

HEDGE

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE HEDGE FUND CLUB



FIRST PRIZE

Mrs Moneypenny on the ultimate trophy asset

JAMIE COOPER-HOHN *On Cliff* **SIR ANTHONY CARO** *on reinvention* **RICHARD BALFOUR-LYNN** *On fizz* **SOREN JESSEN** *on ownership* **DEVIN WENIG** *on news* **HARRY BLAIN** *on America* **PAUL LISTER** *on wilderness* **RENE REDZEPI** *on authenticity* **JENNIFER SHARPO** *on weekends* **SIMON MILLS** *on Triumph* **HELEN KIRWAN-TAYLOR** *on Meta*

Plus
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ISSN 1757-7361
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9 771737 738003
£25



DUBAI'S BUILDING FRENZY HAS resulted in developers focusing on high-density towers and cookie-cutter villas. Not so Nadia Zaal. Still in her twenties, this savvy businesswoman is pioneering sustainable residential projects which go against the city's building norms, and are attracting the highest echelons of society as investors.

'Dubai is undoubtedly an entrepreneur's dream,' concedes Zaal, whose accent is more Chelsea than Emirati. 'I come from a family where summers were spent in internships and we were used as sounding boards to discuss family business issues. I suppose the business of real estate has always been in my blood.'

After studying at the LSE, Zaal was initially more interested in investment banking. She led one of the region's largest IPOs for the Abu Dhabi National Energy Company, and sat on the board of Taweelah Asia Power Company. Then, in 2005, she launched the Al Barari community – a residential sanctuary in a prime location, bordering a wildlife reserve, so ensuring unspoilt views. In stark contrast to the concrete sprawl emerging elsewhere, Al Barari ('wilderness') planned the green spaces on the 130-hectare site first, adding the property components – village, boutique hotel, wellness resort, retail hub and plant nursery – later.

Around 80 per cent of the project will be open, landscaped areas, botanical gardens, woods, lakes and streams, making it the lowest density development in the region. The residences blur indoor and outdoor living, with walls of glass opening out on to scented courtyards and gardens, featuring water elements and infinity pools. 'We wanted to mark a new era of living in Dubai,' explains Zaal, 'one that embodies a peaceful state of mind. After three years of research, this flagship project is about celebrating our inherent love of nature.'

Environmental concerns apart, how do the figures stack up? 'Our properties are an emotional buy, yet make commercial sense. We do a profile process, which provides comfort to the buyer – we're very much about creating a community.' Property prices in Dubai have rocketed, thanks to speculators. Zaal, however, has taken measures to avoid this: 'Buyers pay a 30 per cent deposit in the first six months, and if they choose to sell the property, this can only be done through us.'

With sales of £140m at launch, Al

THAT'S THE SPIRIT

NADIA ZAAL IS BRINGING A CONTEMPORARY ECO-AESTHETIC TO DUBAI'S PROPERTY SCENE

— YVONNE COURTNEY —



Ideal for living: Set on a natural island off the coast of Abu Dhabi, Nurai (above), the latest venture by Nadia Zaal (left), combines environmental credentials with a striking contemporary aesthetic

'We wanted to mark a new era of living in Dubai that embodies a peaceful state of mind'

Barari offered some of the most sought-after properties on the market. Buyers included royalty, Sheikhs, dignitaries, bankers, company CEOs and entrepreneurs – making it one of the few genuinely exclusive communities in Dubai. Zaal has since formed Zaya, a joint venture between Tasameem Real Estate and Assas, with a combined portfolio exceeding £8 billion and senior management with over 25 years of experience. Its debut project, Nurai, launched in May, has similar environmental credentials, with a more contemporary aesthetic.

Situated on a natural island off the coast of Abu Dhabi, Nurai provides a haven for discerning individuals requiring the best in state-of-the-art residences. Based on extensive research of their clientele's aspirations, Zaal is

convinced that Nurai will be one of the most sought after living experiences in the region and a model for future developments.

With new schemes announced in Dubai (and increasingly Abu Dhabi) on a weekly basis, property development is one of the most competitive industries in the country. Unfazed, Zaal says that it's the challenge that makes her work so exciting. 'I excel under pressure, which is good because working in Dubai means working under pressure.' Between endless site visits and meetings, meditation and yoga keeps her sane – and can even help give her a feeling for a site's potential. How very zen. **HEDGE** Yvonne Courtney is a freelance writer and editor, and co-founder of *designtastic.net*, which casts its radar across the Middle East and beyond