

DEEP ROOTS

The RHS Chelsea Flower Show, running in London from 19 to 23 May, is known as one of the most prestigious gardening events. Since 1913, the show has been hosted on the grounds of the Chelsea Hospital. This year, a Dubai resident is bringing an Arabic garden to rainy England. **Georgina Wilson-Powell** reports.

This summer Kamelia Bin Zaal's dream comes true. A landscape gardener who has brought her family's luxury Al Barari residential development to life with an abundant fragrant oasis in the desert, her show-garden design was chosen as one of the exclusive exhibits at the Chelsea Flower Show in London.

"Chelsea is like the Oscars for landscape design," Zaal says. "Getting accepted as one of the fifteen main show-gardens is truly an honour."

Zaal was a judge at the Dubai International Garden Design Competition last year, and showed UK designer and landscaper gardeners David Dodd and Jo Thompson, both Chelsea pros, Al Barari, they then insisted she enter.

"Although it was my dream to participate, I never considered it due to the calibre of the designers. I'm very grateful for meeting them both as they gave me the confidence to push myself and go for it."

Born to a Scottish mother and Emirati father, Zaal studied garden design at London's Incehald School of Design before joining the family's property development business to oversee the landscape gardening of this lush estate.

"I'm addicted to nature. I'm an outdoor person. It's just part of me," she explains. "I think watching my father as I grew up in the garden has been a massive influence. Also my grandfather was very big into gardening. I often went for walks, it's just in my blood. I love being outside, and I appreciate plants, what they do for us in this world."

Zaal works with sustainability in mind, using mature trees to help reduce evaporation and harnessing the local winds to create a microclimate at Al Barari that is four degrees cooler than Dubai.

"It is slowly changing here, more people understand we need to be conscious of our resources and so fewer people are using grass. I also try to use where possible, and if relevant to the design, plants that are low in water consumption."

Her garden, the Beauty of Islam, has been inspired by Arabic culture, calligraphy and traditional Islamic designs.

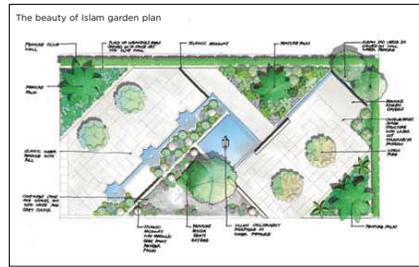
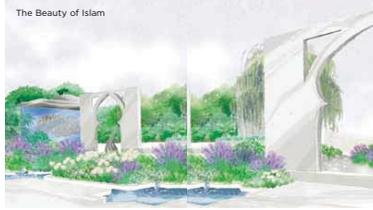
"There are principles an Islamic garden should be based on; the integration of art into life, water and shade. It is a place to seek refuge, a life-sustaining oasis and overall it reflects the peace and harmony between God, nature and humans," she explains.

Famous Islamic gardens all over the world such as Al Hamra in Spain and the Taj Mahal in India all follow a four-quadrant design which splits the gardens into four areas. Zaal's show-garden follows this pattern, using contemporary Arabic arches to guide visitors on a journey.

"There is a garden for the soul, a garden for the heart, a garden for the spirit and a garden for the essence," Zaal says. Inclusion of water features (to cool) and art (to nourish the soul) are common in Islamic gardens. They were literally and spiritually an oasis in the face of harsh desert, providing shade, sustenance and inspiration.

"The water flows throughout the garden, from the back to the front. Water represents so much in an Islamic garden – not just that it irrigates but also the sound, how it affects the soul, how relaxing it is, the movement, the constant trickle and sound of it," she says.

Zaal uses calligraphy, poetry and sculpture in her garden, all of which have played a prominent role in defining the cultural landscape of the UAE.



FLORAL NOTES

In celebration of spring, a floral cocktail is available at The Rib Room Bar & Restaurant in Jumeirah Carlton Tower, created by master mixologist Saverio Vicari. Should you find yourself hosting a refined pre-dinner drink, here's how to make it at home.

Ingredients

- 40ml Patron
- Reposado Tequila
- 15ml elderflower liquer
- 15ml fresh lime juice
- 10ml Morella cherry liquer

Steps

1. Shake all ingredients together
2. Double strain into a chilled martini glass
3. Garnish with lime peel

A Floral Afternoon Tea is also available at Chinoiserie from 12 May. This features a mini plant pot filled with chocolate mousse and chocolate crumble, a coconut and pineapple delicie with chocolate leaves, a rosewater and raspberry flower tart, a chocolate and elderflower window box, and more. jumeirah.com

WHAT TO SEE AT THE CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW

HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum's poem 'Flock of meanings' will be written in calligraphy and carved into a stone boundary that wraps round the space, even this physical protection is a hark back to traditional Islamic gardens that sustained communities.

"This is an opportunity to shine a positive light on Arab culture and Islam and I felt this would be unique for Chelsea. It is a chance to show that Islam and Arabic culture really is a way of life and that we share the same values and morals as other religions and cultures."

It's not just Arabic culture that has influenced Zaal, but also Arabic architecture, both within the UAE and further afield.

"My main inspiration is Sheikh Zayed's Mosque in Abu Dhabi. It is simple and for me this reflects a humbleness and yet it is rich in detail. I have been often and still find something new to see and feel. The Princess Nora Bint Abdulrahman University in Saudi Arabia is a stunning example of contemporary Islamic architecture."

"I have selected plants that reflect the spread of Islam and Arab culture and the growth of the early Arab empire through trade and along the Spice Route. That broad heritage includes jasmine, rosemary, orange, pomegranate, olive and papyrus. It shows how we've obviously been touched by so many cultures ourselves, through our travel and trade throughout the world. I hope to recreate the garden at Al Barari so as much as possible will be brought back to the UAE." Rhs.org.uk



Prince Harry's Sentebale garden

Raising awareness of Lesotho's most vulnerable children, the Hope in Vulnerability garden is designed by Matt Keightley and draws influence from the South African terrain and a new residential camp for children affected by HIV/Aids.

L'Occitane's perfumer garden

Take in the scents of historic Grasse, the sensual home of the perfume industry with this gorgeous garden that celebrates the resurgence of the traditional perfumers such as L'Occitane.



The Cloudy Bay Garden

The Chelsea Flower Show isn't just for those who are gently greyed. The Cloudy Bay Garden with Bord na Mona shows off the green fingered talents of the youngest competitors, Harry and David Rich, both in their mid 20s. It takes inspiration from the New Zealand vineyard.

The Hidden Beauty of Kranji with Esmond & Uniseal

Discover the secrets of Singapore with this lush, tropical oasis from John Tan and Raymond Toh in their first Chelsea Flower Show outing. Find orchids, figs, a waterfall and even a roof garden in this vibrant space.

