

A labour of love



Lesley Zaal pulled out all stops when designing the interiors of the Al Barari show villa in Dubai. Stella Rosato reports

The creation of the show homes at the Al Barari development in Dubai was as much a labour of love as a creative challenge for interior designer Lesley Zaal and her team at Ecoterra Living.

Al Barari, situated to the south of the emirate's Deira district, is the realisation of a decade-long dream of Lesley's husband, Zaid Mohamed Zaid, to create an eco-friendly, sustainable community for his family to share with discerning like-minded, affluent people who value the best of both worlds, landscape being prime, views and lifestyle combined at Al Barari's own premises.

When the first show villa opened last May to great acclaim, its luxury interiors immediately reflected the show business nature of the Al Barari announcement. However, Zaid knew that subsequent show homes would have to generate the same star quality that later sales pushed up to US\$1 million (138.16 aqm) would appreciate – yet at the same time, showcase the meaning of the villa's carbon design and green.

"The original show villa has very high specifications in terms of quality and we needed to maintain that but I felt it was important for all the show homes to be individual," explains Zaid.

"We have a real diversity of residents at Al Barari and although it is impossible to describe in everyone's taste, I wanted at least one element that each person can refer to and say, 'yes, that is me'."

In the Type 'A' villa, at 14, 410 square feet, the largest of the homes in Al Barari's first phase and one of two for this show home, Zaid really launched the biggest challenge was to knock the showroom space down into cosy, livable proportions.

For a week, Zaid and her team played around with materials and colour charts, deciding on textures and configurations for each room.

"I wanted residents to be able to walk in themselves and their family living in the space and show them all the options for their own. We didn't want to dictate this to the master builders, this is the study. We wanted to illustrate through the show homes that they can actually do things in a several ways."

While her personal taste is "very simple, clean and white", she created impact throughout the villa with subtle – warm, coral and gold in the elegant dining room and a funky subversion in the family living room.

"I thought what my own two children would have needed to be able to lounge in that space when they were younger and give a creative twist as well."

She also made use of the custom design manufacturer's expertise, for wood, it sprang, at an average of just one

metre of a room – or even a ceiling in the case of the villa's staircase, which dining room. "Everyone thought I had lost my mind for suggesting black," she recalls. "But I knew I had to pull out all the stops for impact. The black and gold striped wallpaper on the ceiling just gave it something extra – and that is the great bonus with contemporary wallpaper, because you only need a little area, you afford to go for a more expensive type than you might otherwise."

If not, despite the undeniably large pockets of Al Barari residents, Zaid is acutely aware that cost will play a large part in many interior plans. "However, you do never know that in the amazing Cain Zaid's (showing) lady's study for instance, she colourway is from there."

"There are very large homes and will be very expensive to furnish throughout. I wanted to show that it is possible to be budget-conscious without compromising on style."

The area which most couldn't be compromised was in the villa's three bedrooms (the largest, in the reception area, was 20 square metres with three bedrooms) through a few hand-picked contemporary pieces from Spain from a craftsman who normally creates pieces for large hotel lobbies.

For much of the villa's bathroom and objects of art however, it was a case of creating through Ecoterra Living's lines and sense of a well-tuned harmony with this show villa's regular living space in Asia and Europe.

"I always think that if you see and you like, buy it, and you will always use it somewhere. As a designer, interior and also as a resident, if you love things, you already change from there if you have to buy something for a project, I then you will embrace one piece and a whole room can evolve from it."

That says nothing, Ecoterra Living has already taken an interest in Al Barari's momentum as a classic with the development's first villa that is to be finished with this month and another in the pipeline.

But to benefit all residents, Zaid is also planning to work with the facilities department offering instruction for owners and their staff on how to look after their luxury homes.

"I think follow-up is so important when you meet someone once," she says. "I have chosen some beautiful surfaces for the villa work at wooden doors and furniture that need to be cared for properly – and if offering training means there are fewer problems as a result, then it's the best interests of Al Barari and of us all."

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Above: the wife in the family room were custom-made with fabric imported from Italy. The curtains are from Andrew Martin and the floor was brought in London. The lighting is from Vietnam, the lamps were custom-made using Italian-style. The chandeliers, such as the artwork and wooden container were brought in Asia. Middle left the 'Spencer' chandelier in the entrance hall is from India (Dubai) the antique Chinese table is from Cambodia. The rug is from England. Bottom left: the largest of the three wrought iron chandeliers, custom made in Spain. Photographs by Duncan Lloyd for The Spectator