



RESTAURANT & FOOD NEWS

Exclusive: This Houston couple used to work in tech. Now, they're launching a Mexican-Yemeni bakery.

By **Aviva Bechky**, Staff Writer
Feb 20, 2026

Gift Article Facebook Twitter Email



Efrain Ayllon sorts pastries in the kitchen at Yemex Bakehouse & Specialty Coffee, a new Mexican-Yemeni cafe, on Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2026. Brett Coomer/Houston Chronicle

WE SALUTE OUR NURSES
Empowered by excellence.
COME LEAD WITH US
HOUSTON **Methodist**
LEADING MEDICINE

Listen Now: Exclusive: This Houston couple used to work in tech. Now, they're launching a Mexican-Yemeni bakery. About 7 Minutes. 1x Everlit

In 2019, as Efrain Ayllon exited the elevator at the downtown United Airlines office where he worked, Rawan Alsagheer tripped and spilled coffee in front of him.

A week or two later, they ran into each other again at the office. Ayllon asked Alsagheer, "Have you spilled any other coffee?"

They started talking, and their love story bloomed from there. They went on coffee dates. They got married. They indulged in pastries all over the world, on trips to Mexico and Saudi Arabia and Europe. So, when the couple — both former tech workers with no culinary training — decided to open a coffee shop-bakery this year, the move made a surprising amount of sense for their next chapter, even if it wasn't initially their plan to write it.

ADVERTISEMENT
Article continues below this ad

Vote Reliant as Houston's top electricity provider!







an NRG company




WHERE TO EAT: Barbecue, burgers, exclusive sushi: These Houston restaurants opened in January

They're planning to open their joint creation, Yemex Bakehouse & Specialty Coffee, at 18006 Park Row Blvd. in late February or the first week of March. Its name is a portmanteau of their two cultures, Yemeni and Mexican. Those influences are obvious in the cafe's look, decorated with Mexican earthenware and a stringed Middle Eastern instrument called an oud. They're also clear in the fusion halal pastries and drinks on the menu: basil conchas, cafe de olla rolls, tomato-feta-za'atar Danishes.



Clockwise from top left: a spiral chorizo croissant, a honeycomb danish, a tomato-feta-za'atar danish and a turkey-cheese-salsa macha croissant.

Just as their romance began with an unexpected spill, their business began unexpectedly, too.



Want more Houston Chronicle?

Make us a Preferred Source on Google to see more of us when you search.

Add Preferred Source

Alsagheer is a software engineer by training, Ayllon a UX designer. But by 2023, Ayllon wanted something outside of his nine-to-five, and all his other hobbies, like photography or programming, involved a computer too. So he started baking.

Most Popular

1. **Houston World Cup traffic: The worst days to drive and roads to avoid**
2. **River Oaks estate listed for \$21.5M now among Houston's priciest homes ever sold**
3. **Houston public housing waitlists reopening after nearly two years**
4. **Feds appeal after a Woodlands businessman acquitted in bribery, cartel case**
5. **Three Houston suburbs make the top 20 best U.S. places to live, U.S. News says**

WE SALUTE OUR NURSES

Empowered by excellence.




COME LEAD WITH US





Vote Reliant as Houston's top electricity provider!

Vote Today


LOCAL VETERAN OWNED AND OPERATED

Best Window Replacement Company in Houston

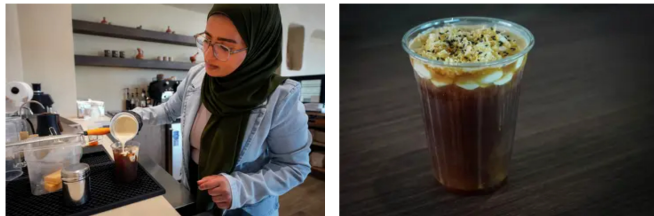
VOTE FOR US



THE WINDOW SOURCE
of Houston

"Forty hours behind the laptop, it just gets to you. It gets mentally exhausting," he said. "I just wanted to work more with my hands."

But in the initial stages, croissants kept defeating Ayllon. He tried again and again — until the pastries were good enough to give to friends, and then to sell.



Left: Raman Alsagheer prepares an areekano, a coffee drink inspired by the Yemeni dessert areeka. Right: the finished drink.

"We wanted to build something unique," Alsagheer said. "We wanted something that represents us and our passion, our background and everything."

To develop the food, Alsagheer and Ayllon drew on the meals they grew up with. One Danish, for instance, stars black lime, a sour and slightly bitter flavoring more commonly used to punch up Yemeni soups or rice dishes. Ayllon's hometown is Toluca, Mexico, famed for its green chorizo, so the couple created a chorizo croissant — but instead of using pork, they make beef sausage from scratch to keep it halal.

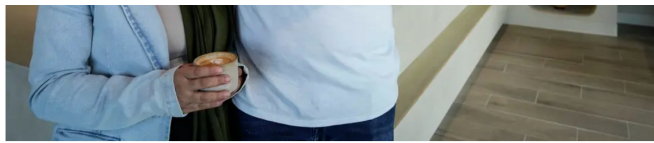
The drinks are similarly creative. Their "areekano" dresses up an Americano coffee with the flavors of a cheesy, date-based Yemeni dessert called areeka, complete with a shower of grated cheddar on top.

MORE FOOD NEWS: [Omakase at the kitchen table: Houston chefs turn to home catering amid tough year for restaurants](#)

In summer 2024, the couple began selling pastry boxes online, offering complimentary drinks to customers as well. They noticed what was popular: the cafe de olla roll, the chorizo croissant. By fall 2024, they'd started looking for a brick-and-mortar.

They paused shortly thereafter, though. Alsagheer was pregnant, and she'd become sensitive to the smell of butter. Nine months later, with a newborn baby, they returned to running pop-ups, selling their treats at New Heights Coffee Roasters for several months. And in September last year, they signed a lease on their tall corner spot in a strip mall.

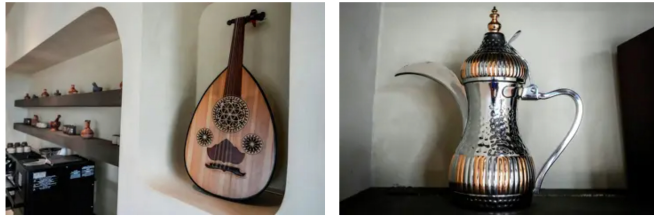




Rawan Alsagheer, left, and Efrain Ayllon pose for a portrait at Yemex Bakehouse & Specialty Coffee, their new Mexican-Yemeni cafe, Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2026. Brett Coomer/Houston Chronicle

Without investors, Alsagheer and Ayllon funded the bakery largely on their own, with some community support. They struggled with the necessary bureaucracy. So on Instagram, they documented the process extensively, leaving a trail for other first-time business owners to follow.

In one video from January, Alsagheer counted the expenses they've paid for: \$13,500 for the security deposit, \$72,000 on remodeling and construction, \$95,000 on equipment. They'd sunk in more than \$200,000 at that point, she said.



Decor at the new Yemex Bakehouse & Specialty Coffee.

Another clip documented an issue with the flooring. A third showed Ayllon lying on the ground, working on the sink. A fourth illustrated the experience of failing their first health inspection. (The cafe has since passed.)

"We know people that want to open their own businesses and stuff, and it's just like, we want to make it easier for them," Alsagheer said. "If we are going through it, why not share and help other people avoid a lot of stresses?"

Feb 20, 2026



Aviva Bechky
FOOD REPORTER

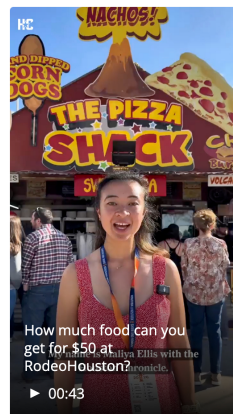
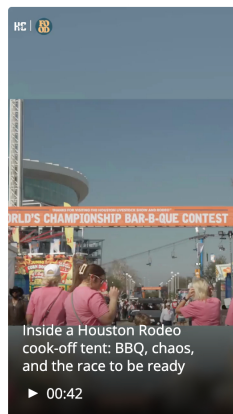


Aviva Bechky is a food reporter for the Houston Chronicle.

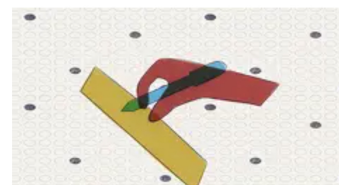
They have previously written for the San Francisco Chronicle, Seattle Times and the Oregonian. Their portfolio includes profiles, breaking restaurant news, and stories about dining trends and farming. Born in Washington, D.C., Bechky, a Trekkie whose favorite food is sour cabbage fish soup, loves to knit and read sci-fi in their spare time.

Aviva graduated from Northwestern University with a journalism degree.

Food Videos



Editor's Picks





BUSINESS

Prep for your property tax protest hearing with TX Tax



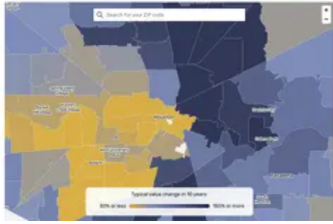
ELECTION 2026

Voter Guide: Explore races and candidates in the runoff election



ENDORSEMENTS

See our full list of candidates endorsed by the Editorial Board



INVESTIGATIONS

Are property tax appraisals rising in your Houston ZIP code?



RESTAURANT REVIEWS

Houston's best seafood restaurants



REAL ESTATE

Guess the price of this Lake Houston waterfront home

[Return To Top](#) ^

HOUSTON★**CHRONICLE**



About

[Our Company](#)

[Careers](#)

[Our Use of AI](#)

[Standards and Practices](#)

[Sitemap](#)

Contact

[Customer Service](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Newsroom Contacts](#)

[Copyright and Reprints](#)

Services

[Archives](#)

[Newspaper Archive](#)

[Advertising](#)

Account

[Subscribe](#)

[e-Edition](#)

[Newsletters](#)