

Kamelia Bin Zaal, 39, is a landscaper and creative director of Al Barari. She lives in Dubai with her one-year-old son, Zaal

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As a kid, I spent a lot of time in the garden. My dad is green fingered, and was always

outside, growing tomatoes and beans. But the idea of gardening myself didn't hit me until later.

I did a business degree and after graduating I worked for the government for four years in different departments, including the DDIA (Dubai Development Investment Authority). I enjoyed my job, but felt like something was missing. I longed to be more creative. When I was in my twenties, my father started his own plant nursery, and it sparked the idea to try gardening.

I took a ten-month course in Landscape Garden Design at London's Inchbald School of Design, and loved it from the start. Afterwards, I moved back to Dubai and set up as a freelance landscaper, creating gardens for high-end villas. I founded my own practice, Second Nature, in 2006, doing bigger commercial projects.

The following year, I joined up with my family's property development company, Al Barari. The business came about because my parents wanted somewhere they could really enjoy living in, where the design focus wasn't just on the house but also the environment surrounding it. My dad realised other people felt the same. So he decided to build houses set in beautiful, lush green landscapes, and Al Barari was born.

I now work as creative director of Al Barari, which involves overseeing the landscaping, marketing and communications. It's a real



KAMELIA BIN ZAAL LANDSCAPER

family company — as well as my father being the chairman, my brother is the CEO, and we all live on the Al Barari site.

My day begins at 6am, when I'll get woken up by my son, Zaal. I fix breakfast for him, and I'll have an omelette and a veggie juice. I drop him at nursery before driving two minutes down the road to work.

I have a quick catch-up with my team, and then check in on my brother and dad. I love

working with my family — we have the odd argument, but we're good together.

My mornings usually consist of lots of meetings. I could be discussing a new project with my landscape team or sitting down with my graphic designer to work on an advert. We've just launched a new collection of villas called The Nest where the focus is on family-friendly homes.

I still take on a few private projects, too. Each one starts

with a visit to the client. I'll ask lots of questions to try and get a sense of their personality, and also look inside their home. For me the garden is an extension of the house and there should be a flow between the two.

I pop home for lunch, which is usually some fish and veggies, then I use the afternoons to catch up on emails. These days, my role is increasingly office-

“I'M THE FIRST EMIRATI TO DESIGN A GARDEN AT CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW”

based. I do miss being outside, so that's why I was thrilled to get the chance to design a garden for the Chelsea Flower Show in London. It's like the Oscars of the gardening world.

Last year, I was a judge for the Dubai International Garden competition. There were two judges there from the UK, and after seeing the work I'd done at Al Barari, they told me to apply for Chelsea. I was accepted to design one of the 15 show gardens. It's been all go since.

I'm the first Emirati to design a garden at Chelsea, and I'm also the first female Arab, too, which is a huge honour. My design is called The Beauty Of Islam, and is a contemporary Islamic garden.

I've been really busy getting ready for the show, so my days have been longer than usual. Normally I clock off at 5.30pm so I can go home and put my son to bed. Then I'll cook something using ingredients from the veg patch in my garden, and then flop in front of a box set like *The Good Wife*. I like having people around for dinner, but on most weekdays I'm usually in bed by 9.30pm!"

PLAN B: DANCER

I really wanted to be a jazz dancer when I was younger. I used to dance in competitions with Louie Spence [famous UK dancer]. I would have loved to have carried on professionally with it – but I'm not sure my dad would have been too keen!