

VOGUE

ARABIA

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SAUDI

ISSUE

THE WOMEN
MAKING
THINGS
HAPPEN

**YARA ALHOGBANI,
TENNIS PLAYER**

"I want to
dedicate
my time to
helping any
Saudi girl
with a racket
and a dream"

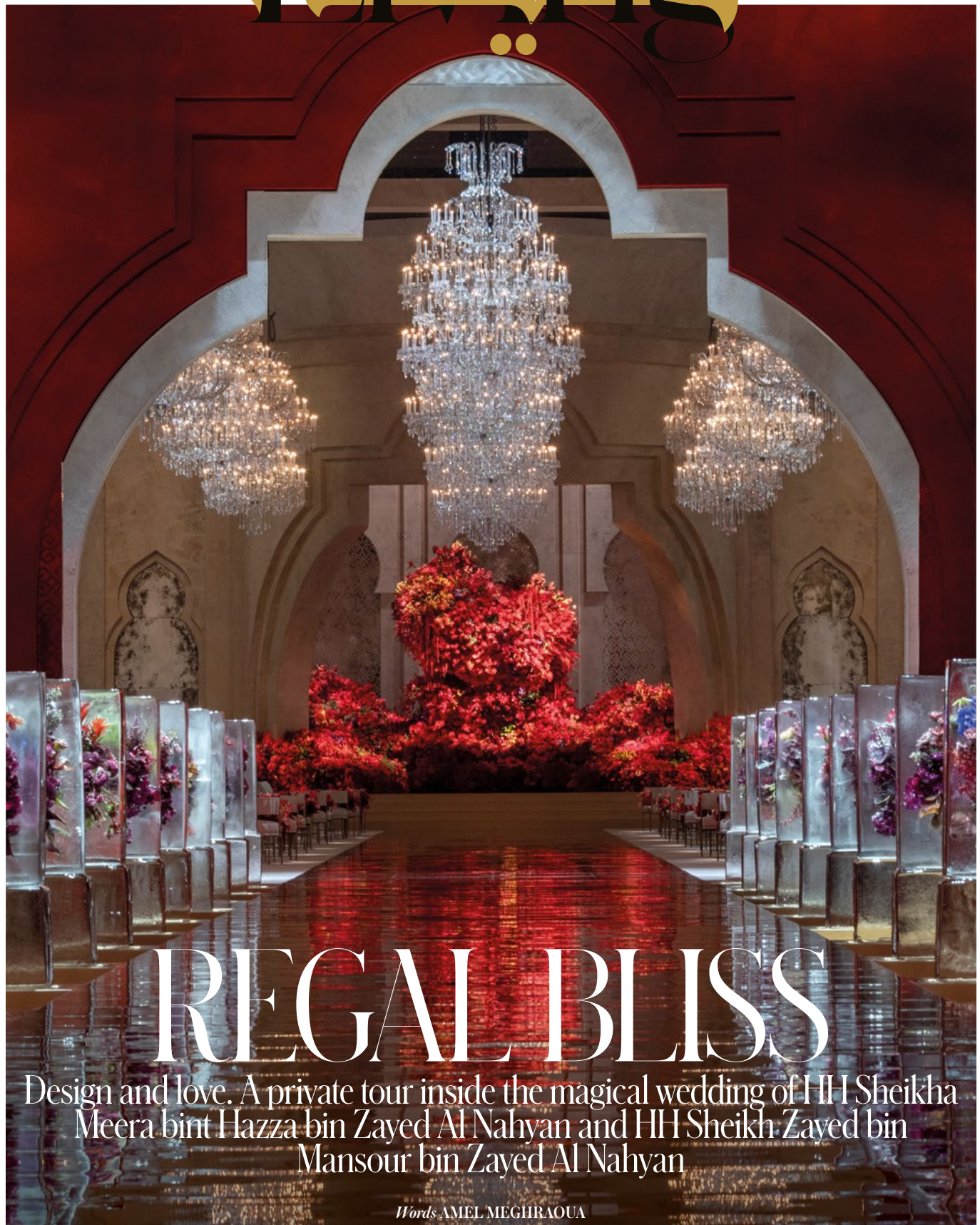


36.75 AED
40 SAR
10 USD



6

Living



REGAL BLISS

Design and love. A private tour inside the magical wedding of HH Sheikha Meera bint Hazza bin Zayed Al Nahyan and HH Sheikh Zayed bin Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan

Words AMEL MEGHRAOUA

it was cherished for centuries and preserved in time with imposing arches, height, and regal proportions, reflecting a sense of home for her.” Further alluding to this facet is the idea of embodying “a shower of light,” as beams of natural light streamed through perforations of the domed ceiling.

Realizing such ambitions is testament to the skills of managing partner El Baba, whose work is fueled by expressive narratives and exquisitely crafted touch points. As a visionary in transformational design, with previous projects including the Glowing Tide installation in Jeddah and Fireflies of Diriyah, El Baba guides his team from concept to execution. “Guided by the DLE team, the aim of the collaboration was the creation of a new incarnation of an artistic palace, through continuous joint exploration and experimentation, allowing us to elevate each other’s work.”

The collaboration brought together renowned scenographer Stefan Lubrina, who worked with the late Karl Lagerfeld on Chanel’s set designs for the last 30 years, and lighting designer Ignace D’Haese, who has designed for Chanel, Dior, and Hermès. The duo was further extended with Japanese floral artist Makoto Azuma, who conceptualized the floral installations throughout, culminating with botanical sculptures set in ice, flanking the catwalk.

With lead architect Marwan Maalouf and El Baba’s son Jad El Baba as senior architect, each moment was meticulously calculated. As Maalouf reflects, “With a non-linear approach to space and journey planning, guests began their evening in the center of the venue before moving through to the dining hall and eventually the Majlis. Connecting all spaces and setting the stage for the evening’s climax was the catwalk spine, joining up the experiential sequences and creating a seamless flow for the guests throughout the venue.”

From arches with a sand-patina texture reflecting a palace environment, to the Mashrabiya inspired by the pattern on an existing couch – where the bride and groom took a photo as young children – each detail of the Majlis offered a timeless quality. “Such references to the bride’s heritage drove the overall feel of the wedding,” notes El Baba. “When the doors opened to the Majlis, you saw a whole other world, in the sandy tones of the UAE.” With an intricate layering of art, crafted by Recycle Group’s Andrey Blokhin and Georgy Kuznetsov, guests became spectators of a lyrical dialogue. The walls paid homage to the love of the bride’s grandparents. Decorated with mesh horses, falcons, and gazelles, they echoed themes from the poetry of Her Highness’s grandfather, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, Founding Father of the UAE.

The event commenced in the early hours of dusk, and lasted until well past midnight, allowing for a gradual exhibition of the sky to peer through the venue. “The guests were made to feel as the spectators and actors alike, switching roles throughout the evening as they were entertained by live performance and culinary delights, until the emotional arrival of the stunning bride,” Albakree recalls. In transcending the expectations of a classic wedding, such details created a sense of multiplicity from a single moment.



“The bride always wanted the place to feel like it was cherished for centuries and preserved in time”

Orchestra and cake moment **ABOVE**
Designlab Experience Team, Hibah Albakree, Mootassem El Baba, Jad El Baba, Marwan Maalouf **LEFT** Majlis



The bride looked exquisite, dressed in a custom ivory lace gown by Alexander McQueen. Magnificent jewelry and a tiara were curated by Chaumet, while the bride's natural beauty was amplified by New York-based makeup artist Mario Dedivanovic and hairstylist Yehya from Lebanon. During the bride and groom's entrance, 49 crystal chandeliers moving in unison and a projection spanning the entire ceiling of the Majlis created an awe-inspiring backdrop to the arrival. The moment was accompanied by the live orchestra with the reflection of a full moon subtly creating varied intensities of light. "At each moment and angle, a new narrative came to life, engaging the audience," explains Albakree.

The cake was created by American celebrity chef Maggie Austin. Inspired by the noble falcon, it featured hand-cut and painted feathers with elaborate golden molding, carved through cream-colored tiers. Perched upon a handmade gilded medallion, the cake measured five layers, with filigree branches adorning the top tier. In both the dining and Majlis spaces, tables were decorated with antique glassware pieces,

elaborate fruit displays, and floral installations in striking shades of red. "This was a challenging brief," reflects El Baba. "I am proud in the knowledge that the bride was satisfied with each detail and am very pleased with the work of our talented team. Sculpting traditional elements into a new era is no easy feat."

From creating symphonic spaces to architectural abstractions, Designlab Experience's commitment to innovation distinguishes it from all else. "The lingering theme will not be physical in this case, though it has been abundant and impactful," notes Albakree. "It was rather the idea of connecting to the bride's roots, while maintaining a sense of uniquely contemporary design with Arabic notions. It was unprecedented in the level of creative bravery by our client and the anchors that inspired the design. Connecting poetry with the love of two grandparents was important to the bride and formed the foundation of the experience. From the first moment meeting her, to delivering the project today, it was a beautiful journey." For the team, emotion becomes a language unto itself. □

"References to the bride's heritage drove the overall feel of the wedding. When the doors opened to the Majlis, you saw a whole other world in the sandy tones of the UAE"



PHOTOGRAPHS ROBERTO CONTE, ART STUDIO

Guests' arrival area
LEFT Majlis

