

InsideOut

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Baroque

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Mohammad Kamal Al Shurfa is one of those people who inspire you to think that anything is possible in life. At only 33 years old, he is the Managing Director of his own architectural practise, employs 65 people from 13 different countries, and has two beautiful children with a third on the way.

Text: Angus McLynley, Photos: Courtesy of Mimar





Above: A Mimar-designed commercial and office building located in Dubai Investment Park.

Having been a typical British expatriate in Dubai for over a decade – which by and large means I can only speak one language – I've driven past the EMAAR business park by The Greens, noticed the EMAAR sign, wondered exactly where the name EMAAR came from and driven on. And guess what? Despite being a journalist – I use that word in the loosest possible way – I've never bothered to check and find out what the word meant. Well, I'm proud to announce, I have expanded my knowledge of Arabic beyond 'hello' 'goodbye' and the usual words you hear Brits say in their attempt not to appear ignorant. Emaar is an Arabic noun and it means something along the lines of 'the process of building'.

Mohammad Kamal Al Shurafa taught me this word recently. You may ask how we got onto this conversation? His rapidly expanding architectural practise in Sharjah is called MIMAR, which is a similar word with a similar meaning.

Mohammad came to Dubai from Jordan in 1997 after leaving the University of Jordan with a Bachelor of Science in Architectural Engineering and has been here ever since. Dubai is home and when I asked how often he made the trip back home, meaning to Jordan, he replied, "I live three towers down. I walk, it takes me 30 seconds." The snag is, even when I elaborated and explained what I actually meant the reply didn't change. "I consider here as home. This is where I live now, I feel like I am living in my country when I am here and I have no plans to leave."

After working for DAR Consult in Dubai, Mohammad moved to PHB Peter Hudson Buckle, an English firm of consultants. He then worked for DEM Design Gulf, an Australian company. After five years with them he decided to open his own office and subsequently teamed up with the man who is his business partner to this day, architect Hazem Abu Nabaa. Together they started MIMAR Emirates. ■



Above: One of Mimar's stunning commercial projects, an office building in Dubai's Business Bay, is reminiscent of Frank Gehry's 'Fred and Ginger' building.



This spread: Mimar's work encompasses every facet of architectural design, from villas and residential towers to tourism projects and offices buildings, hotels and educational establishments, all over the Gulf region

That was in 2002. They opened their first branch in Sharjah, and then in 2004 opened an office in Dubai, locally called Mimar Emirates Engineering Consultants. In 2005 the Ajman office opened and a few weeks ago they received their licence to open in Abu Dhabi. They also have an office in Qatar run by Abu Nabaa. "Ninety per cent of our projects are in Dubai, but it is easier for our employees to live in Sharjah. On the flip side I am seriously thinking of moving the management of the whole company to the Dubai office – maybe it is an image thing, but I like to think that Shaikh Mohammad has made Dubai such a prestigious place to even be associated with that it is important to have a base there. We took an office in Business Bay which will be handed over to us next year, so by 2009 we should have our

head office in Dubai. We specialise in all disciplines of buildings and construction. In our short history we have designed both commercial and residential. We have designed universities – for example Virginia Commonwealth University in Doha – and Sanali Towers in Majan on Emirates Road, a complex of three 30-storey office towers with a shopping mall in the podium.

More recently we have designed Schon Business Park, now that was a fantastic challenge and it has turned out to be a unique development purely because of the sheer length of land that the building sits on; it's around 400 metres long, but at G + three it is almost like a tower block on its side. It's nearly complete; it looks as good in real life as it did when we first conceived it.

"The design took into consideration the special parameters for that site as the length of the land is around four hundred metres, but the building is only G + three, so there was a real challenge to provide a design; it is a tower on its side, it is not as easy to design as it sounds. The unique part of this development is the massive length of elevation and short height and the challenge was how to overcome this and create a nice building that looks good and functions well, by which I mean the circulation of air and people. Each and every office has good air ventilation, a good view and will be a good space to work in.

"My favourite building in the UAE is Dubai National Bank. It was the first building in Dubai that you could regard as a landmark and it was the first building where architectural aspects other than pure function were actually considered. Before that, buildings were just built for function not what they looked like as well. After that came Emirates Towers, which set the

standard for Shaikh Zayed Road. Then along came the Burj Al Arab, and now we have dozens of landmarks, such as the Dancing Towers (watch out for that!), and the Opera House in the Lagoons.

"The architecture in Dubai is developing very quickly and very much for the better. As I said it wasn't really architecture before, merely function and we need to admit that the experience we have received from the first world countries has had a very good impact and has developed engineering in Dubai. From what I see this



Futuristic angular buildings with clean lines and startling geometry, appear in many of Mimar's developments.

office here in the Emirates. The second step was to develop the organisation and bring in key people and produce good quality work. Number three is spreading our name and making our organisation even stronger, making the people that we rely on even better and better. There are seven more steps to go. Step ten is when Mimar is the number one consultant in UAE. So yes, to meet my goal, I need to be the best consultant in the country by 2020." ||

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seed is now growing and spreading beyond the boundaries of Dubai to the rest of the country and the surrounding countries. If you look at the new master plans for the future of Dubai it is much more advanced and developed than it was in the '80s. Now the master plans actually take into consideration things like green open spaces, and communities will see huge improvements between the old and the new. Places such as Murraqabat and Al Qusais were only blocks of concrete with no gardens or schools, just straight lines, but in the new master plans, all neighbourhoods have spaces, gardens, schools and shops. In

short we are on the right track, there will be a better environment for all. "Dubai has reached the point where we very much need the Burj Dubai - because of that tower every person on this earth knows Dubai, understands the meaning of Dubai. It is an advertising tool. This is the vision of Shaikh Mohammad, from day one he wanted to spread the message about Dubai. "Ambitions from here? Don't laugh, but I want to be leading consultant in Dubai in ten years time. In my mind there are ten steps we need to achieve to get there. The first one was to open my own consultant's



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