

# the talk



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Dana Al Shamlan  
Neighborhood Baker Turned Entrepreneur

# Your Neighborhood Baker Turned Entrepreneur

Dana Al Shamlan Talks J's Bakery

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Dana Al Shamlan is a Boston University, College of Communication graduate who majored in Advertising and Mass Communications (concentration in Visual Arts & Women's Studies). After three and a half years of hard work she came back to Kuwait ready to conquer and her choice of industry was Fashion.

She began at Villa Moda's creative department right away. She loved the energy and the owner - Majed Al Sabah's vision. Dana trained and assisted in almost all the departments including the creative side, buying trips, runway shows, visual merchandising, styling, events, etc. She recalls a substantial work experience, observing the team translate runway pieces to wearable looks that are suitable for Kuwait. Dana tells us that this is where she learnt skills like problem-solving and multi-tasking. These skills beautifully woven into and not unlike 'the art baking', requiring vision and long hours, creating dessert trends and translating those to the local palate, portion sizes and retail prices.





**How did you come up with the idea of J's Bakery and what was your inspiration behind the idea?**

I have been a home baker from a very young age, I loved the focus and concentration that baking involves. You have to be meticulous in your measurements, temperatures and ingredients. It's chemistry and you need to follow a recipe correctly for a successful end product. I love the smell of baking, the process of testing a recipe and waiting for the end result; and then sharing it with family and friends and having them reflect back the love you put into it. Feeding people something sweet is love to me.

I was pregnant with my first daughter Jude and I realized that I wanted to work for myself, to create something that made me happy. Jude was a huge inspiration behind this endeavor, as it allowed me to follow my passion as well as be a hands-on mother, it all clicked. This was back in 2005 when I started J's as a home business. I remain extremely appreciative of all the love from my early supporters; my family, friends, customers and companies that believed in J's as a home business which led me to open the Bakery in Surra in October 2008.

Personally, I can live on baked goods all day, every day. Yes, I am very health conscious and have a fit lifestyle, but I believe in balance and at the same time I didn't want to limit my treats and wanted to have 2 cookies instead of one. I started breaking down recipes and studying and testing fat-to-sugar ratios in my favorite baked goods and realized that it's possible to literally cut the fat by manipulating the recipe, ingredients and baking techniques without sacrificing taste and texture. This doesn't work with all recipes unfortunately some are better left full-fat and fabulous... believe me I've tried!

**Why "J"?**

J - Jude and Jenna my two daughters! My youngest is Tala, and I am constantly reminded by her that I owe her a business!

**What was your vision when you first opened up J's Bakery?**

I wanted to create a neighborhood bakery that serves wholesome, lighter versions of everyone's favorite baked goods, desserts and treats, and it became the J's Bakery's mission. I wanted people to feel a sense of nostalgia and a guilt free pleasure when enjoying our updated twist on some childhood favorites. I wanted to offer treats the the whole family enjoyed. In addition, I wanted to be

able to wholesale to local cafes and outlets so everyone can enjoy our treats with their coffee on the go! I love providing snack solutions for local concepts that want something sweet to complement their menu or what they are serving.

**Over the years, what changed and what influenced the change?**

In the beginning I was very focused and strict on being a niche bakery that only offers low-fat or lighter versions of traditional baked goods. I started getting feedback from customers requesting 'something good' irrespective of calories or fat, and I realized I needed to adapt our offerings and serve the best of both worlds, the lighter version and the classic. This was 10 years ago when people were not as calorie and lifestyle conscious and not many cared about the "macros" in a product! So I adapted the menu. And this is when we introduced our Chocolate Indulgence treats like our best-selling Love Bites and Chocolate Balls.

Food and lifestyle trends started changing and awareness grew, the demand for healthier options was back, and at the same time I was creating desserts for my personal consumption that I loved and were based on my lifestyle. The very same lifestyle trends, like low-carb, high-protein, dairy and gluten-free and most recently paleo, vegan and keto were introduced on the menu and we got a great response back, customers started appreciating them.

**Now about those cookies... and well everything else, who customizes the recipes and finalizes the product before being offered?**

I do it, I make the recipes, deconstruct them and recreate them. When I first started I had to actually test the recipe out, go through trials to understand how I can manipulate it or adjust it. But after years of experience I can look at a recipe and work it out on pen and paper, manipulate and edit it and then it goes to testing. I have a great team of bakers, some who have been with me since the beginning. I hand it over to them and I work with them until we get it to the point that I'm very happy with. We work very hard, not compromising quality, taste and texture. Some recipes work out the very first time and I know it's going to be a winner! And other times I go back to what I did on day one, I send it to family and friends and even some day 1 customers and get their feedback which is extremely valuable. Once it passes, the costing has to be worked out, we conduct a photo-shoot and launch it. I also test it out on my wholesale clients who are always looking for something new to offer their customers.

**We love the re-branding! What surprises should we expect from J's Bakery this year?**

Thank you! I love it too. It was time, we were coming up to our 10<sup>th</sup> year and I knew I wanted to grow the retail side of the business. It was time to grow up from being a neighborhood bakery. For rebranding, I knew I wanted something more minimalist, mature, feminine but strong, a new look for our vision to expand. I wanted to work with cool creative women to help me realize the new look. So I worked with Lujain Al Fulajj (FB Branding Consultant) and Dana Abdal ( Graphic Designer).

Also, as this October marks the 10-year anniversary of our **J's Bakery store in Surra**, we will be opening our doors to our new location in "Vibes" Abu Al Hasaniya. It's going to offer delivery, pickup, and a small café serving coffee, drinks and treats for everyone to enjoy in-store with a cozy seating area. We're excited for our customers to enjoy the J's experience with us in our new store.

**Now for a harder question, what is your favorite snack from J's Bakery?**

That's like asking who is your favorite child, because I truly do eat and enjoy all our products almost exclusively, they are my go-to snack, treat or dessert. However, I can never get enough of a nut butter / dark chocolate combo so I always have our stuffed dates and sugar-free peanut butter cups or protein bombs with me. A recent obsession that I'm super excited about launching in September is a line of protein bars that I collaborated on with @thedietinja. They are so good, I have one every day!

**Those Instagram posts and stories have been showcasing a fashionable side of the people indulging in J's baked goods.**

Yes, I see it as **J's lifestyle**. How does J's fit into your life? I say a little J's everyday! Our new branding is so cool it looks great with everything, I have so much fun creating social media content around it. And I love it when our stylish customers share their J's!

**Talking about style, what are the items in your closet you would never let go off?**

Definitely my Mala and Rudraksha meditation beads, and fine and chunky gold jewelry, I love stacking and layering them. My vintage stuff as well, and of course Jeans as they always keep me in check and also my branded custom J's t-shirts, they are my uniform. I like not having to think what to wear to work, one less decision I have to make.

