

Shisha Masters

Magazine

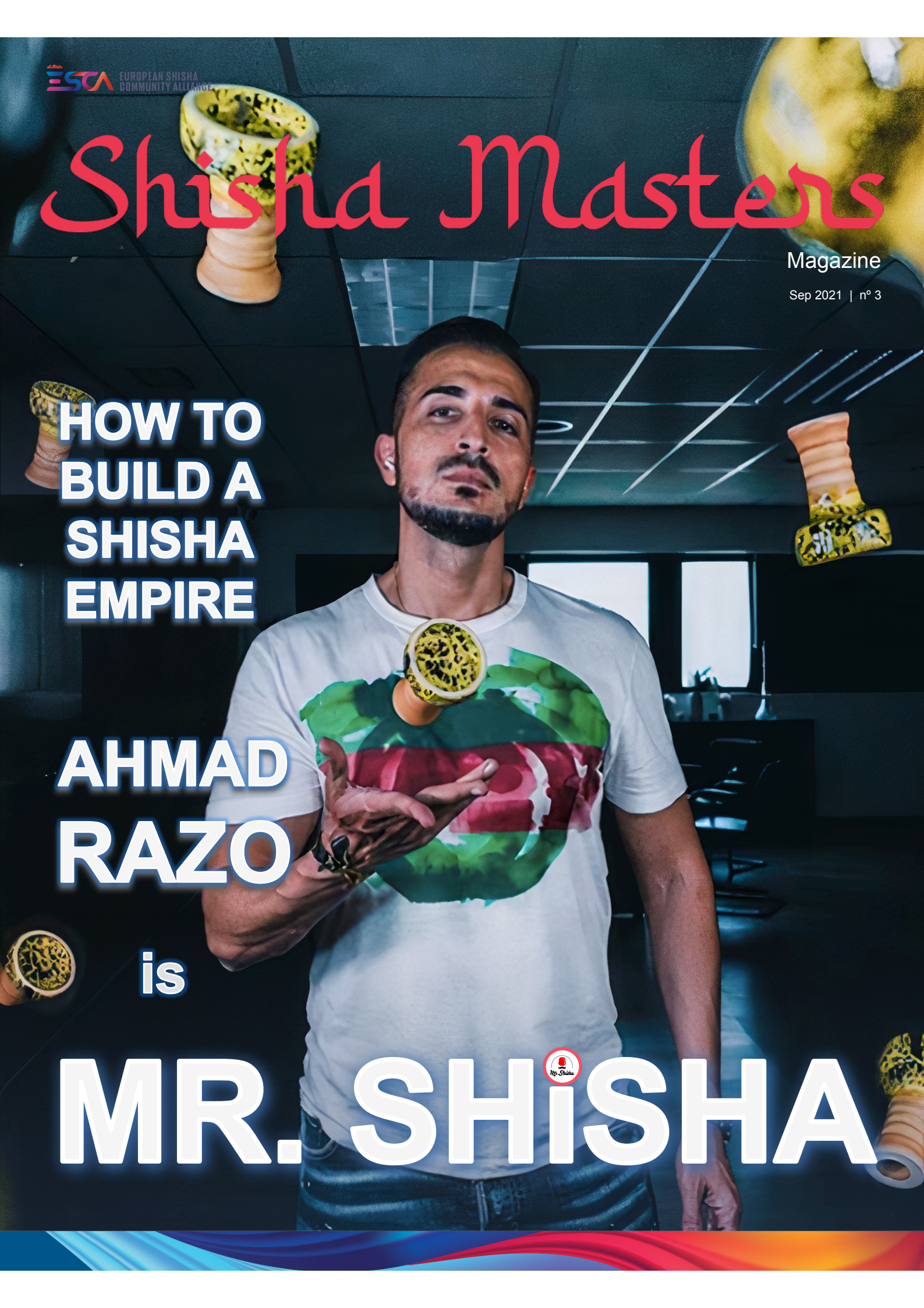
Sep 2021 | n° 3

HOW TO
BUILD A
SHISHA
EMPIRE

AHMAD
RAZO

is

MR. SHISHA



There are many online shisha businesses but not many have built up such an iconic brand as Mr. Shisha in Europe. This month we speak to the man behind the fez and the curly moustache, Mr. Shisha Founder and CEO, Mr. AHMAD RAZO. His business covers the A to Z of shisha and he's about to launch a peanut butter, chocolate and caramel flavour. We can't wait.

Ahmad is the owner of Madrid based online retailer Mr. Shisha and an ESCA ambassador in Spain. Of Iraqi origin, he came to Spain at the age of 17 to study Pharmacy and after completing his degree he decided to go into business. We spoke to Ahmad to find out how a pharmacist became a shisha alchemist.

Do you remember the first shisha flavour or product you tried? I will never forget the first flavour I tried as I still use it from time to time: Al Fakher's Double Apple.

What is your favourite shisha flavour and why? Among the flavours of my own brand of tobacco - which will be available in tobacconists in September 2021 - my favourite is Mr. Shisha Late Night (it's a mixture of chocolate with peanuts and caramel). I called it Late Night because of that craving we sometimes get at night for chocolate or ice cream. Regarding other brands, my favourite is the Double Apple by Al Fakher because whenever I use it, it always reminds me of my first times with the shisha.

When and why did you decide to enter the shisha business? It was in 2017. I had been studying the market and preparing a business plan for three to four years prior to that. Once I finished studying the market and being of Middle Eastern origin, I saw a clear opportunity and I just jumped into the adventure. I decided to go into it because shisha was like a hobby for me and still is. Even though I have my own brand of shishas and tobacco I also use other brands.



“DURING THE PANDEMIC WE RAN OUT OF STOCK DUE TO THE HIGH DEMAND FOR HOME DELIVERY”

What challenges did you face in setting up your business? At the beginning everything was very difficult like any other start-up business. I saw less of my family and friends. I didn't sleep at night thinking about what to do to find the key. I had very clear ideas and I didn't mind having to sacrifice a lot of things to get it right. Thanks to God, now I can see the rewards of the hard work.

How did you manage to survive the pandemic? The pandemic was very strange for the whole sector. In mid-May 2020 we ran out of stock because there was a lot of demand at home and practically all the borders and ports of the countries were closed. It was very difficult to receive goods, but we still managed to get through it and meet the needs of customers. So, we never stopped working, but always complying with safety measures.

Where do you see the shisha business in 10 years? Personally, I see the shisha business growing more and more every day and I don't think it is simply a “trend” at all. I think shisha is a way of life and this has been demonstrated by its cultural importance in the Middle Eastern countries that have been doing it for years.

“I don't think its simply is a trend, it's a way of life, its culturally important”

If you could choose any company or business person in the world, which one do you admire the most? And why? There are many people I admire. I have met many people in this business, one of them is Angel Molero. Angel is an ESCA member and owner of BENGALA, another well known shisha business in Spain. I really like the way they manage and approach the business. They always try to be surprising and that is something we have been doing since we started.

How would your friends or employees describe your business and management style? Being the CEO and Founder of the Mr. Shisha brand, I treat all my staff as friends. I have never liked to play the role of boss-employee; I have learnt a lot from them and they have learnt a lot from me. Almost all of my staff were friends of mine before they joined the company.

What are your business goals in life? My personal goal is to start a family and to be so successful that I can dedicate my time only to my family.

How do you think one should be if he wants to be successful in the shisha world? I think he has to be quite close to his audience. Natural and with a lot of ethics, which is lacking nowadays.

What would you recommend to someone who wants to get started in the shisha sector? I would recommend looking for the needs of the general public - which change daily - and offer them straight away. There is no need to complicate things further. I always try to put myself in the consumer's shoes because I am the first one to consume shisha.

What changes have you made to your business strategy in recent years? We have protected the concept of consumer loyalty first and foremost and we have set ourselves objectives of continually renewing ourselves. Consumers are human and we humans get bored of things very quickly.



“CONSUMERS ARE HUMAN AND WE HUMANS GET BORED OF THINGS VERY QUICKLY”

What qualities do you look for in new employees? A desire to work, preferably from the world of shisha and that they work for pleasure rather than for a monthly salary.

What 3 things can't you live without? Family including my partner, friends and work.

What three skills are necessary to be successful in business? The desire to succeed and to be different from others, to be a bit stubborn and to always be close to the business. Having capital to start with is also a good thing to have.

What has been your most satisfying moment in business? The most satisfying moment was in January 2018, when we presented the video of a new model we released (Rocket 2.0) and, if I'm not mistaken, it was the first video presentation of a shisha model in the sector. We sold all the units in one day. I couldn't believe it!

“The most satisfying moment was at the launch of the new shisha model Rocket 2.0 - it sold out in one day!”

How many hours a day do you usually work or think about work? For me, working means 24 hours a day every day of the week because my mind never rests. I enjoy one month of holiday a year to disconnect, but it's a difficult thing to do, to be honest.

Considering all the individual parts of the shisha (the bowl, the stem, the head, the charcoal) describe your perfect shisha setup. My perfect setup consists of a phunnel bowl with provost, 3 x 26mm coals, small shisha with diffuser and only one hose connection because I don't usually share.

What is the best place in the world to enjoy a shisha? The best place in the world to enjoy a shisha is at home, especially mine!

“The best place in the world to enjoy a shisha is at home, especially mine”

JOIN ESCA

ESCA works to promote shisha and to educate the public and political leaders about the tradition of shisha and those who use it.

If interested in joining please follow the link below to our website
www.shishaalliance.org

CLICK HERE

ESCA
EUROPEAN SHISHA
COMMUNITY ALLIANCE



www.mrshisha.es