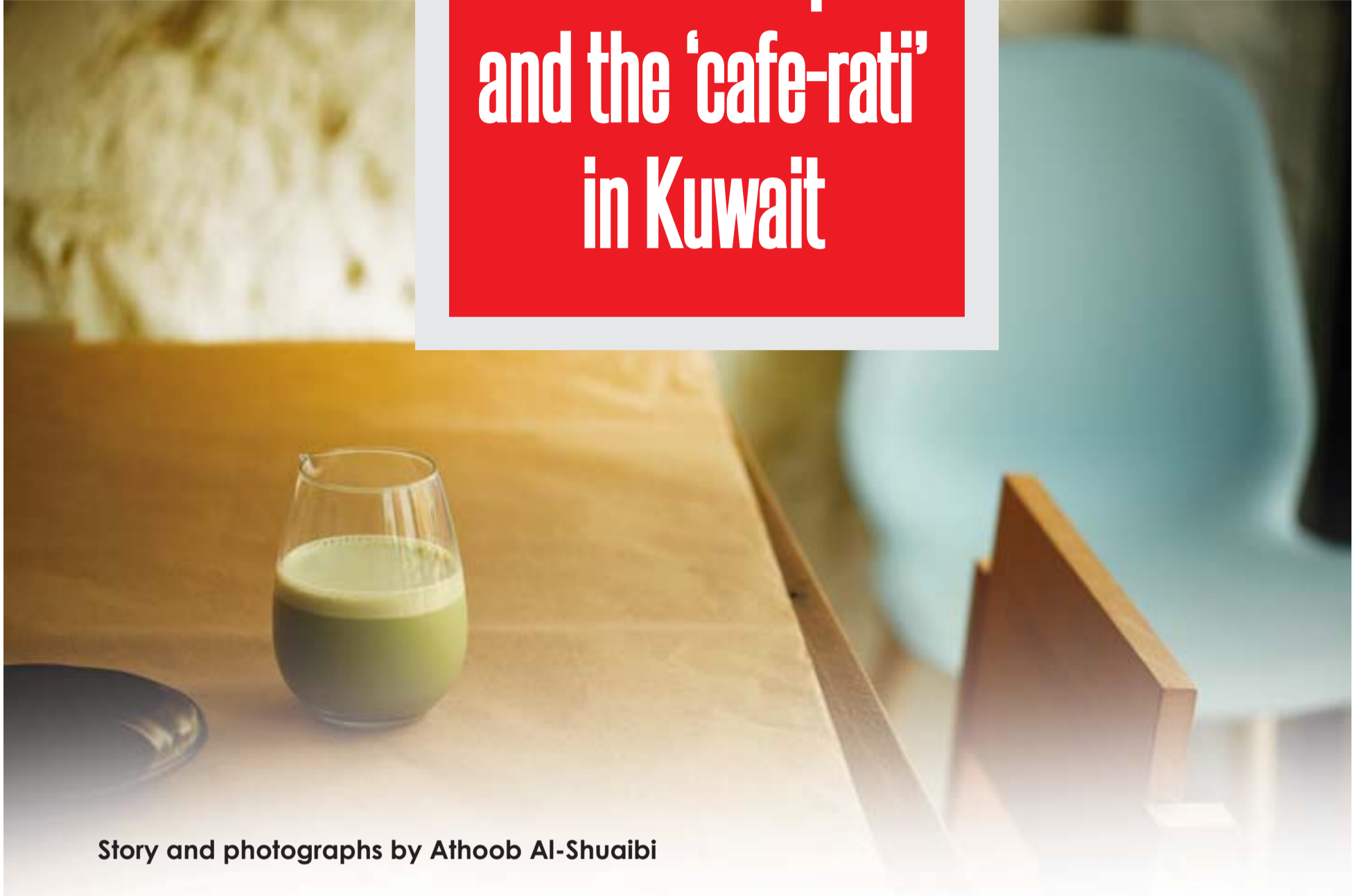


Coffee shops and the 'cafe-rati' in Kuwait



Story and photographs by **Athoob Al-Shuaibi**

A small coffee shop in the heart of downtown Kuwait City has a wall-mounted sign saying 'Free Wi-Fi'. A few steps away, another cafe has a blackboard sign in front of its door reading 'No Internet, talk to each other'. At the end of the street, another cafe has a large seating area for people who have no interest in communicating with anyone, and want complete isolation. Each table here has only one chair, and is separated by a divider.



Kuwait has witness an explosion of local coffee shops opening. From cozy tea house decor to industrial lighting, you can find pretty much any type of cafe to suit your personal taste and style. Young Kuwaitis in droves now hang out at these hip hotspots, with new ones opening up each month.

Most offer some hipster-esque menu options - artisanal cold brew or French press, designer cookies, hand drawn cakes. And each appeals to a segment of the caferati through decor and location.

Ali Akbar, an engineer and a businessman, wanted to try his luck in the coffee business. He wanted to open a coffee shop for readers, because he personally loves to read and has a rich library at home. After finding the right place, his engineering colleague wanted to gift him an interior design scheme in collaboration with one of the best designers. "I treasure that gift very much. Cafe owners usually spend thousands to get the perfect interior design. But another friend turned my thinking upside down after alerting me that people no longer read as much as before. He asked me that when did I take a book with me to a cafe? He said most people nowadays prefer reading from their mobile phones or tablets," Akbar recalled.

After scrapping the reading cafe idea, he decided to design the place himself. "Before I hammered a nail in the walls, I showed my plan to three teenage cousins. They were bold enough to tell me that my taste was very old-fashioned and outdated! The girls

were eager to assist. The following day, they arrived with lots of pictures, notes and suggestions. They said the sole reason they go to cafes is to take selfies, so every corner should be different in design from the other," he said. Akbar used the targeted client group to design the perfect environment for them.

