

Whether you prefer classic, contemporary or conceptual garden design, inspiration is to be found at RHS Chelsea Flower Show. A review of the top award winning gardens from this year's show.

BY JULIE RONALD



PARADISE FOUND



**THE BEAUTY OF ISLAM GARDEN
BY KAMELIA BIN ZAAL WITH AL
BARARI**

RHS Silver-Gilt Medal

In honour of HH Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan and Dubai, Emirati landscape designer Kamelia bin Zaal and her sponsor Al Barari created The Beauty of Islam Garden for their debut at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show where they won a prestigious RHS Silver Gilt Award. Celebrating her achievement, Kamelia is the first female Arab landscape designer to participate at this international show which she describes as the horticultural 'Oscars'.

"I was so proud and honoured to exhibit at RHS Chelsea Flower Show with my garden 'The Beauty of Islam' says Kamelia. "I am continuously inspired by our heritage and wanted to creatively translate my interpretation of our peaceful religion into a beautiful garden design. Most importantly, it was an opportunity to shine a positive

light on Arab culture and Islam. Traditional Islamic gardens were a representation of the relationship between humankind and the earth, not only through the garden's productivity, but also through the use of the senses and in its beauty. Creating space of multiple uses but yet still a place of calm and reflection."

Her serene garden features Arabic and Islamic culture in poetry, calligraphy and sculpture. White marble gleams in the sun and cool water ripples along slender rills through eight-point star shaped pools or 'khatims' widely used in Islamic art to represent the seal of the prophets.

The 'Flock of Meanings Poem' is carved in Arabic along a slim marble panel running the length of the olive hedge on two sides of The Beauty of Islam Garden. The poem, penned by HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, honours HH Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al

Nahyan. Its inclusion pays homage to the important role poetry plays in the UAE.

The ancient Spice Route of the Arabic empire is evoked in the garden. Fig and pomegranate trees punctuate with bewitching intensity, while a haze of fragrance floats from ginger, rosemary and cardamom plants, representing a rich diversity of horticulture. Trees specially chosen by Kamelia bin Zaal are the blue-silver, leathery Nannorrhops Arabica Palm which is a species native to the Arabian Peninsula and the distinctive Bismarckia Nobilis Palms which are being donated to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UK, after the Show.

"This garden tells the story of the spread of Islam and the growth of the Arab empire through trade over centuries," explains Kamelia. "The Beauty of Islam uses edible plants, fruiting trees, herbs, water and art to connect humankind with the Earth. The desert landscape of my country is a place of extraordinary, wild beauty and I am



very proud to be from the UAE. His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan's advocacy for the protection of our environment has been my greatest inspiration. This garden is to honour his memory and legacy."

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, the Alhambra and Kamelia's UAE heritage inspired her garden design based on a traditional Islamic pattern set into a 45-degree angle that breaks away from the usual courtyard quadrant. Four Islamic archways sprinkled with quartz reflect the sun's rays and stand diagonally to give fresh vistas of the garden.

"The Gates of the Garden of Eden will open up to them" are words from the Holy Qu'ran, Surah Sad: Verse 50, carved into the white marble water wall that majestically overlooks the garden. The text is seen in traditional Islamic Thuluth calligraphy, originally painted by Emirati calligrapher Hamda Abdulla Al Hashmi. Above the water wall a domed steel canopy features a traditional Arabic Mashrabiya pattern, representing the play on light and shade found in Islamic gardens. Below lie scattered white cushions, some in pyramid style, for sitting and relaxing. Arising from the water feature is a steel sculpture reading 'Ullah' and shining in the water is faux mother-of-pearl in tribute to the pearl fishing roots of Dubai.