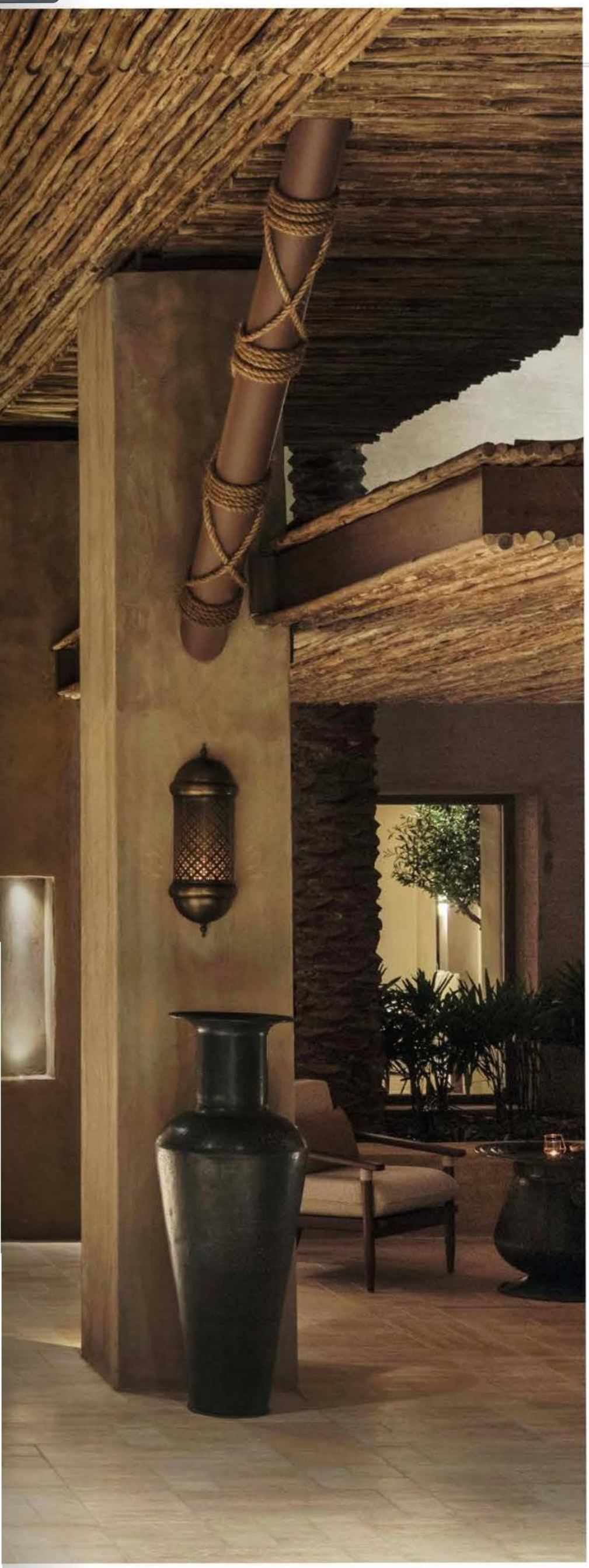
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Photography courtesy of Natelee Cocks

BAB AL SHAMS, A RARE FINDS DESERT RESORT

DUBAI

Kerzner International has launched its first property Bab Al Shams, a luxury desert resort and spa, under its new brand, 'Rare Finds', a collection of resorts that brings to the forefront the essence of a place. *Hospitality Interiors* found out more about the project from design studio, LW Design.

LW Design was commissioned to reinvent Bab Al Shams, a landmark destination, into a contemporary and glamorous desert resort. The brief was to create a refined yet extravagant leisure and entertainment venue to attract local and international travellers with a cost and time-conscious approach. The eclectic and contemporary Arabic theme creatively maintains much of its original heritage, allowing a re-launch with ultimate style and offering cultured desert experiences.

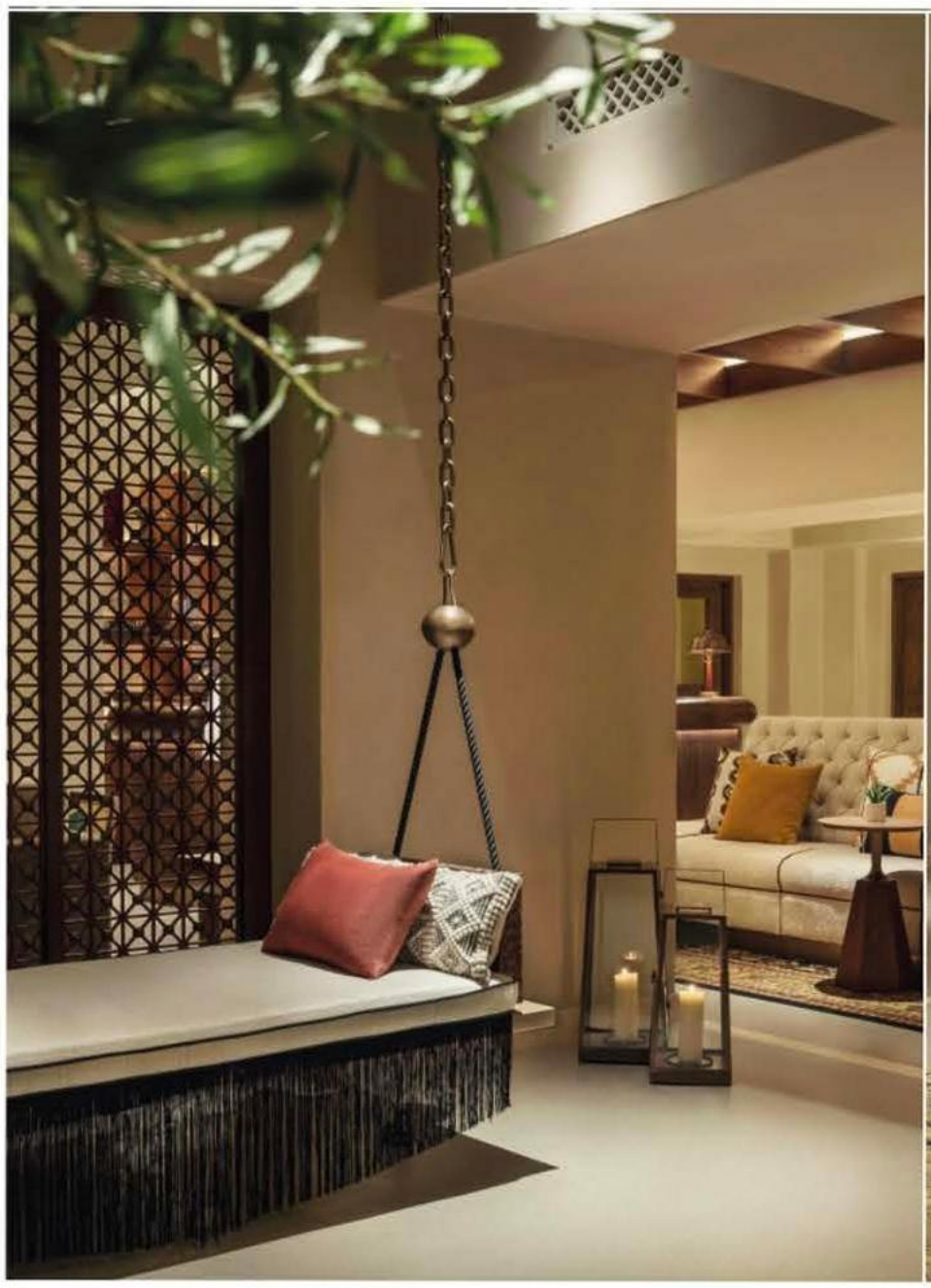
With a design narrative centred around 'The Lost Princess', Bab Al Shams is her sanctuary of luxury and unforgettable journey. Interior design elements subtly weave through her iconic heritage tied deeply to her customs while celebrating the glamour of modern-day Arabia. The resort's limited and carefully considered architectural interventions integrate with existing forms and materials to provide an enhanced guest experience.

The overall fabric of the design is a seamless blend of the confluence between contemporary Arabic elements and sustainable heritage. Early on in the concept phase, the design team paid special attention and made efforts to preserve and re-purpose key furniture pieces, iconic artwork and accessories into the new design, adding to the resort's overall sustainable value and heritage.

As visitors enter through oversized doors, the grand driveway, landscaped by Square M, has lush palms and water features and well-preserved decades-old foliage that instantly transports guests into a forgotten world. The restrained palette of materials marries the barasti-style canopies, adobe walls, and columns with the existing vernacular-inspired architecture, while the new porte cochère provides a threshold with dappled shade.

The original carved and metal-studded doors have been re-stained for an immediate nostalgic welcome to the resort. Locally inspired slatted screens guide visitors to the reception desk, encouraging them to pause at the beautiful swing seat upon entering. The banquette, centred on the solid walnut reception desk, is the focal point of the check-in area. Art consultant Capsule Arts has meticulously curated artefacts and art that tie into the narrative guided by interior design. ›

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A curious journey uncovers corners of mystery and intrigue, eventually leading to the main lobby bar. A grand traveller's chest, reminiscent of the princess's many travels, inspired the design of the back bar. The eye-catching piece of furniture is the perfect balance of heritage and glamour. Vividly lit, a collection of the finest bottles, intricate herb drawers and hand-cut crystal glasses add a playful layer to the design. The ornate counter, detailed with metal studs, walnut wood and mocha cream marble, is designed as an apothecary table. Mixologists interact with guests while they create unique infusions inspired by Arabic tea and coffee traditions.

LW Design retained the skylight in the lobby bar as one of the key features of the original design. Daylight filters through the intricately patterned architectural elements casting shadows and creating a magical atmosphere blending nostalgia with romance. Once the sun sets, subtle decorative lighting creates an intimate ambience. The lighting designer Studio Lumen carefully considered soft hues throughout the resort to ensure a delicate approach to the lighting design.

Bi-folding doors have been introduced to the raised and integrated courtyard creating a seamless transition between the indoors and outdoors. A traditionally inspired awning covers the extension to the lobby by adding a soft layer to the architecture and extending the interior feel into the alfresco areas.

The furniture and lighting have been carefully curated and handcrafted by local artisans or restored. Hand-knotted rugs and jewel-toned upholstery pay homage to Arabic glamour, making the lobby lounge a vivid and memorable central meeting place.

The guest rooms and suites have been transformed whilst respecting the original design elements.

LW Design retained the novel concrete flooring integrating indoor and outdoor spaces. The indoor flooring has been re-finished with durable micro-concrete. The solid teak doors were stripped and stained to a more authentic natural timber tone, balancing the soft bastakiya colour palette synonymous with Bab Al Shams. Challenged by the original small windows and doors, the rooms have limited

daylight, so a lighter colour palette and mirrors reflect light where possible. Studio Lumen paid extra attention to the lighting within the guest rooms to ensure a brighter and more spacious experience. A large shower, beautifully clad in marble mosaic, translates into a modern interpretation of Arabic patterns adding an authentic backdrop to the washroom. A stunning hand-carved vanity inset with mother-of-pearl inlay elevates the design to true luxury. A unique valet stand displaying the amenities adds a sense of extravagance to the limited space, with hand-picked items displayed on different tiers.

Each bedroom has high ceilings detailed with timber beams and a feature ceiling fan. Double-layered headboards at a lower level afford each guest a cosy and intimate feeling within the bedroom area. LW Design preserved the majlis window seating from the original design giving it a modern twist with bright upholstery in modern Arabic-inspired patterns. A small dining cove in front of the television gives the room a boutique feel. A free-standing mini bar inspired by the princess's traveller's chest, clad in authentic leather, has a surprise colour inside.

Keeping with the Bab Al Shams sustainability concept, LW Design has re-used and upcycled existing pieces, including the iconic coat hangers that have been re-lacquered to complement the new colour scheme. Carefully hand-picked items in each room add quirky modernity while respecting its heritage.

Each room opens on to a balcony or garden with inimitable views of the Arabian desert. Furthermore, to celebrate the narrative, every guest room has a backlit etched mirror artwork with subtle references to the lost princess through glimpses of her jewellery and unique heritage.

The five signature suites are a true ode to Arabian glamour. A rich colour palette of burgundy and teal immediately lifts the design. The living area is a luxurious depiction of a bygone decadent time with beautiful handcrafted furniture pieces detailed with rope and tassels. Sliding metal-studded doors reveal the bedroom, a floor-to-ceiling cabinet-style mini bar, a walk-in wardrobe, a double vanity and a free-standing bathtub.

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The signature restaurant, Zala, has a modern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern-inspired theme with a theatrical kitchen and open-flame oven. Arches with rattan details and beautifully handcrafted ceramic pendants make an instant change from traditional metallic perforated Arabic lanterns. While the interior architecture palette is in keeping with the rest of the resort, the transition to a colour palette of teal and terracotta instead of the bolder, punchier tones used in the lobby and guest rooms adds a softer touch to the space.

Al Hadeerah, the iconic Arabic heritage restaurant, also underwent a complete refurbishment – the dining experience is full of Arabic glamour and theatre.

Anwa, the iconic rooftop restaurant, is fully refurbished with an Asian concept. Fashioned around modern-day Asian cuisine, the small indoor space has woks and cold counters on display while the exterior is still in keeping with the original architecture of Bab Al Shams. A new central bar has been erected at the centre of the terrace to create a focal point around the seating under the barasti roofs with modern Asian fittings. The outdoors maintains its original charm of subtle coves and seating, affording the best desert sunset views.

Ya Hala, the lobby bar, underwent a soft refurbishment to maintain its age-old charm and original character that appeal to the resort's regular guests.

Bab Al Shams is a landmark heritage building that hadn't been renovated for almost two decades, so there were many surprises and unexpected challenges to consider. With only nine short months to complete the project, LW Design adopted an agile onsite mindset to ensure the rapid design and build decisions. Designers deployed a site supervision team from conception to completion until everything, including the spa and events centre, is finalised.

Art consultant Capsule Arts worked with LW Design to create a unified curated art collection to elevate the original hotel's existing items whilst bringing new pieces to complement the contemporary design. The team re-purposed the existing collection and stylishly presented them to juxtapose seamlessly with the new additions sourced from local artists and artisans who offered a refined, feminine and unique perspective to the resort.

An exceptional original artwork hangs behind the reception desk in the hotel lobby. The stunning textile art by Iranian artist Mahsa Baraghani was inspired by Bedouin jewellery and headdresses worn by Emirati women. The artist carefully selected a beautiful representation of traditional Emirati culture to enhance the story of the lost princess. Its careful placement ensures that it is one of the first pieces guests see upon arrival to Bab Al Shams, setting the tone for the rest of the resort's art collection. In the same area, another textile artwork by Loretta Bilinskaite-Monie is a minimalist contemporary interpretation of an embroidered Bisht, a traditional cloak worn in the UAE.

Visitors will find works by Emirati photographer Mohammed Ahli presenting striking views of the Arabian desert throughout the resort, together with contemporary plasterwork on linen canvases inspired by the hotel's architecture by Melissa Charlier.

Each piece of art, from handcrafted items

and framed objects to textile artworks and contemporary photography, was carefully selected to contribute to the hotel's overall aesthetic while enhancing the princess's story.

Rachael Brown, Co-founder and Creative Director of Capsule Arts, commented, "This approach is a prime example of how hotels can refurbish sustainably and stylishly. By re-purposing existing items and elevating them with expert curation, the hotel retained its authentic charm and legacy while embracing contemporary design elements".

The unique standalone spa building, due to open in April 2023, with two hammams, five treatment rooms, a gym and a yoga deck, will make this a beautiful destination spa.

A stark contrast from the exterior, which maintains its original bastakiya appeal, the interior boasts a kaleidoscope of colour, texture and pattern defining the glamour of modern Arabia. Each space has a carefully curated selection of vibrant fabrics, and accent finishes that balance with the fresh and neutral palette of the architecture.

Beautiful Appiani mosaic tiles supplied by TAF House are in the Ottoman restaurant and on the terraces. Sustainably re-used and upcycled existing FF&E, art and accessories are used throughout Bab Al Shams, providing a consistent theme throughout the resort.

From geometric carved wooden accents and traces of bush-hammered metal to touches of soft fringe details, each piece of furniture is custom designed and locally handcrafted with intricate details combining a subtle balance between authenticity and modern comfort. The sanitary fixtures from Kohler perfectly balance contemporary and classic design, blending seamlessly with the interiors.

www.babalshams.com
www.lw.co

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