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✦ There is an emphasis on natural light in each room

An open Canvas

With his first project, Mohammed Bin Zaal tries to be both fearless and dynamic. He speaks to *PW* about giving Dubai millennials a starting point to create a life they desire

By Esha Nag
Editor

His name has been part of Dubai's first botanic haven, Al Barari. A benchmark for sustainable luxury in the region, the project made use of naturally landscaped lakes and freshwater streams and green spaces. So when Mohammed Bin Zaal, the former CEO of Al Barari, launched his own real estate development company, and named it KOA (which means strength, force or being fear-

less in different cultures), it naturally signified that the young Zaal was being fearless enough to reimagine the property landscape of Dubai.

"My family and I have been in real estate for a long time, but I haven't seen much change in the industry with regards to the way developers have been creating products and the formula they've been using," explains Zaal. "There are definitely some beautiful designs and architecture here in Dubai, but that's about it. So when it came to launching my first



✦ The homes are designed with millennials in mind

Pictures courtesy of KOA

project, I wanted to have a rethink and ask questions, such as why I'm developing and who I'm developing for."

Zaal felt Dubai needed a shift in perspective. "So when there was an opportunity I thought of creating something for those born in the 80s and 90s, for young professionals who valued things differently than the baby boomers," he says. Canvas, KOA's first mixed-use development, was created for millennials who want their living space to be spatially unique and socially dynamic. "Millennials value their individuality, they value their identity. They don't want to conform. They want

to express themselves and they want to be creative. We have seen spaces such as the Dubai Design District and Al Serkal Avenue being success stories, so this was an opportunity for me to address those social changes."

Located just 20 minutes from the city in Mohammad Bin Rashid Gardens, Canvas will be a sanctuary, a creative hub and a pocket of culture for Dubai's creatives, Zaal explains. It will have retail and residential components, including co-working space, a multipurpose amphitheatre and a gourmet market.

"We wanted to blur the lines between live, work and play," says Zaal. "So

it's a place where you can socialise, where you can work and live."

The architecture for Canvas has also been based on these requirements. "I chose an architect who believes in this philosophy. I wanted someone who is part of the creative culture of Dubai, someone who is young and whose philosophy is in line with my vision."

Zed Architects' Tarik Zaharna, an award-winning architect of Palestinian origin, produced a new model of modern living for Canvas, removing the traditional boundaries that defined where one works, lives and socialises. The 70 residences of Canvas across two buildings use clean, natural materials and textures.

"There are 41 unique layouts out of the 70 that have been designed with the new generation of modern residents in mind. These units provide a sense of freedom and individual expression. It's about living in a space that is not limited by the boundaries of four walls," says Zaal. "The outdoor spaces here are also an extension of the interiors and there is an emphasis on natural light in each room."

The first phase of Canvas, which will have 44 units, will be completed end of this year, while the rest will be completed late next year. Prices vary from Dh1,000 to Dh1,200 per square foot. "There is a huge list of amenities that residents can enjoy here," says Zaal. "One of the defining characteristics of this project is that the 70 units sit on 250,000 sq ft of land, so you can imagine the space that we have to develop for the amenities and the urban ecosystem."

Zaal's first project promises to be a starting point for residents to create the life they desire. "We want you to make it yours. We know you will be at home here." ■



✦ Mohammed Bin Zaal wants each of the 70 Canvas homes to express the individuality of each resident