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## FEATURE STORY

### AFIR MEETS "HONEY HERBS"

As you step off the Byblos sea road and enter the old souks, you find yourself surrounded by (overpriced) pubs, restaurants and gift shops that have all but obliterated this ancient port city's character. So much so that you might not notice the permanent exhibition space of the **local action group** [Via Appia](#). And that would be a shame.

The standalone shop doesn't have a sign and doesn't figure on any map or address. But this doesn't bother *Fadi Abi Sleiman*, one of the local artisans behind Via Appia, one bit. If he'd wanted to spend money on advertising he certainly could have. Instead, he values the one-on-one relationship he enjoys with visitors, mainly tourists. Most days, Fadi or his wife *Marie* tend the shop and promote their products and those of their partners.

We discovered the shop and Fadi's "**Honey Herbs**" line of natural cosmetics and cleaners a little over a year ago by pure chance, and we've been hooked ever since. A former chemist turned beekeeper, Fadi is a true renaissance man. To date, he has developed 26 products from soaps to shampoos, deodorants, creams, body and shaving lotions, balms, detergents, etc. using only natural products like olive oil, essential oils, and of course honey and beeswax.

This month, three of us (Rita, Amani and Alexis) had the chance to visit Fadi's workshop where we heard his story and got a glimpse of some of his trade secrets. This was an invaluable experience for us as we prepare to launch AFIR Beekeeping and Nature Discovery Center.

Back in 1986, most Lebanese beekeepers didn't even know about varroa mites, and were unable to treat their hives for this parasite. Fadi had received a new book about varroa mites from friends in France, so he read it and began applying the knowledge from it. His family's hives thrived while beekeepers around them suffered losses. Soon, they were coming to him for consultation.

In the process, he built up confidence as a beekeeper and began considering it as a possible livelihood. However, he realized that his income would always be dependent on climate conditions and overall bee health. After all, no matter how healthy he tried to keep his bees, they would always be at risk of contamination from other bees or poor flowering seasons. Bees and honey were not enough, so he asked himself "What else can bees produce?"

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In 1987, he had the chance to attend beekeeping trainings by the Food and Agriculture Organization in Europe and North Africa, and this is when he made up his mind: he would combine the virtues of honey and herbs to develop a range of cosmetic and cleaning products. "Honey Herbs" was born.

His family called him crazy but he held fast. Using his chemistry background and his new experience in beekeeping, he began experimenting. His first products were a shaving cream (with 30% honey) and a facial mask, both made entirely from natural products. Gradually, over the years, he developed new products. With Marie, he would notice the side effects and residues from chemical products in their household and slowly work on replacing them with natural concoctions. Today, Honey Herbs sells products, from shampoos to soaps, deodorants, dish-washing liquids, etc. He took great care to make sure his products were 100% safe and without side effects.

All the while, he kept reading and researching to perfect his beekeeping skills. His 200 hives produce the honey, beeswax, propolis and royal jelly he uses in his products, while he sources herbs from local suppliers to extract essential oils and perfumes from them. As he proudly advertises: the raw material is Lebanese, and the grey matter is Lebanese.

Fadi also bought processing equipment from Europe to facilitate the production of beeswax and essential oils. As he honed his understanding of the processes and machines, his workshop became a model factory that caught the attention of entrepreneurs and cooperatives around Lebanon. Beekeepers began to come to him for processing their own beeswax to reuse in their beehives. Some organizations asked him to help them set up new workshops in their part of the country, and he gladly obliged. He also finds the time to deliver workshops in beekeeping or making natural cosmetics.

As we toured his workshop, Fadi demonstrated some of the processes he uses in soap-making and beeswax processing. He explained the difference between potassium hydroxide (KOH) or potash used in making liquid soaps (for shampoos or detergents), and sodium hydroxide (NaOH) or lye, used in making hard soaps. KOH-based soaps are also ideal for cleaning fabrics, as they leave a white or translucent stain, whereas NaOH-based soaps leave a yellow stain.

Perhaps the most striking thing about Fadi is his relationship to his craft and business. Instead of targeting the mass market, he bet on a niche clientele that knows what it wants. And his wait-and-see attitude paid off. At 64, his spirit is as lithe as ever and he still has plans to expand and develop new products.

Before we left, we had one more surprise when Fadi opened for us a stash of printed out emails he still receives from satisfied customers around the world.

If you're ever in Byblos, seek out his shop. You don't have to buy anything; listening to him talk about his passion is a reward in itself.

*Shared by the Editorial Team*





## LET'S FOCUS

### EMPOWERING WOMEN BY PRESERVING TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

I have been lucky to work as the project coordinator for the **Women's Workshop**, a project by **Basmeh and Zeitooneh**, since June this year. Although my experience with Basmeh and Zeitooneh is short, I can say quite a lot about NGOs' involvement in livelihood programs. I would therefore like to offer a perspective from one NGO's endeavor to bring work to women in camps.

Before I begin with experiential knowledge and challenges we tend to face in these programs, I want to give a little back story about the Women's Workshop. I first learned about it in 2013, back when Basmeh and Zeitooneh was still a small group of relief and development volunteers. That year, a first group of women residing in Beirut's **Shatila camp** came together to take on an embroidery job ordered by a client in Syria. The group included *Em Jihad*, the woman responsible for bringing Palestinian embroidery to our products, and *Em Ahmad*, who knew crochet.

By combining their efforts, the project coordinators then (now our chief executives and program managers) compiled all the data and consultations, and more importantly the wealth of knowledge from Em Jihad and Em Ahmad to teach 10 women how to embroider and knit several items. Soon after, Basmeh and Zeitooneh implemented a simple process that consisted of teaching women these crafts to create a livelihood project focusing on psychosocial improvement. The original 10 ladies were hired as *mushrifat* (trainers) for other women in the community who approached us to be part of this project. Many of these ladies, whom I like to call *al-saidat*, are still with us - including Em Jihad's daughter, now the *mushrifat* in the **Borj el Barajneh camp**.

Since then, our attempts have been geared towards introducing new designs and models for the Women's Workshop and improving the structure it stands on. The *saidat* are paid for the embroidery patches they make at the beginning of every month, whether we sell the final products or not, and sales revenues help sustain the project and pay employees' salaries. Although we haven't introduced new crafts yet, we did grow in size – 3 new centers have opened since 2012 in Borj El Barajneh, Qebbe (Tripoli), and Bar Elias (Bekaa). We have over **350 registered women** and an additional **300** are currently undergoing training.

In my short time as project coordinator, I have become aware of the challenges of the system that we have structured, as well as the broader system in which we operate. I have been proposing new project plans and taking inventory of our now **300+ products** to categorize all existing designs - a process that had been on hold for a long time.

However, our number one priority is the employment and wellbeing of the women. The majority of these ladies are now from Syria, and the craft is seen as "regional" to them and the founders, rather than "uniquely Palestinian", as the former and current *mushrifat* might insist.

Commoditizing crafts and artwork is not recent in livelihood programs but it is a recent undertaking for me. From my past projects, I understood that: a) It must be easy to translate crafts as paid work, procure materials and market products to a broad audience; b) Being a project manager, operational manager, technical manager, sales and marketing expert and procurement officer at the same time is hard, but it pays off; c) Collecting success stories is crucial, and research into the craft and its history and materiality is equally important to help fuel a creative project; d) Constant involvement with and raising awareness for the women are a MUST. A livelihood program should not just provide a stable income/service, it should be a gateway for participants.

We are not in this to appropriate a cultural heritage and assimilate women, artisans and practices into one program. In the end, we have to ask ourselves what we are doing this for. The answer still stands as our mission at the Women's Workshop; we want to offer local women in camps the option to empower themselves. Of course, I also have the difficult task of soon employing some 600 women in all 4 centers on a regular basis within the terms and budget set by our donors. The accomplishments of the project are expected to come in slowly, and our outreach is limited to only women within the proximity of our centers. Thankfully, we are not alone in this creative endeavor, as there are many NGOs, INGOs and initiatives in the recent years responding to the recent influx of refugees in Lebanon. These are easy to find through Daleel Madani and by asking people involved in humanitarian aid. Organizations such as Al-Sumud and Tatreez stand very prominently among livelihood projects that incorporate crafts as a source of income.

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The Women's Workshop also welcomes visitors to see hand-made products for sale in the Shatila center's showroom and inquirers who wish to learn more about our mission and see the women's hand-made products – which can also be acquired on our website ([www.basmeh-zeitooneh.org](http://www.basmeh-zeitooneh.org)) and Facebook page. Every purchase helps us sustain the project. By doing so, many employees and beneficiaries maintain the option to continue their line of work in an environment they find safe and wish to come back to.

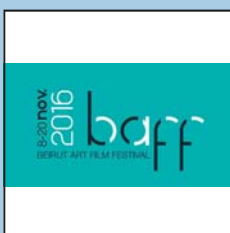
*Shared by Saba Sadr*



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### "BEIRUT ART FILM FESTIVAL" DOCUMENTARY SCREENINGS



**NOVEMBER 11-20, 2016  
5:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.**

*Metropolis Cinema, Ashrafieh*

Discover 45 documentaries on art, literature, archaeology and more.

Click link for program and ticketing

<http://www.bafflebanon.org/baff/index.asp>

### "THE HUMAN SCALE" EXHIBITION



Free entrance

<http://www.lebtivity.com/event/exhibition-the-human-scale>

**NOVEMBER 11, 2016 -  
JANUARY 20, 2017**

[Click link for timings](#)

*Sursock Museum, Ashrafieh*

Archeological photographs from the Fouad Debba collection.

### "EXPO DE NOEL - SESOBEL 2016"



**NOVEMBER 24-27, 2016  
10:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.**

*Hotel Le Royal, Dbayeh*

Gifts, crafts and mounh products to support the SESOBEL association

<http://www.lebtivity.com/event/expo-de-noel-sesobel-2016>

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## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

### MAKE YOUR OWN RECYCLED JEANS TOTE BAG

If you are one of those people who like to reuse old clothes they aren't wearing anymore, then I bet your cupboards have at least a few pairs of jeans you hope to turn into something else one day. I have made a shopping bag using an old pair of jeans and one of my husband's old shirts for the lining.

If you like the model and you are handy with a sewing needle, here's how to make one yourself:

1. First, neatly cut out the seam of one pant leg across its length, following a straight line. The cut out seam will be used for your shopping bag's handles (you can cut out the seam from the other leg as well if one seam is too short for two handles).

2. Cut out a sewing pattern in sewing paper similar to the one in the picture

3. Fold the jeans leg on itself in half (inside out) and pin the pattern over one side (leaving at least 1 cm from the edge of the fabric). Then trace the contour of the pattern.

4. Now cut around the contour, leaving 1 cm apart from each edge. You will end up with 2 separate pieces of equal shape and size. Repeat this process for the fabric you will use for the lining, also leaving 1cm when cutting it.

5. If you have a sewing machine, you can start sewing the bottom and sides of the jeans. Then do the same for the lining, while paying attention to leave 5 cm opening at the bottom (to be used later on to reverse the bag). If you don't have a sewing machine you can sew it by hand using a back stitch but it'll take a lot of time.

*\*A-B Editor's note: to box the bottom corners of the bag, follow these steps for the jeans and the lining: 1) Separate the layers of the bag at the cut corner; 2) Pull the side and bottom seams together so they match; 3) Stitch closed; 4) For extra strength, reinforce by stitching again.*

<http://www.lazygirldesigns.com/pdf-files/tutorial-box-the-bottom-corners-of-a-bag>

6. When done with the boxing, leave the jeans reversed (right side inside), then pin the edges of handles at equal distances on the inner side, their curve facing down as shown in the picture. Now place the lining inside the jeans bag, right sides facing, and pin them together. Sew the jeans and the lining together on the upper edge (leaving 2 cm seam). Once done, you can pass your hand through the 5 cm opening and reverse the whole thing inside out, then sew the opening by hand with a discrete stitch.



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SAVE PAPER – Do you really need to print this newsletter?

L.E.T.S. Lebanon

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## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

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To make the flower: 1) Cut out 8 squares of fabric and fold each in half twice; 2) Cut the open side of each square in a heart shape; 3) Sew all the heart shapes together at their narrow base; 4) Glue or sew the flower onto a brooch pin (or sew it directly on the bag)

Shared by Rita Ghanem



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## BIRD ON A WIRE: THE WESTERN MARSH HARRIER

By Fouad Itani

The **Western marsh harrier** (*Circus aeruginosus* - مرزة المستنقعات) is the largest harrier in the Accipitridae family. It measures 53 cm in length, with a wingspan of 132 cm, and an average weight of 600 grams.

The plumage color varies between sexes. The adult male is dark brown with yellow streaks on its breast and pale-grey head and wings. Females and juveniles are brown with yellow patches on the crown, throat, and shoulders. The eyes, legs and feet of both sexes are colored yellow.

In Lebanon the western marsh harrier is a passage migrant, a winter visitor, and a summer breeder. It is usually found around wetlands, farmland and open land, notably in the Ammiq wetlands, Hima Kfar Zabad and the open plains of the Bekaa valley. It still faces a number of threats, like illegal shooting, habitat destruction and the use of pesticides.

Like most harriers, the western marsh harrier glides low over open ground in search of prey such as small mammals, reptiles, birds, insects and carrion.

Breeding occurs in spring. A male often pairs with more than one female. Females usually build the nest in a reed bed using sticks, reeds and plant material. She lays an average of 5 eggs which are incubated for approximately 5 weeks, and both parents contribute in raising the chicks.

This article appeared on the **Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon's** website: <http://www.spnl.org/the-western-marsh-harrier-circus-aeruginosus/>



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## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

### HOW TO MAKE TASTY MARINATED OLIVES THE EASY WAY

Since our olive trees started fruiting 4 years ago, my mom taught me a simple recipe for marinated olives that can be eaten within a few days of their preparation. This year, we didn't have a big enough harvest to make olive oil (this was the case in a lot of South Lebanon olive orchards), so I was keen on trying her recipe to get at least some harvest out.

I mainly picked small black olives from a single tree, which to my surprise were almost 100% free of the Mediterranean fruit fly, unlike previous years where the infestation level was high. I've been told that it might be due to the cultivar of this particular tree, which is closer to local varieties and might not attract the pest.

Anyway here's a quick way to prepare olives if you don't want to wait many months for them to get sweet the traditional way.

#### INGREDIENTS

1 kg of freshly picked olives (green, black or mixed depending on the preference)  
1 tbs of coarse sea salt

#### Materials:

Strainer  
Something to crush the olives with (I like using a small glass bottle or jar)  
Container with a lid  
Spoon

#### INSTRUCTIONS

Sort the freshly picked olives one by one and remove those that are bruised or dry. Wash the handpicked olives in fresh water then leave them in the strainer overnight or until they're dry.

Clean a part of your kitchen counter well. Use a clean jar or bottle (or a flat stone) to softly press the olives one by one until their skin is slightly split. I find a small glass bottle of juice to be handy because it's easy to hold and the slight curve at the bottom prevents the olives getting crushed more than necessary. The greener the olives, the harder you should crush them so they sweeten in a shorter time (black olives sweeten fast). The act of crushing is a bit hard on the wrist, so if your hand gets tired try switching to the other one for a while, or take a break.

After crushing all the olives put them in a container with a lid and add the salt. Shake them well to get them mixed, then put on the lid on. For the next 3-4 days you should turn the olives and salt with a spoon around 4-5 times a day, so it's a good idea to place the container in a spot which you visit often (I put mine on the counter next to the water bottles). This is a very important phase because any delay in mixing the olives could cause them to start developing fungus.

On the fourth or fifth day, you can taste your olives and check whether they are sweet enough. If not then mix them for another day or so. Once the desired sweetness is reached (keep in mind that they're meant to be a bit bitter and sharp) you can put the container in the fridge, and gradually remove small quantities to serve them with olive oil. Of course you can add oil to the whole quantity, which will preserve them better and prevent rotting, but that would amount to a lot of oil.

You can add extra spices or herbs (thyme, lemon, pepper, etc.) at this stage, but not before, as this will lengthen the sweetening time.

If you've picked a lot of olives at once, you can single out the blackest ones and - without crushing them - just wash them and put them in oil, they will take a long time to become sweet (some weeks or a couple of months), while you enjoy the ones marinated in salt.

You can also store some of your crushed olives in small batches in the freezer without adding salt. When you are ready to consume them, you can take out a batch, add salt and follow the rest of the steps to marinate them.

*Shared by Rita Khawand*





## PHOTO OF THE MONTH

You sent us your submissions and you voted for your favorites. Here it is, the PHOTO OF THE MONTH:  
To send us your photos, email us on [contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com](mailto:contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com)



*Mushroom on a plane tree in Taanayel, Bekaa*  
Photo by Alexis Baghdadi

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## GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED


**Do you enjoy reading this newsletter?**


Send us your feedback and suggestions, share your news, photos, tips or thoughts, or find out more.


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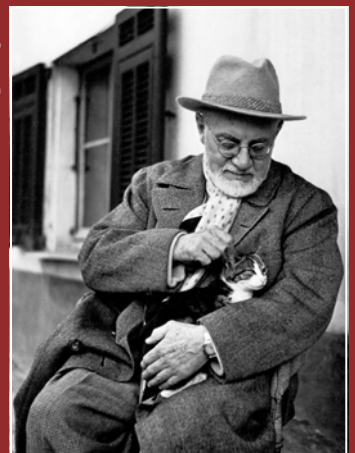
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Cover photo by Adel Nehmeh

## A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

**"There are always flowers  
for those who want to see  
them."**



**–Henri Matisse (1869 – 1954)**

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