

Flying the flag for the UAE this year at the prestigious RHS Chelsea Flower Show is Kamelia Bin Zaal, Creative Director at Al Barari, whose passion for gardening was inspired by His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan.

DESIGNS FOR LIFE

By
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Kamelia Bin Zaal clearly combines business prowess with enviable creative skills. For prior to studying landscape design, Kamelia worked at the Economic Department managing the press for Dubai Summer Surprises and the Dubai Shopping Festival. She then took a senior position at Dubai Internet City, after which she was offered the opportunity to work with Dubai Development and Investment Authority. Soon she discovered she wanted to head in a more creative direction and decided to get into garden design, and she credits her father in pointing her towards landscape architecture. After studying landscape garden design at London's renowned Inchbald School of Design, Kamelia returned to Dubai inspired to create intuitive and stylised outdoor living spaces. Shortly thereafter she began her career as a freelance garden designer working on residential villas until she established her own landscape architectural practice, Second Nature, in 2006, working on





both large commercial projects and unique residential jobs. Kamelia later formed an association with her family's prestigious property development company, Al Barari, where Second Nature, now part of Green Works, created the lush botanic surrounds and themed gardens that the address has become recognised for. In 2013, she was featured on the front cover of The UK Garden Design Journal for her work with Al Barari and several other projects. Her work has been included in the Garden Design Up Close book by Emma Reuss featuring the Al Barari Contemporary Garden. She is regularly cited as an expert in the garden landscape industry, having been featured in several publications across the Middle East. And her profile is set to go global with her participation in the RHS Chelsea Flower Show this year with her 'Beauty of Islam' garden (read our review of RHS Chelsea and Kamelia's designs in this issue).

As if to prove a point that the more you do, the more you can do, in her free time, Kamelia goes trekking and mountain climbing for charity Gulf for Good. She has developed a passion for amateur photography over the course of her travels and is greatly involved in charity work with Senses Residential and Day Care Centre, and PEPY (Promotion education and empowering Youth). Her goal is to leave behind a green legacy and way of life for the people of the UAE to enjoy, for decades to come. We were fortunate to catch up with her prior to her departure for London.

From where did your original passion for landscaping

and gardening arise?

I have grown up always watching my father in the garden. He has always loved flowers and the sense of peace a garden can give. I have an artistic background and although I loved working in the government of Dubai I felt something was missing. At the time my father was planning the concept of Al Barari, a plant nursery, maybe a horticultural school, and it was this conversation that made me think of garden design. Within one month I was at the Inchbald School of Design studying garden design.

What are some of your first floral memories?

As a child I also remember collecting and pressing flowers with my grandfather. I also remember the vivid details of my outdoor adventures as a child and how each time I entered a woodland, garden or a field I would lose myself in its beauty. I still love to be surrounded by nature having climbed Kilimanjaro and Mount Kinabalu in Borneo.

Some say that gardening is a very therapeutic hobby and profession – have you found this to be true?

Yes. For me, it's about the senses and nurturing the soul, so gardens represent peace and tranquillity and being able to shut out the rest of the world out. I love the sounds and scents of nature.

Have you visited Chelsea in the past and if so which gardens/designs remain in your mind?

Yes, twice. Once as a visitor in 2011 and last year working

KAMELIA IS PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE LUSH NURSERIES OF AL BARARI. SHE CREDITS HER FATHER FOR POINTING HER IN THE DIRECTION OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN



SOME OF THE LANDSCAPE DESIGN PROJECTS KAMELIA AND SECOND NATURE HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WITH INCLUDE PRIVATE RESIDENCES IN JUMEIRAH, KHALIFA CITY AND ARABIAN RANCHES. ALSO PICTURED IS HER RENDERING OF HER BEAUTY OF ISLAM GARDEN FOR RHS CHELSEA; FOR A FULL REVIEW OF THIS AWARD WINNING GARDEN, PLEASE SEE OUR PARADISE FOUND FEATURE.

behind the scenes helping with Jo Thompson's London Square garden. Some of my favourite gardens were the Tourism Malaysia garden by James Wong and David Cubero, and Andy Sturgeon's garden in 2008 for Cancer Research, however my favourite is His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan's garden from 2003, the "Garden from the Desert" by Christopher Bradley-Hole.

Would you say you have had any role models or mentors in your career to date?

My personal inspiration is HH Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan. His love of nature and his people were always a priority. HH Sheikh Zayed understood the importance of protecting our environment and that it was key to sustaining our community and to the growth of the country. If I can keep supporting this, even if it is in a small way, then I feel I have done something to make him proud.

From a design point of view I have always loved the work of Christopher Bradley-Hole. It's the pure simplicity of the designs and architectural elements I love. Another mentor is Andrew Wilson, as my tutor at Inchbald he really inspired me and his energy for design is why I am here.

Another recent influence on me has been David Dodd from The Outdoor Room. His experience and knowledge has been invaluable and he is now someone I can call my friend. For some reason he mentioned that he would be happy to build my garden if I tried for Chelsea. He stood by his word. He has been building award-winning gardens and has won Gold and Silver medals at Chelsea for the last 11 years, working with the likes of Andy Sturgeon, James Wong, Marcus Barnett and Andrew Wilson, to name a few. I feel very blessed to be working with him and my tutor from the Inchbald School of Design, Andrew Wilson.

At home, do you try to bring the



outside in and if so, how?

My house just opens up onto the gardens as all the windows leading to the garden are bi-fold so it's really indoor outdoor living at its best.

Your route to Chelsea has been the result of a lot of hard work and success. How do you like to relax?

I love spending time with my son outdoors. It really relaxes me. Travelling or photography really help to distress me.

You work outside in harsh weather conditions, how do you maintain your beauty routine. Do you have any favourite products you recommend?

I like to keep my face free of makeup unless I have an event. I have a simple beauty regime. It involves Dr. Sebagh face wash and Shiffa toner and moisturiser. But I always make sure I wear SPF.

What are some of your favourite places to socialise in Dubai?

For a casual meet up or healthy lunch, my go-to is The Farm in Al Barari. The other is Zuma; it is still one of my favourite places to eat and I love the atmosphere.

Having been in London setting up the installation, have you had a chance to look around the city and if so, where are some of your favourite places?

I grew up in the UK and often visited London over weekends. I love Islington and I will always make a trip to the Tate Modern at some point.

Do you have any mottos you live by?

I embrace the Al Barari mantra of "passion for life" which is based on the concept of living amongst nature, spending time with family, savouring each bite and not rushing through life. I also believe the past doesn't matter and it's what you do today that changes what happens tomorrow.

What is on the agenda post Chelsea?

A relaxing holiday! I have been planning my garden since August last year and although it has been hectic, and I have loved every minute of it, I need a good break with my son.

What are some of your goals for Second Nature in the future?

Second Nature, which is now part of Green Works, created the lush botanic surrounds and themed gardens that Al Barari is renowned for and will continue to do so for phase two of Al Barari. I will also continue designing villa landscapes.

Where are you planning to holiday this summer?

Sri Lanka and Europe.

What are some of your travel essentials?

First aid kit, flip flops, sunscreen, a good book and lots of things to keep my son amused!

www.secondnature.ae, www.albarari.com

