

VOGUE

ARABIA

JANUARY 2019

THE JOY
OF BEING
NANCY AJRAM
“A GIRL IS
A *blessing* TO
HER FAMILY.
THAT’S WHAT
I’VE LEARNED
FROM *life*”

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VOGUE

ARABIA

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Emirati landscape
designer Kamelia
Bin Zaal shares
her sustainable
vision for turning
surrounding
green spaces into
paradise found

A natural

Photography JULIA CHERNIKH Style MOHAMMAD HAZEM REZO Words KARINE MONIÉ

PASSION

“Being a *good landscape designer* is not just about design. “Your work has to be **SENSITIVE** to its *environment* and surroundings”

“I worked in the Dubai government for about four years,” says Emirati-Scottish Kamelia Bin Zaal of the period prior to discovering her true passion – landscape design. “During that time, my father, Zaal Mohammed Zaal, [who named her after the lush garden flower] was imagining a plant nursery and even a horticultural college, which led to the idea for Al Barari.” The Dubai-based development features more than 250 villas and 450 apartments, a restaurant, health club, spa, and the region’s largest privately owned plant nursery. “I had a light-bulb moment one day,” she continues. “Garden design popped into my head. I took my savings and headed to the Inchbald School of Design in London to study what has since become my calling.”

The pixie-cut brunette (“I’m not afraid of a challenge,” she winks of the recent chop) returned to Dubai, where she worked as a freelance designer for three years before establishing Second Nature in 2006 to work on various private and commercial projects, donning an on-duty uniform of jeans, a hard hat, and construction boots. In 2010, she incorporated Second Nature into the family business and became creative director at Al Barari, shaping the botanic surrounds and themed gardens, which were recognized with numerous awards. “It is really a family achievement and has given me the knowledge I have today within my field,” Bin



DRESS, JACQUEMUS AT BOUTIQUE 1 **PREVIOUS PAGE**
JUMPSUIT, SHOES, MANGO

Zaal shares. “It is the green heart of Dubai.”

Now at the helm of her eponymous landscape design studio, Bin Zaal nurtures her creativity by finding inspiration in art, architecture, Islamic patterns, and, of course, natural landscapes and plants. “It can come from anywhere,” she states. “Even from another creative mind like myself, in a different field.” The year 2015 proved to be a turning point, when she became the first Emirati landscape designer to participate in the renowned annual Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show. She won a silver gilt medal for her garden The Beauty of Islam. “I was scared to participate but I pushed myself,” she recalls of her garden that featured soft planting amid a structured white space. “That’s what life is about.” The following year, she received a second silver gilt medal at the Gardening World Cup in

Japan for her creation The Seal of the Prophets.

“Being a good landscape designer is not just about design,” explains Bin Zaal. “Your work has to be sensitive to its environment and surroundings. Understanding how a landscape is built, how materials work together, considering lighting and art, are all important. Most of all, and especially here – where our plant palette is so limited – knowing how different combinations and textures can work to give you a different atmosphere and feeling within a space is vital.” The designer cites indigenous plants among her favorites. “Their resilience in such a harsh environment is amazing,” she says. “I believe that with water being our scarcest resource, we need to do all we can to prevent high consumption. Sustainable landscapes are something I advocate.”

Maintaining a garden should be an act of love – one that requires knowledge to make things right. “First, it is important to place plants in the right position and to know whether they like full sun, semi-shade, or shade. You must always check your irrigation and be sure to water enough without overwatering. Plants need food, so fertilize at the right time and don’t hesitate to use compost. Shrubs and trees need clipping, and always keep an eye on your plants’ leaves to see if they have any issues like bugs and fungus.” She also advocates speaking to plants to help them thrive, and not hesitating to experiment.

Bin Zaal is currently working on a Mediterranean-style home with hints of arabesque design in Sharjah. She is also rejuvenating the spa area of Dubai’s Five Palm Jumeirah, bringing lushness to the garden around the spa and considering how to incorporate herbal plants into the treatments. Another project has her redesigning and replanting areas on Nurai Island. Her dream design – a public contemporary Islamic garden – is still on the horizon.

When it comes to a personal green space, Bin Zaal has created a simple, contemporary refuge at Al Barari; a yin-yang reflection of her aesthetic and personality. She describes herself as “flamboyant and energetic,” while her design showcases her refined side. “I’m quite minimal; I am a simple person who doesn’t adhere to all the glamour,” she

says, noting that her go-to brands are Victoria Beckham, Chloé, and Bottega Veneta. “What you see is what you get. I’m a straight-talking person.” The uncomplicated things in life satisfy her, like spending time with her five-year-old son. “When we travel, I take him exploring. We pick out shells on the beach or take a walk in the park and he’ll find a stick that he likes.” Of her garden, she reveals that the planting is all green. “There are no flowers except my frangipani and

orange trees. I also have an amazing piece of street art on my back wall: a tiger, my spirit animal. It gives me the boost I need when I feel unfocused or a little off. I just look at her and my energy comes back. I have to be fearless in everything I do, especially as a single working mother with her own business. But working with nature fills my soul.” □

Plant this

Aerva javanica An indigenous plant with a silver color and soft foliage.

Senna italica A rich green shrub with yellow flowers. It needs full sun and very little water.

Yucca aloifolia An architectural, spiked plant that looks incredible when it flowers. Drought tolerant.

Chamaerops humilis This features feathery palm fronds. Great for adding contrast in texture.

Pseuderanthemum carruthersii A shrub with deep purple foliage and pink flowers. It can be partial to shade and likes water.

“Working with NATURE fills my soul”



DRESS, VICTORIA BECKHAM
AT BOUTIQUE; SHOES,
STUART WEITZMAN

VOGUE

العربية

يناير ٢٠١٩

البهجة في اسم
NANCY AJRAM
"البنت نعمة في
حياة عائلتها، هذا ما
تعلمته من الأيام"

مشروع كل يوم
قواعد "الدينيم"
الجديدة- كل الأشكال
لكل المناسبات

REBIRTH

الموضة في العام الجديد تحترم البيئة والتنوع وتشمل الجميع

الدور الذي تؤديه Stella McCartney

العارضة العربية الممثلة القوام والصاعدة إلى النجومية