

# In Touch With Nature

*Sara Sayed Gets Personal About Her Projects*

*By Ramzi Makram-Ebeid*



For Sara Sayed, nature is the ultimate inspiration.

As co-founder of Nawaya (along with its food arm – Baladini), co-founder of Dayma, president of Slow Food Cairo and a board member of Slow Food International, Sara's passion for nature runs deep.

I was curious as to how all these jobs correlated, how she could do them all simultaneously and what her vision for the future was.

Having been one of the first students to receive a master's degree in biomimicry, Sara is a big believer in what the future of biomimicry has to offer as it's "the design and production of materials, structures, and systems that are modeled on biological entities and processes." It's also the perfect way to describe her philosophy of "how the natural world dictates a better way for us to live."



What Sara is able to do may seem like a lot by any standard, but she does it effortlessly. Even with my self-diagnosed ADD, throughout our interview, I was never overwhelmed or confused - she's clear, concise and objective.

Sara started by co-founding Dayma with Betty Khoury to "show how to make that connection." The idea behind Dayma is that it offers a "guided discovery of some of Egypt's most wondrous natural destinations, as well as areas and individuals that embrace sustainable lifestyles and responsible forms of tourism... [We] offer a responsible type of tourism, one which allows you to get immersed in a culture and not be a mere consumer, but rather an active participant," or journeyers as Sara prefers to say.

As for Nawaya, it's "a non-profit green business working to ensure sustainable food systems. Nawaya's vision is the co-creation of self-reliant, bountiful and resilient Egyptian communities." Along with Laura Tabet and Adam Molyneux-Berry, Nawaya is based on food being the most important element for our survival, as well as the foundation to building a more sustainable life and planet.

Baladini on the other hand is all about empowering farmer's wives to gain economic stability through products; it's "a social enterprise for rural Egyptian women to become artisanal food producers." And finally, Slow Food teaches us all about sustainable farming and healthy nutrition. It hones in on the concept of "food that is produced or prepared in accordance with local culinary traditions typically using high-quality locally sourced ingredients."

So, yes, there are strong similarities between her works, but I still needed that one phrase for clarification, a cliff notesque comment if you will. When she said "the nature component doesn't end with just plants and animals, human beings are part of nature," it clicked. Obviously, I realized this before, but in context to her work, it meant a lot more. For example, with Dayma tours they often visit local sustainable communities that are very aware and connected (and have been for generations) to the nature surrounding them and, as such, serve as inspirations and offer many lessons from their food to their dwellings.

Yet, how does she do it all without going through a daily box of cigarettes or cocktails of anti-anxiety medications/narcotics?

"I don't have a secret formula, I go with my passion," she states, so much so that she doesn't "like the idea of I'm back home so I disconnect." Her passion is not just on during working hours, it dictates her life. And when I brought up the late Tarek Labib (Egypt's architecture and design star), I realized that Tarek was very similar. Tarek headed sessions on permaculture and natural design for them, and was co-working to create a Baladini kitchen.

"It wasn't a matter that we wanted Tarek to design our kitchen, it's about a community to create this together, or bringing people together to understand the value of vernacular design. We wanted to understand the functionality of architecture and to use materials locally. It wasn't about him, he wanted to see beauty and functionally," says Sara of her time working with the talented architect.

And this community philosophy is what she sees as the next step. She feels we need communities to work together, especially during these trying times - "Generally speaking, we are living in Egypt during an economic downfall riddled with problems but at the same time you have all these people setting up these businesses and projects. But they are all in their own bubble... we need to bridge these communities; very different people, rural to urban, falahat coming to peoples home. Dayma brings JOURNEYERS to a place to bridge... To make any significant impact, we need to be more community oriented, and this is the way forward. Look at Cuba, when sanctions were put on them, they were forced to use the resources they had. That is when urban farming started and people started relying on each other as they needed each other, this is our only way forward, anything else will just bring a bigger gap between people. Begad!"

She said "begad" a lot. **III**

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