guests, serving up hospitality and local history along with their famous, aromatic coffee*

• By JOANNA PARASZCZUK

It's the early 1980s in Jaffa's Ajami neighborhood. A small girl is running as fast as she can along Rehov Kedem on an important errand from her mother.

"Go to Anton's and get black coffee, finely ground with cardamom."

"Black coffee finely ground with cardamom," the girl repeats her mother's order over and over, in time with her footsteps.

At 73 Rehov Kedem, the girl rushes through the door of Anton Coffee, the local grocery store. Inside, the air is heady with the scent of freshly ground coffee beans.

It's the middle of the day, and the store is packed with customers. They are here for coffee, groceries and a chat with the store owner, Anton Haifawi, who greets each of them by name as he serves them with bottles of green, locally-pressed olive oil, jars of raw tehina and yellow-white labaneh, and bags of black coffee.

By the time it's the little girl's turn to be served, she's forgotten her mother's precise instructions. All she can remember is "coffee."

Haifawi smiles down from behind his counter.

"Don't worry," he says. "I know your family, and I know exactly what coffee your mom wants."

That little girl's name was Doris, and she grew up to be a local beauty. She married Anton's son Marsel and today works alongside him and her father-in-law



*'I talk to our guests about Ajami and our family and tell them stories about the neighborhood I remember from my childhood,' says Doris Haifawi, affording tourists a fascinating insight into the lives and culture of a local Arab Catholic family*

selling the Haifawis' delicious brand of home-ground coffee.

As we sit over coffee and cakes in the Haifawi's sitting room above the store, Doris relates this story to me. Behind us, through the windows, is a gorgeous backdrop of Rehov Kedem, Ajami beach and the Mediterranean sea.

As Doris talks about Cafe Anton, she interweaves her story with tales of her life growing up in Ajami and the Haifawi family history. Her mother-in-law, Samira, occasionally drops in to answer questions or add information, turning for reference to a handwritten copy of the Haifawi family tree.

It's not surprising that the young Doris wanted to get her family's coffee order right. Coffee is not just a drink here, it's an important part of everyday life. That's why Anton Coffee, the most famous coffee seller in Ajami, is far more than just a neighborhood gro-



DORIS HAIFAWI pours aromatic, freshly ground coffee spiced with cardamom for guests at one of her stylish home hospitality events. (Tsur Shezaf)

cery store.

Owned and run by the same family for four generations, Anton Coffee has been a part of daily life here in Ajami since 1888. As a local makolet and coffee seller, it is an integral thread in the social fabric that weaves this community together.

"The story starts in 1760, when Anton's family moved from Lebanon to Haifa," says Doris.

A few years later, the family moved again, this time from Haifa to Jaffa. Perhaps they hoped to make their

fortune in this lively port city with its noisy, colorful mix of Jews, Muslims and Christians and the constant crowds of tourists, merchants and pilgrims.

When Anton's grandfather Daoud set up home in Ajami, the locals nicknamed him "Haifawi" – the man from Haifa. Haifawi has been the family's name ever since.

"In 1888, Daoud opened a makolet and passed it on to his son Dimitry, the second generation of Haifawis," Doris continues.

Dimitry Haifawi fathered 14 children, but only two

survived – including Anton, the current head of the family and owner of the store. It was Dimitry who started selling freshly ground coffee, grinding the beans right in the Haifawi's family home. When Dimitry retired, Anton continued selling home-style coffee.

Apart from some different brand names on its shelves, (the same shelves Daoud Haifawi put up in 1888), the passage of time has not had much effect on Anton Coffee. Family patriarch Anton Haifawi stands behind the counter, chatting to customers in Arabic and Hebrew as he deftly wraps their purchases.

Anton still knows the coffee preferences of every Ajami family, but these days, it is his son Marsel who is responsible for grinding the beans.

Coffee-grinding is a complex and delicate art-form that takes years to perfect.

"Everybody has their own special order for coffee," says Doris. "Some people like the beans roasted or ground more, some less; some like cardamon, some don't."

The enormous green and red coffee grinder into which Marsel pours coffee beans and cardamom pods has almost mythical status. For 60 years this machine has faithfully produced countless kilos of fine, dark, aromatic coffee to suit the individual preferences of Ajami's different households.

Should their coffee be ground by anyone other than Marsel, customers can discern the minute differences in flavor and texture.

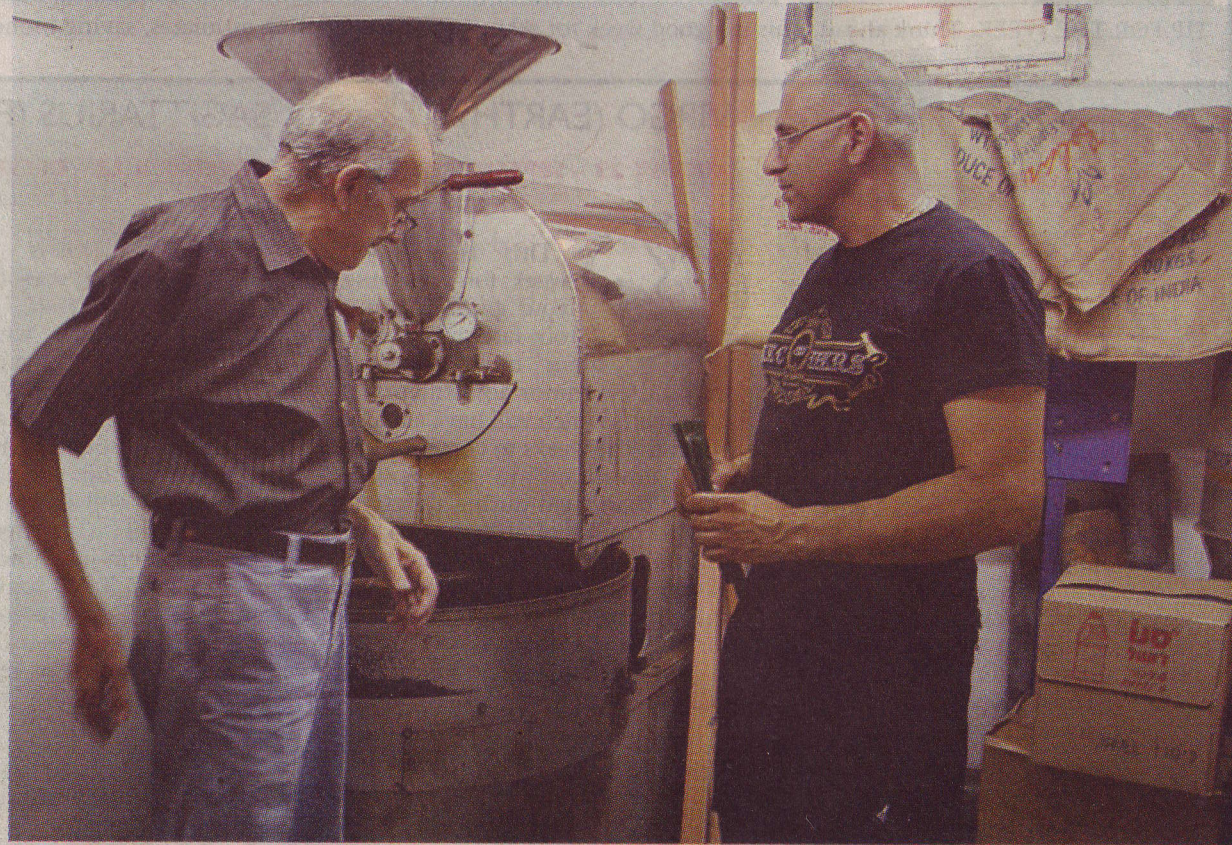
Doris says that when she started to work in the store after her marriage, she quickly realized how much Anton Coffee is a part of the local community.

"When I suggested modernizing the store, our customers objected!" she laughs.

It wasn't just Ajami locals who were against modernization. A customer from Ramat Aviv put it this way: "I am 68 and don't have much time left," he said. "I want to come to a shop that preserves the past. If you want to make changes, please do it after I'm gone!"

The Haifawis abandoned their plans. "If all of Ajami changes, we will stay with the past," Doris vows.

The neighborhood of Ajami is far more than a backdrop to Doris's story. It is a central character. Though the neighborhood is named for Ibrahim al-Ajami, one of the prophet Mohammed's companions,



ANTON COFFEE has been part of part of daily life in Ajami since 1888. Anton Haifawi (left) and son Marsel with coffee grinders in their store on Rehov Kedem. (Tsur Shezaf)

ble and waste.

"We couldn't even see the sea because there was a huge mizbala – a rubbish dump – blocking it," Doris remembers.

"Jaffa was filled with prostitutes, drugs and crime, and the only people who visited here were the police."

Today, Ajami is rapidly becoming gentrified. Wealthy people are moving into smart new apartment blocks that seem to spring up overnight in place of older buildings, a phenomenon that has caused upset and alarm among some of Ajami's residents.

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As well as home hospitality, the groups also enjoy Doris's natural gift for storytelling as she makes the neighborhood, its people, history and culture, spring to life.

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When Doris was a small child in the 1970s, Ajami was a thriving mixed community of Jews, Christians



ANTON HAIFAWI outside his store in Ajami. (Tsur Shezaf)

and Muslims, but many of its beachfront homes were demolished.

"Chich [former Tel Aviv Mayor Shlomo Lahat] decided to knock down the houses in Ajami and rehause the residents in other parts of Israel," Doris explains.

She takes me to see the seafront house on Rehov Kedem where she grew up. Though many residents – Jews and Arabs – have left, a few, including Doris's family, refused to move.

With most of Ajami's beachfront houses demolished, all that remained were enormous piles of rub-

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As Ajami gentrifies, it is also becoming a hot sight-seeing destination for Israelis and foreign tourists, who bring a new source of revenue to the area.

Doris says Scandar Copti's 2009 film *Ajami*, set in and named after the neighborhood, had a huge effect on tourism here. The movie's runaway success in cinemas in Israel and abroad has brought scores of visitors flocking to tour the neighborhood.

"Though the film shows crime and poverty, it still put Ajami on the map," says Doris.

The newly-opened promenade and beachside park linking south Tel Aviv and Jaffa via the revamped Jaffa Port have made Ajami a nice place to visit, and easily accessible by foot from the old city.

Doris says the promenade and park have improved things for the neighborhood, making the sea accessible (and visible) again to residents and restoring this important part of Jaffa to its former beauty.

"In Arabic we call Jaffa aroos al-bahar, the bride of the sea," says Doris. "Now she is that again."

The influx of tourists – Israelis as well as foreign visitors – eager to know more about the neighborhood, its people and its history, gave Doris an idea. The Haifawis and Anton Coffee had been at the heart of the neighborhood for generations. Who better to give a taste of the real Ajami to visitors?

Doris got in touch with tour guides and suggested they bring groups of tourists to see a real Jaffa family – the Haifawis.

Now Doris welcomes groups of guests into the Haifawis' family home, serving them delectable home-made baklava and Arabic sweets together with cups of the family's aromatic freshly-ground coffee

spiced with cardamon. Guests get a gift bag of coffee to take home and additional discounts should they want to purchase more.

As well as home hospitality, the groups also enjoy Doris's natural gift for storytelling as she makes the neighborhood, its people, history and culture, spring to life.

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The home hospitality events provide a fascinating insight into the lives and culture of a local Arab Catholic family.

While Doris wants to continue developing her home hospitality events, she says she has no plans to grow coffee sales by opening other branches of Cafe Anton.

"I want the coffee to stay as it is," Doris says. "When I sell this delicious coffee from a modest shop here in Ajami, it has a powerful effect, because it's genuine and real."

For details about Doris Haifawi's home hospitality events visit [www.antoncoffee.com/trips.tmp](http://www.antoncoffee.com/trips.tmp) or call Doris on 054-477120. Freshly ground coffee (as well as local olive oil and Arab cheeses) is sold at the Haifawis' store Anton Coffee at 73, Rehov Kedem, Jaffa or online via [www.go-in.co.il](http://www.go-in.co.il)