

Producer ^{OF THE} Month

JULY 2022



YALLA FOODS



Brattleboro, VT



Amaia and Dan



BRATTLEBORO FOOD CO-OP

Producer OF THE Month

by Ruth Garbus



Dan Seals has been the quiet partner behind Yalla hummus & falafel for years. As of January 1st, 2022, he officially owns fifty percent of Yalla Foods Manufacturing, LLC, the wholesale wing of the Yalla enterprise, and is responsible for producing all of the world-class Yalla hummus and falafel we know and love. Atop the foundation of generosity, integrity, and soulfulness laid by founder and partner Zohar Arama, Dan is poised to build an ever more thriving business and bring their delicious creations to an ever-widening Yalla community.

ORIGINS

Back in 2016, Zohar started making pitas and hummus, the way he remembered from his childhood in Israel. In 2018, after two years of great success selling his hummus and pitas at farmers markets and a small number of select stores (our Co-op among them), he opened Yalla Vermont, the restaurant on Main Street in Brattleboro. Yalla's pure heart and uncompromising flavor was self-evident, and Zohar's products quickly developed a loyal following;



the restaurant was destined to prosper. But its success also meant that in order to focus on what brings him joy—serving his community beautiful foods—he needed to give some of it away, as well, and share this abundance with others.

That's when he approached Dan, his neighbor in Jamaica, VT, about becoming a partner.

Dan is originally from Philadelphia, PA. In 2015, he and his wife, Lauren,

who met in college, made their way to Vermont, where she's from originally. Dan has worked in professional kitchens off and on since his early twenties, and before he and Lauren moved to southern Vermont he was running an amp and guitar repair business and playing music. In Vermont he got a job working in our Co-op's kitchen, and quickly became a beloved and integral member of our community, joining our board

of directors and becoming a union steward within his first year.

For Dan, the decision to take Zohar up on his offer was clear. As he told me, “Life is usually deterministic, but then there are points on the path where you have choice, and for me those choices are usually pretty loud.” He said yes without hesitation. But Zohar urged him to sleep on it. He went home and conferred with Lauren, who immediately told him to take it.

From that point until recently, it was a “gentleman’s agreement.” The official, legal division of Yalla Foods Manufacturing, LLC, and Yalla Vermont was initiated in November of 2021 and officially went into effect at the beginning of this year. For Dan, the switch was surreal, and took a couple of months to sink in. But from the beginning, back in 2018, he’s felt a sense of ownership, and the ability to envision a future. “Zohar invested in me,” he said. “I don’t really know why he chose me, but as we’ve gotten to know each other we’ve realized we have many opposing qualities that lend to making a good team. We balance each other.”

THE KITCHEN

On the days the Yalla Vermont restaurant is closed, Dan, along with Amaia, his one employee and a vital part of the Yalla Foods operation, work in the kitchen out back. It feels like an Airstream trailer turned inside out: gleaming silver, compact, yet formidable. When I arrived to do my interview, a giant pressure cooker was steaming, eggplants were being seared on open flames, and Amaia was heaping a giant, fluffy pile of fresh organic cilantro into a bowl. Dan was in constant motion. Timing is everything when you’re making great food.

The star piece of equipment is their giant Robot-Coupe. If you’ve ever worked in a professional



kitchen, you may have seen tabletop varieties of this machine, which is basically a food processor not much different than a Cuisinart you’d find in someone’s home. But Yalla’s version is massive in comparison. It stands over four feet high, and in thirty seconds does what used to take Dan ten minutes with a giant immersion blender. There’s also an incredibly complex machine for vacuum-sealing containers that looks like an entire dollhouse-sized factory, a

rig for pumping the hummus into the tubs, and a heavy-duty meat grinder. The kitchen may be small, but clearly it’s a serious professional operation.

As of very recently, the hummus and falafel are both certified organic—when I visited, the new lids with the organic seal had only just started being used—and this, in addition to the stringent requirements of Yalla Foods’ wholesale distributors, means that at every stage there must be copious documentation. Besides an overall state of sparkling cleanliness, there are temperature and timing logs on clipboards hanging in strategic spots all over the kitchen. In fact, when the FDA did its inspection, it was very pleased: Dan is running such a tight ship that they’re actually going above and beyond what the government requires for food safety and organic certification.



THE HUMMUS

It's important to know that Yalla hummus is made in the Israeli style, the signatures of which are its silky, creamy texture and the inclusion of white beans in the recipe. Hummus is a cornerstone of Israeli cuisine. It's a common street food that's held to the highest standards; everybody has an opinion about where to get the best and how to make the best. Family recipes are honed over years of dedicated home cooking. It's out of this tradition of excellence that Yalla hummus was born.

A vital part of Yalla's hummus is the kind of tahini they use. Zohar says it's the best in the world. Dan noted its color is darker and its flavor richer than other varieties. But what really makes Yalla hummus so singularly great? You may think that the ingredients list is enough to create some next-level hummus of your own, but many have tried and all have failed! Why? Because what sets it apart is not only the ingredients, though those are of the utmost importance. What makes the difference, as I learned in the Yalla kitchen, is precision: the timing, the amounts, the temperatures, the equipment. All of these details are

what elevate Yalla products from good to great.

THE FALAFEL

Watching Amaia, the resident falafel maker, make a batch of the dough, it was striking how simple and clean the food is. It's not much different than what I might cook in my own kitchen, but more sophisticated, with an expert balance of spices and textures that I couldn't achieve at home. Chickpeas cooked from scratch, fresh onions, parsley, cilantro, and salt and spices all go into a meat grinder, which creates the perfect consistency. This is a key aspect of the recipe that comes directly from Zohar's family. What comes out is flavorful, bright green falafel dough, ready to cook. Amaia, who loves it so much she even buys it for herself at our Co-op, suggested I try pan-frying small patties in a bit of olive oil instead of deep-frying it in its traditional shape. When I did, the crispy brown outsides and soft, savory insides were every bit as satisfying as the deep-fried version. Delicious!

You can buy some of the falafel dough for yourself from our freezer section, near the frozen pizza dough. But make sure to grab it

when you can—right now, Dan and Amaia are limited in their falafel production because of the size of the space. They aren't able to meet the ever-growing demand without a third employee, and the size of their kitchen makes it challenging to have another person on deck. Growth, however, is on the horizon. At some point in the hopefully not-too-distant future, Yalla Foods will find its way into a new, larger space that will allow them to make enough falafel to feed all of us hungry Yalla fans.

Buy some Yalla today to taste this remarkable food made with a generous spirit and a serious commitment to creating the best hummus and falafel for miles around!



Our Co-op carries Yalla hummus in four flavors—plain, and with a choice of three different toppings: roasted eggplant, minced olives, or skhug (a spicy Israeli blend of hot peppers and herbs). Find it in the hummus cooler across from the salad bar. Yalla falafel can be found in the freezer section, near the pizza dough. Enjoy!