

THE WOMEN SHAPING ABU DHABI

PUBLISHED ON EMIRATI WOMEN'S DAY

THE BUILD

Twenty years of setting Arabic letters
in gold

THE LONG VIEW

On what a country actually owns

THE ABU DHABI TEN

Reported, not commissioned



COVER STORY

WOMEN SHAPING ABU DHABI

*The Leaders, Innovators & Visionaries
Redefining the Emirate*

INSIDE THE C-SUITE:

Lessons from Abu Dhabi's
Female Powerbrokers

INVESTMENT OUTLOOK 2024:

Where the smart money
is going

THE NEW FACE OF LIFESTYLE:

Balance, Wellness,
and Culture

THE PUBLICATION



THE MAGAZINE

Gulf Times Now is a magazine about the people building the Gulf, Abu Dhabi first and then the wider region. Where a feed forgets by morning, a magazine keeps a record. This edition publishes on Emirati Women’s Day and records fifteen women shaping this city.

Each of the fifteen features is built from that woman’s own account, and is sent to her in full before print with any change we made explained. That promise covers those fifteen pages and nothing else.

A city is shaped by the people who choose to build in it.

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Whose city *is this?*

THIS EDITION PUBLISHES ON EMIRATI WOMEN'S DAY, 28 August 2026, and it is not an edition about Emirati women. Some of the fifteen women in it are Emirati. Most are not. That sits in the first sentence because smoothing it over would be the easiest thing here to do, and the least honest.

The day belongs to Emirati women and marks something specific. It is not a general occasion a publication can borrow and point at whoever it happens to have on hand.

What a magazine can honestly do is publish on the day and say what it sees. Abu Dhabi is being shaped by Emirati women born to this place, who carry the long responsibility for it. It is also being shaped by women who arrived from elsewhere, chose this city on purpose and are building inside it. Both are true at once. A magazine that folds the two into one thing is not being respectful. It is being lazy.

So the edition is called The Women Shaping Abu Dhabi and it means exactly that.

Fifteen women, and not one describes the work the way you would expect.

Fifteen women are featured in the pages that follow. Two hold senior research posts at the same university. One founded an international family law practice for families whose lives sit in more than one legal system. One has spent twenty years setting Arabic letterforms in gold. Four work in property, for four different reasons.

Each supplied her own account, most by answering the same questions in writing and one by sending her record instead. Those accounts are the spine of every page. We researched around them. We did not write over them. Where a fact did not come from her, it came from the organisation's own current page and is printed no stronger than that page supports. What we could not verify is not in the edition, and several things are not.

Some of these features are commercial. Each carries the GTN Spotlight mark on its opening page, on the line that credits the writer and the photographer, and the masthead says what the mark means. Nothing here is sold without it showing.

At the back is a section we were not paid for and did not sell. The Abu Dhabi Ten is ten women whose work runs through this city. Nobody in it paid, nobody was approached for payment and nobody was told the section was being written. Their portraits are licensed, and each prints its photographer and licence. On a day that belongs to Emirati women, the least a magazine can do is report on some of the women this city runs on rather than only sell to them.

The rest of the edition is theirs.

THE PEOPLE

The Contributors

The women who sat down with Gulf Times Now, in their own words and on their own record. Ten more are reported later in the issue, and were never asked.



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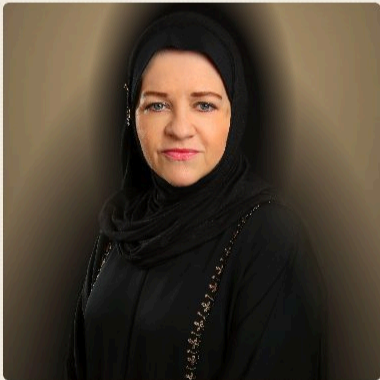
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01 The Build

My dream is to build a gated community that will bring back the childhood I had.

IN THIS SECTION

Nº 01 Fatema Al Rashdi

Nº 02 Nadine Kanso

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The Build

Three Abu Dhabi businesses across beauty and clothing, a jewellery house twenty years old, and a property consultant whose endgame is to stop selling and build the neighbourhood herself.

THE FEATURES



Nº 01 Fatema Al Rashdi

Two salons and an abaya label



Nº 02 Nadine Kanso

The word, set in gold



Nº 03 Hannah Issac

Thirty million in sales since January, and a neighbourhood in mind



THE BUILD

N° 01

Fatema Al Rashdi

Fatema Al Rashdi runs Blonde Luxury Beauty, Nine by Blonde and The Rare Panther, three Abu Dhabi businesses spanning beauty and clothing. On starting before you have it figured out.

WORDS BY GULF TIMES NOW

ROLE	VENTURES
Entrepreneur	Blonde Luxury Beauty · Nine by Blonde · The Rare Panther
BASED	
Abu Dhabi	

Two Salons And An Abaya Label

FATEMA AL RASHDI RUNS THREE BUSINESSES IN ABU DHABI. TWO are beauty salons, Blonde Luxury Beauty and Nine by Blonde; the third, The Rare Panther, is an abaya label that sells online.

Blonde Luxury Beauty works from three Abu Dhabi addresses, in Shakhbout, in Khalifa City and at Yas Mall, and its own account calls it the city's luxury salon. Nine by Blonde sits on Khalifa Al Mubarak Street and has opened inside Matcha Al Bateen, trading from ten in

the morning until ten at night. Its introduction runs to four words: where it all begins.

The Rare Panther sits furthest from the other two. It is a clothing brand rather than a service business, it sells abayas from its own storefront rather than a shop floor and it takes orders by telephone as well as online. The label's own line is six words: sculpted by beauty, crafted beyond time.

“*For me, success is not only about a title or an accomplishment; it is about growth, independence, and being proud of how far I have come.*”

Three businesses across two trades is a wide spread, and she is candid that little of it was mapped out in advance. “My professional journey began with curiosity and a willingness to learn,” she says. “Like many people starting out, I faced uncertainty and moments when I questioned whether I was making the right decisions. One of my biggest challenges was learning to trust myself and my abilities.”

She offers no method for getting past that. She offers a disposition. “Sometimes you simply have to start, learn along the way, and keep moving forward.”

Asked what she counts as her biggest achievement, she names no business, no launch and no figure. “My biggest achievement is becoming the person I am today and having the courage to create opportunities for myself,” she says. “Every step in my journey, including the moments when things did not go as planned, has helped me grow. What makes it meaningful is knowing that I did not give up when things were difficult.” Success, on her account, “is not only about a title or an accomplishment; it is about growth, independence, and being proud of how far I have come.”

The lesson she names as most valuable is about rejection, which is a working condition of both her trades. A salon is judged appointment by appointment. A clothing label is judged by whether the garment sells. “Not every opportunity will work out exactly as expected, and not every challenge is a setback,” she says. “Some experiences are there to teach you something.” She has learned, she says, not to take rejection personally, and to come at the work with more patience and a more open mind.

She puts the present in general terms: developing herself professionally, building connections and creating opportunities that will pay off later.

On what she wants to be remembered for she is more precise than she is about the businesses. “I want people to remember me as someone who was confident but kind, ambitious but genuine, and always willing to help and inspire others.” And: “I believe that the strongest impact is not only what you achieve, but also how you make people feel along the way.”



Al Rashdi outside, in a camel abaya over a white shirt.

THE BUILD

N° 02

Nadine Kanso

Nadine Kanso founded Bil Arabi in 2006 to set Arabic letterforms in gold. Twenty years on, the designer who grew up in Beirut explains why a word changes the moment somebody puts it on.

WORDS BY GULF TIMES NOW

FOUNDED
Bil Arabi, 2006

CRAFT
Arabic letterforms in gold and silver, made in Dubai

NEXT
An exhibition marking twenty years, due January

Wearing the *Word*

BIL ARABI'S OWN SITE DATES THE HOUSE TO 2006 AND SAYS every piece it has made since has been manufactured in Dubai. Its founder, Nadine Kansa, sets Arabic letterforms in gold and silver; the catalogue runs to rings, earrings, cuffs and pendants. Twenty years on, she is preparing an exhibition to mark the anniversary. She says it opens in January.

The brand did not begin as a business. It began as photography. Kansa's series Meen Ana, which she translates as Who Am I, was an exploration of identity and of what it meant to be Arab. The

jewellery followed because the question outgrew the frame. She wanted to take the idea beyond the photograph, into something she could carry. "I wanted to wear my identity," she says.

That sentence accounts for the whole catalogue. A Bil Arabi piece is usually a single Arabic letter or a short word, enlarged, cast in precious metal and worn where it can be read. The script is handled as form rather than as ornament. A letter stretched too far stops being a letter. A letter copied too faithfully stops being jewellery.

“ *It became a way of keeping our language, our stories, and our identity alive, while allowing them to evolve.* ”

Kansa traces the interest to Beirut, where she grew up. "Arabic is my identity," she says. "Growing up in Beirut, it was part of my everyday life, my memories, and the way I expressed myself. I have always been fascinated by its visual strength, but also by its ability to carry so much emotion and meaning." Two claims are being made there at once. The script is beautiful, and the script is loaded. Most work in this territory takes the first and leaves the second.

Longevity is the part of the story that is easiest to skip. The house has been trading for twenty years and its range has widened rather than narrowed in that time: its own catalogue lists high jewellery, anklets, cufflinks and pieces made for men, and the house puts a custom commission at five to seven days. Asked what was hardest about starting out, Kansa gives four words. "No challenges, just learnings."

She is more unusual on the finished object than on designing it. Her interest ends roughly where the wearer's begins. "What matters to me is that the word has a life beyond the jewellery itself," she says. "Once it becomes a piece, it takes on another meaning through the person wearing it. It becomes part of their own story, their own memories, and their own identity." Designers are not generally relaxed about handing over authorship. Kansa treats it as the object of the exercise.

The same argument runs through the way she describes heritage, and it is the least sentimental part of her account. Bil Arabi started as something personal, she says, and became part of a larger conversation about identity and belonging. "What started as my own way of expressing who I am became something that other people could see themselves in." Heritage, on her reading, is not a holding to be guarded. "It is not something we simply inherit and preserve. It is something we continue to interpret, question, and carry forward."

The anniversary exhibition is the only project she names when asked what she is working on. Beyond it, the ambition she describes is not a commercial one. She wanted to explore Arabic beyond language, she says, as a form of identity, expression and design, and to give something rooted in her heritage a contemporary form while keeping it authentic.

Her shortest answer is the one that is not about work at all. "I would tell my younger self to trust her instincts, to embrace who she is, and never be afraid of what the future holds." She adds: "Remember that life is a beautiful journey."



Kansa wearing one of her own Bil Arabi letterforms.

courtesy Nadine Kansa



THE BUILD

N° 03

Hannah Issac

Hannah Issac trained as a mining engineer. She returned from maternity leave in January and has closed thirty million in sales since, spread across separate transactions. She is not working towards a bigger year. She wants to stop broking and build a gated community of her own.

WORDS BY GULF TIMES NOW · PHOTOGRAPHS
COURTESY HANNAH ISSAC · GTN SPOTLIGHT

ROLE

Senior property consultant, I Buy Real Estate

CLOSED SINCE JANUARY

Thirty million, across separate transactions

THE AMBITION

A gated community she builds herself

Thirty million in sales since January. *She wants to build a neighbourhood, not broker one.*

HANNAH ISSAC'S FIRST DEGREE IS IN MINING ENGINEERING. SHE is a senior property consultant at I Buy Real Estate. She arrived in the UAE from Eritrea with that degree and a diploma in project management.

Property came about four years ago, and it came from the buying side. She was hunting an investment of her own. Somewhere in the hunt she stopped looking at units and started reading the market, and the search turned into the job.

“*My dream is to build a gated community that will bring back the childhood I had.*”

The firm's own account of itself says it was founded by Alan Harthy and works with private investors, family offices and hedge funds, moving much of its portfolio before it reaches the public portals. A brokerage built that way does not wait for buyers to walk in off Saadiyat. It goes and finds them, wherever they live.

Which is most of Issac's work. She sells apartments and villas her clients have never walked through. They are in London, Toronto, New York and Sydney, and some of them buy several units at once and hand her the whole portfolio. In her own telling she is the eyes of people four thousand kilometres away, and they get one chance to trust her.

She frames what she sells by what it becomes. “I am happy that the property I sell builds generational wealth for my clients, and that it gives families a place to settle in a country I am proud to call home. My children are growing up here.”

She has built a public account of her own alongside the deals, and it changes the shape of the first conversation. By her description, most of the trust is already done by the time a client writes to her. The pitch has happened before the pitch.

The method that follows is unhurried to the point of being uncommercial. She gives buyers time to say in detail what they want,

She returned from maternity leave in January. She has closed thirty million in sales since, spread across separate transactions rather than concentrated in a single deal. She has three children. The youngest is not yet one.

The figure is offered less as a boast than as the settlement of an argument she had been having with herself. There were three children at home and every practical reason to come back slowly. The achievement she names is not the total. It is having believed the total was available to her, and then going and taking it.

and she does not move them through options to keep the momentum up. Availability is not the question she thinks she is being asked. She is listening for “feeling calm and happiness with the unit you purchase”. The client who feels rushed is the client who leaves.

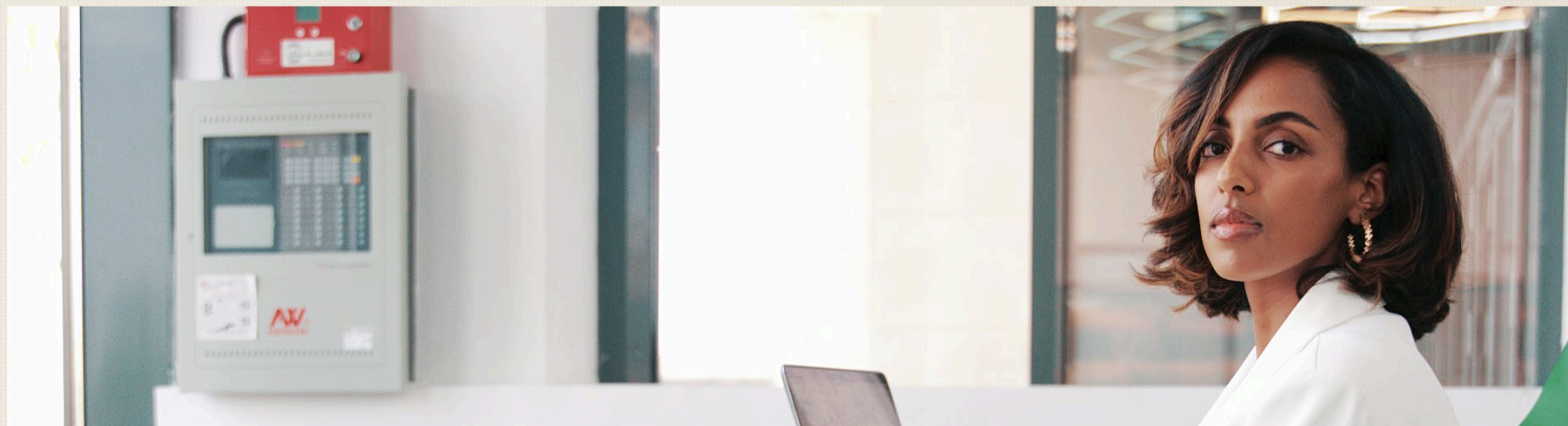
The hardest thing to learn was not the market. It was the failures. A buyer views for months and then changes their mind, and early on that lands as a loss. Later it becomes information, because by then you have started to study the client rather than the listing.

Asked what shaped her, she gives an answer two words long. My mom.

“I looked at other countries first and I chose the UAE twice, once for my career and once for my family,” she said. “The UAE is a beautiful place to build a life. It is safe, it is generous with people who arrive with nothing but a plan, and it opened the door for women and then trusted us to walk through it.”

She wants to be remembered for her professionalism above everything, and for staying humble at every step she takes.

She is not working towards a larger year. She wants to stop broking and build: a gated community that gives the next generation the childhood she had, inside a community rather than beside one.



Issac came to property from the buying side, hunting an investment of her own.

Photograph · courtesy Hannah Issac

02 The Long View

*Knowledge gives you capability, **but** character determines what you do with it.*

IN THIS SECTION

Nº 04 Hoda Al Khzaimi

Nº 05 Marta Losada

IN THIS SECTION

The Long View

Two senior researchers at the same university, whose work is measured in institutions and decades rather than launches and quarters.

THE FEATURES



Nº 04
Hoda Al Khzaimi
What does a country own?



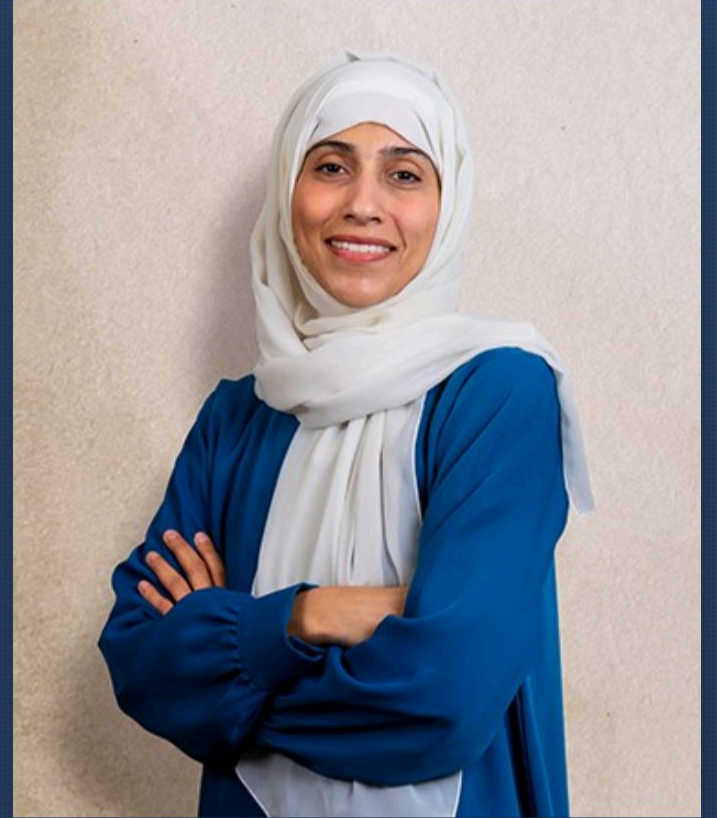
Nº 05
Marta Losada
The physics of institutions

THE LONG VIEW

Hoda Al Khzaimi

An Emirati scientist, strategic economic and investment advisor and national expert in advanced sciences and future economies, with seven degrees and more than two decades across sovereign investment, advanced industries and the commercialisation of research. Her argument is that the country's next stage is not adopting technology well but owning what it originates.

N° 04



THE VALUE-CREATION CHAIN

IN HER OWN WORDS

knowledge

→ intellectual property

→ enterprise

→ scale

→ industrial capability

→ economic competitiveness

*What do we own.
What do we originate.*

A breakthrough is not an outcome.

HODA AL KHZAIMI IS AN EMIRATI SCIENTIST, A STRATEGIC economic and investment advisor and a national expert in advanced sciences and future economies. More than two decades sit behind that description: sovereign investment, advanced industries, research and development, technology commercialisation, entrepreneurship and economic strategy. At New York University Abu Dhabi she holds academic and institutional leadership across research translation, innovation and entrepreneurship, connecting scientific knowledge and intellectual property with investment, industry, venture creation and market development.

Her academic formation spans seven degrees, across science and engineering, finance and investment, business, analytics and

“ *Knowledge gives you capability, but character determines what you do with it.* ”

Her scientific foundations are mathematics, computer science and cryptology, the disciplines that set the analytical rigour of the early years. She was among the primary founders of the university's Center for Cyber Security and led it before moving on. She founded EMARATSEC, the Emerging Advanced Research Acceleration for Technologies, Security and Cryptology centre, and directs it still, across advanced and emerging technologies, applied research and technology translation, cryptology among them.

Technical depth, she believed early on, was the principal requirement for solving hard problems. It remains essential. It also turned out to be insufficient. She spent about twelve years inside a sovereign investment environment, under a mandate for economic diversification that ran across advanced industries, strategic technologies and the funding and building of research capability. That work was never simply technology assessment. It was learning how capital, science and industrial capability combine into long-term economic value.

A technically superior technology does not automatically create economic value. Market structure, capital, intellectual property, regulation, talent and supply chains decide whether anything comes of it.

The difficulty was translation. A scientist asks whether something is possible. A founder asks whether anyone will buy it. An investor asks whether it returns. A policymaker asks whether it creates employment. A country has to ask all of those at once, and someone has to move between the languages. That became her capability.

One proposition organises the rest of her work. A breakthrough is not an outcome. It is the beginning of a chain that runs from research

international business law, with further executive education in investment and financial leadership. At the university she is associate vice provost for research translation, innovation and entrepreneurship, and assistant professor of engineering.

Asked to name her biggest achievement, she declined to reduce it to a title, an award or an appointment. She wrote instead about a question.

It began as an observation. She grew up watching a young country make deliberate choices about what it wanted to become, against a very long horizon. None of it was accidental. Nations could build capabilities on purpose.

to intellectual property to enterprise, and from there to industrial capability and to industries that can compete anywhere.

She works that chain from more than one side. She is a founding partner and chief investment officer of a private investment and venture platform, which she asks not be named here, focused on deep science, frontier technologies, advanced industries and future-economy opportunities, and she has held board and strategic advisory positions across advanced industries, energy, technology, financial services and investment. The advisory work travels: advanced sciences and future economies, artificial intelligence and quantum technologies, investment and economic development, through UAE national initiatives and at the ITU, the UNDP, the World Economic Forum and BRICS.

For the UAE she believes the next stage has to go beyond adopting and investing well in other people's technology. What do we own. What do we originate. Where do we control the intellectual property that matters. Which parts of emerging value chains can be anchored here, and which capabilities will still create value in twenty or thirty years.

Asked what she wants to be remembered for, she names the multiplier: a researcher who progressed, a founder who built something, an institution that got stronger. Her advice to her younger self runs in the same currency. “Plant some trees whose shade you know you will never sit beneath. Build institutions you do not need to control. Teach people who may eventually surpass you.”

“Legacy, to me, is not the position you occupied, the capital you managed or the recognition you received. It is the capability that remains in your people, your institutions and your country when you are no longer in the room.”



ROLES Associate vice provost for research translation, innovation and entrepreneurship, and assistant professor of engineering, New York University Abu Dhabi
FOUNDED EMARATSEC, the advanced and emerging technologies centre she directs **THE QUESTION** What does a country own?



THE LONG VIEW

N° 05

Marta Losada

Marta Losada is interim provost of New York University Abu Dhabi. A high-energy particle physicist with a doctorate from Rutgers and a CERN fellowship behind her, she held the university's research portfolio before the appointment, and spent eight years as president of a Colombian university before that.

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· PHOTOGRAPHS
SALEH ALHALABI · NYU ABU DHABI

The Physics of *Institutions*

MARTA LOSADA IS INTERIM PROVOST OF NEW YORK University Abu Dhabi. Before the appointment she held the research portfolio itself. Through 2025 and 2026 she was associate vice chancellor for global research, senior vice provost for research and professor of physics at NYU Abu Dhabi, and global network professor of physics in the Faculty of the Arts and Sciences at NYU in New York. The research office covers a university's research administration and services, its integrity, policy and compliance functions, its technology transfer office, its core technology platforms and its laboratory operations.

The physics is not honorary. Her field is high-energy particle physics, spanning elementary particle phenomenology, cosmology and experimental high-energy physics.

The training took place across three countries. She took her undergraduate degree and an MSc in physics at the National University of Colombia, then a PhD in physics at Rutgers in the United States. From 1997 to 1999 she was a postdoctoral fellow at CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, in Switzerland.

She has been principal investigator on numerous research projects and is a member of the ATLAS, DUNE and NEXT experiments. She was also principal investigator for the Universidad Antonio Nariño node of the European-funded networks HELEN, Invisibles, Invisibles Plus and Elusives. She has sat on the scientific committee of the Latin American Symposium on High-Energy Physics and of the CERN-Latin America School of High-Energy Physics, and was elected to the Colombian Academy of Sciences.

The other half of the record began in Colombia. She was president of Universidad Antonio Nariño from 2010 to 2018, and before that the

university's national director for research and director of its Basic and Applied Science Research Center. At NYU Abu Dhabi she was dean of science from 2019 to 2024.

The policy work has run in parallel throughout. She was a commissioner of the engineering, architecture, mathematics and physical sciences section of the Colombian Ministry of Education and Research Policy from 2006 to 2009. She chaired the preparatory group for Latin America's strategy in high energy, cosmology and astroparticle physics until 2021. She sat on the steering committee for the first UNICA-IAU Masterclass on Internationalization, on the review group for the Magna Charta Universitatum from 2018 to 2020, and on the Global Attainment and Inclusion Network.

She has served as an international councillor and board member of the American Physical Society and as a board member of the International Association of Universities, and has been a scientific consultant to the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics. Most recently she was appointed to the Governing Council of the Magna Charta Observatory.

Profiles tend to treat a scientist who takes an administrative post as a scientist who stopped. This record reads the other way round. A collaboration in particle physics is held together across countries, funders and decades, and so is a research university. She has spent her career moving between the bench and the budget and has held senior office on both sides. The conventional route runs one way and late. Hers has gone back and forth for two decades.

In January 2026 she convened a conference on high energy, cosmology and astroparticle physics on the Abu Dhabi campus. The invited speakers came from the Perimeter Institute, the Weizmann Institute and the University of Sydney among others.



Losada at an NYU Abu Dhabi commencement.

Photograph · NYU Abu Dhabi

03 The Market

Families today are increasingly global, yet the legal systems they have to navigate can be fragmented and complex.

IN THIS SECTION

Nº 06 Samara Iqbal

Nº 07 Karina Meirmann

IN THIS SECTION

The Market

Cross-border family law, and the ultra-luxury end of the Dubai and Abu Dhabi property market: two practices where money and borders do not line up.

THE FEATURES



Nº 06

Samara Iqbal

Families whose money sits in two legal systems



Nº 07

Karina Meirmann

The assets always remain



THE MARKET

N° 06

Samara Iqbal

Samara Iqbal qualified as a solicitor in 2011 and founded Aramas International Lawyers, which dates itself to 2019 and gives its bases as Abu Dhabi Global Market, Manchester, Doha and Riyadh. Her clients are families whose lives, and whose money, sit in more than one legal system at once.

WORDS BY GULF TIMES NOW · PHOTOGRAPHS
COURTESY SAMARA IQBAL

FIRM
Aramas International Lawyers, founded 2019

BASE
Al Sarab Tower, Floor 11, ADGM Square, Al Maryah Island

RANKED
Chambers, UK and UAE

Between Two *Laws*

ARAMAS INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS GIVES ITS REGISTERED address as Al Sarab Tower, Floor 11, ADGM Square, on Al Maryah Island. Samara Iqbal founded it. The firm advises expatriate families on international family law and lists four bases: Manchester, Abu Dhabi, Doha and Riyadh.

She qualified as a solicitor in 2011. The firm dates its own founding to 2019. Chambers and Partners ranks her in its UK guide for family and matrimonial law in the North West for 2026, which the firm records as its second consecutive year of recognition, and in its High Net Worth guide it ranks her twice, in the United Kingdom and in the United Arab Emirates. In the same guide the editors write that she “is routinely instructed by high net worth clients with interests in Qatar, Dubai and elsewhere in the UAE to handle divorce and financial remedy matters”.

“*The most valuable lesson I’ve learned in my career is that resilience is just as important as expertise.*”

That is the founding argument of the firm and it is also the commercial one. A family separating across two jurisdictions does not have one problem. It has two sets of rules that can reach opposite conclusions about the same marriage, the same children and the same money. “Families today are increasingly global, yet the legal systems they have to navigate can be fragmented and complex,” she says. “I want to help bridge that gap and make cross-border legal advice more strategic, practical and human.”

Building the firm is the achievement she names first, and she is precise about why. “It matters to me because it represents far more than a business achievement. It has taken resilience, courage and a willingness to step outside my comfort zone.” She is proud, she says, that it “has grown from an idea into a recognised international practice, while maintaining a personal and client-focused approach”.

The obstacles she names are not legal ones. The first was confidence and establishing herself in a competitive industry while working across different legal systems and cultures. The second was the unglamorous business of building a client base and a reputation while managing the commercial side of a firm. “Those challenges taught me resilience and adaptability. They also taught me not to be afraid of taking a different path.”

The work is narrower than the phrase family law suggests and considerably harder. It covers cross-border divorce, children who live in one country and hold the passport of another and financial claims where the assets sit in a third. It covers wills and estate planning, pre-nuptial agreements, parental child abduction and the enforcement of an English court order in a country that has never heard of it.

Iqbal traces the choice to something she watched rather than something she studied. “One moment that had a significant impact on my career was seeing, from an early stage, how difficult family breakdown can become when people are dealing with different legal systems, cultures and countries,” she says. The conclusion she drew was not an academic one. “It taught me very early that good legal advice needs to be both technically strong and genuinely human.”

She is growing the practice: cross-border family matters, children, divorce, wills and estate planning, a stronger presence across the UAE and the wider region and a larger team. She wants a leading international family law firm with a reputation for complex cross-border work, recognised for understanding the human complexity behind a case as well as the law that governs it.

She hopes to be remembered as someone who built more than a successful law firm, and to encourage other women building careers in competitive industries to have the confidence to create their own path.

Asked what she would tell herself at the beginning, she does not reach for strategy. “I would tell my younger self to trust yourself sooner. You do not need to have everything figured out before you take the next step, and you should not underestimate what you are capable of simply because you are still learning.”

On what actually makes a good lawyer, she does not name a skill. “Ultimately, being a good lawyer is not just about knowing the law; it is about being someone people can trust when they are facing uncertainty.”



Iqbal at a boardroom table, the city behind her.

Photograph · courtesy Samara Iqbal

THE MARKET

N° 07

Karina Meirmann

Karina Meirmann is part of Driven Forbes Global Properties, which the Forbes Global Properties network says was the first brokerage in the Middle East it admitted. She works the ultra-luxury end of the Dubai and Abu Dhabi markets, and she argues that property is read far too simply.

WORDS BY GULF TIMES NOW · PHOTOGRAPHS
COURTESY KARINA MEIRMANN

FIRM

Driven Forbes Global Properties, founded 2012

MARKETS

Dubai and Abu Dhabi, ultra-luxury

ABU DHABI

Branch opened April 2026

The assets always remain.

KARINA MEIRMAN IS PART OF DRIVEN FORBES GLOBAL Properties, a Dubai brokerage founded in 2012. The Forbes Global Properties network announced in September 2021 that the firm was the first in the Middle East it had admitted. The firm opened an Abu Dhabi branch in April 2026. Meirman works the ultra-luxury end of both markets.

The glamour attached to property did not draw her. The market itself did, and the work of understanding how it moves well enough to put the right data in front of investors and buyers before they commit. She describes the industry as lucrative and durable, and says that

“ *Each cycle has its own purpose and upside.* ”

She declines to name a single defining deal. There have been many, large and small, and she treats the achievement as cumulative. She will claim the outcome. Her clients leave the transaction better off, and so does she. It is a deliberately unglamorous way to keep score, and it fits the rest of how she talks about the work.

She is candid that the beginning was not especially hard for her. She did not have too many struggles at the start, and she says so plainly. That is a different thing from it being easy. “The journey is hard for everyone in their own way,” she says, and the mental pressure of the industry is not for everyone.

On her current work she is deliberately brief. She is part of Driven Forbes Global Properties, she believes the people leading it are aligned with where she wants to go and beyond that she will not go into detail. She will say that Dubai and Abu Dhabi are moving through significant shifts, and that she reads this as a good thing, particularly at the ultra-luxury end.

whatever else happens, the assets always remain. That is a claim about the asset class rather than about salesmanship, and it is the one she keeps returning to.

It is also a particular way of working. She offers a reading of the market rather than access or taste, and she wants the buyer to be able to check it against the numbers.

She was studying abroad from a young age, and she traces most of what she is now to that. Being somewhere unfamiliar and expected to keep up made her a high achiever, and she has stayed one. She describes herself as always striving to do better and bigger.

The firm’s own Abu Dhabi report, published in April 2026, describes a market changing character rather than cooling. Transaction volumes across the emirate rose forty-eight per cent year on year over the first nine months of 2025, and the firm records buyers in early 2026 moving towards completed, income-generating assets and away from speculative ones. That is a market that rewards the kind of reading Meirman says she sells. The report covers Abu Dhabi as a whole. The view of the ultra-luxury end is hers.

The lesson she offers is about mindset before method. Mindset, she says, is the most important thing she has learned.

She would change how the industry is read. Property is presented as simple and it is not, and she would like both the approach to it and the data behind it to grow up. Every person working in the industry, she says, is putting in hard work to make something of themselves.

Asked what she would tell her younger self, she refuses the premise. “Do everything as you did, otherwise you wouldn’t end up where you are now.”



Meirman, in a studio portrait against a plain ground.

Photograph · courtesy Karina Meirman

QUICK READS

In Their Own Words

One line each, in the words they gave us.

“

For me, success is not only about a title or an accomplishment; it is about growth, independence, and being proud of how far I have come.



FATEMA AL RASHDI · PAGE 8

“

It became a way of keeping our language, our stories, and our identity alive, while allowing them to evolve.



NADINE KANSO · PAGE 10

“

My dream is to build a gated community that will bring back the childhood I had.



HANNAH ISSAC · PAGE 12

“

Knowledge gives you capability, but character determines what you do with it.



HODA AL KHZAIMI · PAGE 16

“

The most valuable lesson I’ve learned in my career is that resilience is just as important as expertise.



SAMARA IQBAL · PAGE 22

“

Each cycle has its own purpose and upside.



KARINA MEIRMANN · PAGE 24

“

I wouldn’t change a thing.



VOULA IKONOMAKI · PAGE 30

“

During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2021, I discovered art as a way to disconnect from work pressure.



SALMA AL JABERI · PAGE 32

“

The world will adapt to climate-intelligent skincare in the future. Abu Dhabi will be the place where it was first born.



SRUTI GUDAVALLI · PAGE 36

“

I did not have a choice; I could not let them down.



SONJA BOSCH · PAGE 38

“

The biggest lesson for me is that honesty is always better than just a quick check.



REGINA GAITOVA · PAGE 42

“

Every dog can learn.



GINA SOKOLOV · PAGE 44

Features marked GTN Spotlight are published under a commercial partnership with the featured business.

MARIAM EM

One Hero Ingredient, Every Formula

Sidr is the hero ingredient in every MARIAM EM formula, the founder's own brief for the brand. It launched from Abu Dhabi during the pandemic, with skincare in the market and a hair-care range next.



SIDR WENT INTO BODY AND HAIR MASKS IN ALMOST EVERY LOCAL HOUSEHOLD the founder of MARIAM EM grew up around. It is a powder. Before it can be used it has to be mixed with something else, rose water or yogurt, and she was never able to keep that up. The properties were real. The format was the obstacle.

So she set out to build a brand rather than a routine. Her brief to herself: Sidr as the hero ingredient in every formula. That fixes the centre of a range before a single product exists.

MARIAM EM started during the pandemic. Travel was shut, so suppliers had to be found online, and shipments arrived late. The launch went ahead anyway. She puts that down to keeping one goal in front of everything else.

The achievement she names first is launching a beauty brand into a saturated market, where the big names make it hard to compete. Her answer to that has

been deliberate rather than fast. “I am taking my time building the brand slowly and adding products only after meticulous testing and trials,” she says.

The harder problem came after the launch. Products went out to influencers in exchange for an honest review. Plenty agreed, took delivery and were never heard from again. It still happens, she says, no matter how carefully the brand vets. “What they don’t realize is that someone’s time, money and efforts were wasted in exchange for a loss that we have to bear.”

“Growth doesn’t look the same for everyone. Set your own goals and work towards achieving them,” she says. The rest of that lesson is about scope. Trying to be everything in a business, she says, only costs a founder focus and energy.

Savoir Flair has listed MARIAM EM among Arab-owned beauty brands, Grazia Middle East among Middle Eastern ones. A hair-care range is next, already through testing and well received by the testers, with wellness products once skincare and hair care are all out.

BRAND
MARIAM EM, Abu Dhabi

HERO INGREDIENT
Sidr, by her own brief

RANGE
Skincare in market, hair care next

mariamem.com · [@mariamem.ae](https://www.instagram.com/mariamem.ae)

04 The Makers

*Every order means that someone connected **with something I created with my own hands.***

IN THIS SECTION

N° 08 Voula Ikonomaki

N° 09 Salma Al Jaberi

IN THIS SECTION

The Makers

Thirty-seven years of colour, counted from fourteen, and abstract work built up in texture.
Both of them still make the thing themselves.

THE FEATURES



N° 08

Voula Ikonomaki

She began at fourteen, in the family salon



N° 09

Salma Al Jaber

Texture, and somewhere to put the noise



THE MAKERS

N° 08

Voula Ikonomaki

She started at fourteen in the family salon and counts thirty-seven years from that morning. First place in the L'Oréal Colour Trophy came in 1997, on the theme Bride of Spring. She has owned the Porto Rafti salon outside Athens since 1992, and worked Abu Dhabi and Dubai floors from 2013 as a colourist and educator. UAE work is freelance now.

WORDS BY
GULF TIMES NOW
 · PHOTOGRAPHS
COURTESY VOULA IKONOMAKI
 · GTN SPOTLIGHT

First place at twenty-two, and the Porto Rafti salon she has owned since 1992.

VOULA IKONOMAKI HAS OWNED ROYALTY BEAUTY & MORE AT Porto Rafti, outside Athens, since 1992. She first worked a salon floor at fourteen, still at school, in her family's business, and counts thirty-seven years in the international beauty and fashion industry from that start. She was balancing lessons against long hours on the floor and travelling to the UK and to Paris to train. Her ambition, in her own account, was not to be another hairstylist but to be the first in every salon she entered.

She was picked young. L'Oréal Professionnel's general director in Paris, Michelle Claire, gave her a full scholarship as one of the company's youngest new talents, and from seventeen she spent ten years with its artistic team, teaching in its studios and performing on

catwalks in front of audiences of two and three thousand. She trained with Vidal Sassoon, Toni & Guy, Jacques Dessange and Alexandre de Paris.

The win came at twenty-two. She had been entering the L'Oréal Colour Trophy since she was twenty, put forward by her own directors, and had taken second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth places along the way. In June 1997, after three stages run over months, she took first place on the theme Bride of Spring. She puts the field at thirty-three thousand entrants, cut to thirty in the final. It was family work. Her mother did the make-up and her sister was the model, in pale blue in a field of white dresses, with a blonde built for it, and she puts the whole result down to that one decision.

“ *I wouldn't change a thing.*

The trophy itself was three days of instruction in Paris from Jules Egger, artistic director of Alexandre de Paris, in the complete bridal look: hair, make-up, styling and total image creation. The contest's judge, Minetti, offered her work in Paris on the strength of it. She was twenty-two and would not live that far from her family, so she refused. It opened the private seminars she has taught ever since, from one person to fifty.

The UAE came to her. A salon had watched her hair shows online and offered a long-term contract, and from 2013 she was at Boudoir Beauty Lounge on Reem Island. She managed it from scratch, her own phrase for it, and trained a staff of more than twenty. She went on to work as a senior stylist at Marquee, moving between its Abu Dhabi and Dubai locations, and other five-star salons in both cities followed.

She became known in the UAE for blonde. Emirati clients, she says, trusted her completely with their hair, and let her work further than most: ash blondes, mermaid hair, colours she calls unconventional. She says one assignment ran six months at a royal palace in Al Bateen.

She works from the Athens salon now and keeps a home in Abu Dhabi. UAE bookings are freelance and taken on request, for bridal,

red carpet and VIP clients, and she takes bridal as a complete look, hair and make-up together. Salon owners and stylists send her photographs of a colour going wrong while the client is still in the chair, and she talks them through it from wherever she is. She names that as the part of the work she likes best, and enough of them have pushed her to teach it formally that masterclasses are the next project.

Her Dubai free-zone licence stands behind Museofficial.ae, a fashion and beauty platform she describes as soon to open, with a second store for Athens. The salon she wants in the UAE is still ahead of her.

She takes VIP work on request, at voula.ikonomaki@gmail.com and on WhatsApp at +971 52 143 0602. She is on Instagram as [voula_ikonomaki](#) and on TikTok as [royaltybeautyandmorebyvoula](#). She asked that this page record her thanks to her clients and friends in the UAE, and to the global clients who have supported her here since 2013.

Never say never, she says, and take the opportunity even when it looks too hard. She traces her whole UAE career to the first contract she accepted.



Ikonomaki dressing a competition look early in her career.

Photograph · courtesy Voula Ikonomaki

STARTED At fourteen, in the family salon

WON L'Oréal Colour Trophy, first place, 1997

BASED Athens, with a home in Abu Dhabi



THE MAKERS

Nº 09

Salma Al Jaber

A demanding health and safety career, an art form she had never tried and no intention of selling anything. The last of those three did not last. The business it turned into is called Artology.

WORDS BY GULF TIMES NOW · PHOTOGRAPHS
COURTESY SALMA AL JABER

BUSINESS
Artology

MEDIUM
Abstract textured art

BEGAN
2021, at home

It began in 2021, as somewhere to put the noise

SALMA AL JABERI SELLS ABSTRACT TEXTURED ART UNDER THE name Artology, and the Instagram account she gave on her submission states that the business is licensed by the Department of Economic Development. She runs it alongside a full-time career in health and safety that she has never given up. It began in 2021, at home, with no intention of selling anything.

The year matters because of what else was in it. Her health and safety job did not slow down during the lockdown. If anything the period

made it heavier, because everyone was at home and the work was relentless. She went looking for something that would take her out of it. She found textured art. It was creative, unusual and at the time not something many people around her were doing.

It quietened her first. Making the pieces slowed her thinking and cleared her head, and that was the whole of the point. She was not building a business. She was learning techniques and making work for herself, and none of it was for sale.

“ During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2021, I discovered art as a way to disconnect from work pressure.

The business came later, and only because she kept going. The more she practised the more she saw in the material. Textured art is built up rather than painted flat, worked into ridges and folds that hold light differently depending on where a person stands. The four pieces she supplied for this issue run to two registers. One is close to monochrome, white worked on white until the surface reads as heavy fabric. The other is graphic and hard edged, a single field of red or black set against cream.

The two careers shape everything else. Health and safety is a discipline of procedure, checklists and other people's rules. The art is the opposite of that by design. That is why it worked as an escape in the first place and why the balance is difficult. The hard part was never the art. It was holding a full-time career and a small business at the same time, developing her own visual language and learning the commercial side from scratch as she went.

Her measure of the achievement is deliberately small. A private hobby became a real business. Every order means a person connected with an object she made by hand, and the fact that it grew out of a difficult period, from the thing that was keeping her steady, is part of why it counts.

The lesson she names is patience, and not measuring her progress against anybody else's. Creativity takes time. Not every idea works at the first attempt. That has pushed her to experiment more and to treat the process as the point rather than the finished object. She would like her pieces to be remembered for a character of their own, and for bringing warmth into the rooms they hang in, rather than being one more decorative object.

She is working on depth now rather than scale. Developing the style further, pushing into what texture can do and finding the clients whose taste genuinely matches the work. She wants the work to be recognisable as hers, grown at its own pace, without drifting from the kind of art she likes making.

The operation is modest and she has not dressed it up. On the account she gave, Artology sells directly, to an audience of fewer than two thousand followers, and it does it without a press file. The account carries process instead. She shows a surface being built, posts the finished piece framed and marks it sold when it goes. Work is grouped there as available or sold, and one piece is captioned simply Framed, for Sale. Commissions, it says, come by direct message and by WhatsApp. The sets carry names of their own: Dola, Flora, Eagle, Curve and Space.



Al Jaberi with four of her textured works.

Photograph · courtesy Salma Al Jaberi

05 The Second Act

I did not have a choice; I could not let them down.

IN THIS SECTION

Nº 10 Sruti Gudavalli

Nº 11 Sonja Bosch

The Second Act

A full career in medicine and ten years marketing consumer brands in India. Both started over, and neither was twenty when she did.

THE FEATURES



Nº 10

Sruti Gudavalli

Formulated in Seoul, for the Abu Dhabi summer



Nº 11

Sonja Bosch

She started again, and she was not twenty



THE SECOND ACT

Nº 10

Sruti Gudavalli

Sruti Gudavalli spent ten years marketing consumer brands in India before founding moondune, a climate-intelligent skincare line developed in South Korean laboratories and run from Abu Dhabi. She launched it on 28 February 2026, after two years of research and paperwork.

WORDS BY GULF TIMES NOW · PHOTOGRAPHS
COURTESY SRUTI GUDAVALLI · GTN SPOTLIGHT

FOUNDER	LAUNCHED	FORMULATED
moondune, Abu Dhabi	28 February 2026	Seoul, South Korea

Formulated in Seoul, made for the Abu Dhabi summer

SRUTI GUDAVALLI IS THE FOUNDER OF MOONDUNE, A SKINCARE line formulated in South Korea, sold direct from moondune.co and run from Abu Dhabi. She launched it on 28 February 2026, and marked it in a post that gave away what it had cost: “Two years. Intense research. Endless paperwork. Amidst war. Finally.”

Asked for her biggest achievement, she names the launch itself. “We launched moondune the morning of the day the war began,” she says. “The fact that we are still here, growing, is because we chose to be resilient in the face of something unusual and unforeseen.” The parallel is deliberate. The range is built on dates, and resilience is what moondune’s own ingredient page says the date seed stands for.

“*The world will adapt to climate-intelligent skincare in the future. Abu Dhabi will be the place where it was first born.*”

Abu Dhabi helped her understand the problem. “Residents of the UAE live in two climates every day. A furnace outside and a freezer inside,” she says. “Skin swings between the two constantly, and most skincare is formulated for only one of those states.” The answer she built is a barrier-first range that is climate intelligent, drawing on Arabic ingredients and Korean bioscience. The brand’s own site lists two all-in-one essences, Dates and Coffee for the morning and Dates and Honey for the night, and publishes Dunecast, a free daily index of temperature, humidity, ultraviolet, air quality and dust, sent at sunrise.

Close to a hundred conversations came before the first formula. Over many months she met neighbours, her child’s teachers, the mothers of his friends and women she got talking to in cafés and at Sephora in Yas Mall. “Everyone had adapted their wardrobe and food, but nobody’s skincare was built for it,” she says. The same women became the first testers. They “pushed back on textures that felt too heavy for indoor life” and they weighed in on the packaging and the names. By her account the team around the brand is now almost entirely women, most of them from the city. “I did not set out to build a woman-led brand. It happened because the women of Abu Dhabi were generous with their time, their honesty, and their taste.”

Even the colour is argued from the region. The brand’s own account traces its purple to a sundown at the Al Qua’a desert outside Abu

“It matters to me because a brand built on resilient ingredients like dates, should behave the same way. We lived our own promise before we ever asked a customer to trust it.”

She came to it from the other side of the industry. On LinkedIn she describes herself as “a marketer with over a decade’s experience”, most of it spent scaling consumer brands in India, and the same profile gives her education as the Institute of Management Technology, Ghaziabad, from 2013 to 2015. She says those years taught her to “solve real problems rather than chase trends”. The decision to build her own came later, on a factory floor. “Watching a product come to life in front of me, I knew with complete certainty that I would create my own one day.”

Dhabi, and its name to the earliest dwellers of the dunes, who worshipped the moon.

The hard part has not been the formula. “Our R&D labs are in Seoul, South Korea, our team spread across several stops in between, and I sit in Abu Dhabi holding it all together,” she says. “Managing multiple time zones, cultures, and workflows while building a brand from zero has been the steepest learning curve of my career.”

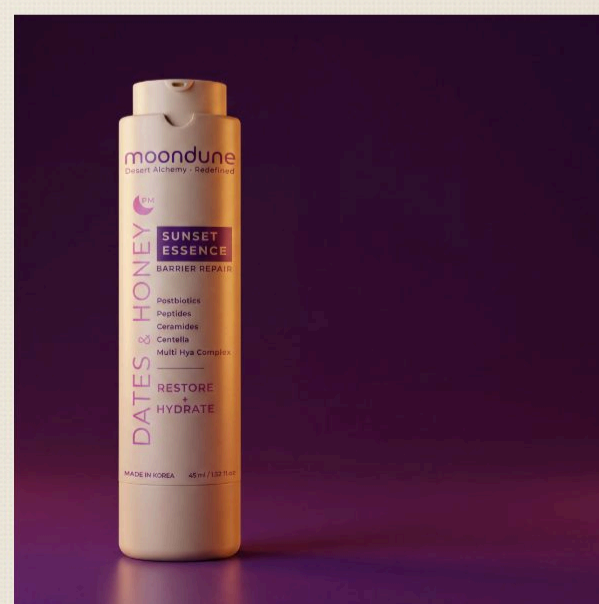
In August 2026 she announced that moondune had been named in the BeautyMatter and Beautyworld Dubai Middle East report as one of the brands shaping where Arab beauty goes next, with her own name in the contributors list. Her focus now is distribution, getting the range into more of the UAE and the wider Gulf.

She has come to treat that as the lesson of her career. “A great product is only part of the answer. Formulation is the core of the product. But distribution, storytelling, and timing matter just as much.” It has made her a more patient founder. “I no longer assume that the right product will find its audience on its own. I build the audience alongside the product, and I stay close to the consumer at every stage.”

She wants a category at the end of it, not a company. Her advice to the woman who had not started yet is shorter. “Do not be afraid to think differently from the room.”



Sunrise Essence. Dates and coffee, for the morning.



Sunset Essence. Dates and honey, for the night.

Photographs · courtesy Sruti Gudavalli



Sonja Bosch

Sonja Bosch spent her whole working life in the medical field before she moved into property. She was not twenty, she had three sons to support and, in her own words, financially she was not in a good place. Her own listing puts her at the brokerage Huspy in Abu Dhabi, working Saadiyat, Yas, Hudayriyat, Reem and Al Raha.

WORDS BY GULF TIMES NOW · PHOTOGRAPHS
COURTESY SONJA BOSCH · GTN SPOTLIGHT

BY HER OWN LISTING
Property consultant at Huspy, Abu Dhabi, since April 2026

ON THE SAME LISTING
Saadiyat, Yas, Hudayriyat, Reem and Al Raha

BEFORE PROPERTY
Her whole working life in the medical field

Her whole working life was in medicine. *She started over in property, with three sons to support.*

SONJA BOSCH SPENT HER WHOLE WORKING LIFE IN THE MEDICAL field. By her own listing she has worked as a property consultant in Abu Dhabi since November 2024 and joined the brokerage Huspy in April 2026, and the same listing gives Saadiyat, Yas, Hudaibiyat, Reem and Al Raha as her ground.

Property had been at the back of her mind for years. Life, in her own account, does not always take you straight there. Instead she held a highly responsible position in a career she loved, and a job she had come to need a break from.

The opening came through a question. She describes herself as inquisitive, someone who likes to find things out and ask, and she

“ *I did not have a choice; I could not let them down.* ”

She went anyway, and she is precise about the reason. Her three sons and the people closest to her believed she would manage it, and that belief closed off the alternative.

So the achievement she names is not a deal. It is having got past the restrictions that were in her way, financially and emotionally. That is a longer list to clear than any sales target.

She has the ambition and says so, but it is the part in the middle that makes the work fit. She likes discovering what a person actually needs and then going and finding it, and she is unembarrassed about the pay-off she is in it for: the satisfaction she can see in a client's face when they finally get the thing they came for.

She started in leasing. It suits the opening stretch of a second career. Tenants need answers immediately, so the work moves at speed and it has taught her Abu Dhabi at street level: the buildings, the owners, the other agents, the shape of a deal. It pays slowly. It teaches quickly. Writing in August 2026 she said resale was her next stop.

approached a man in real estate and asked him about the work. He introduced her to a close friend who had started a company and needed someone to bring in customers and build relationships with them. That was the whole mechanism.

She names the obstacle exactly, and it was self-belief rather than the market. She had been in the medical field all her life, this was a complete change of career and the people around her said so. She was not twenty years old any more and does not pretend otherwise. Financially, in her own words, she was not in a good place. She had three sons to support.

Her own public description of her work has already moved past leasing. On that same listing she puts herself in front of investors in the AED 2M to 15M bracket, across the island communities she names. That is a statement of the market she is working in, not a record of what she has sold, and she has been in property for less than two years. Read against where she started, it is the more telling of the two numbers.

She says the country has been good to her, and that being able to help build Abu Dhabi and keep growing with it feels like a privilege.

Her lesson is the one nobody starting out wants to hear. Success takes time, and patience is what turns into a career. She wants that patience to work as support for the people who decide they have failed because a property did not sell in the first week, or the first six months. Her advice to her younger self runs to three sentences. Find a mentor. Assume you know nothing. Absorb everything.



Bosch moved into property after a whole working life in the medical field.

Photograph · courtesy Sonja Bosch

06 The Practice

*Every dog **can** learn.*

IN THIS SECTION

Nº 12 Regina Gaitova

Nº 13 Gina Sokolow

IN THIS SECTION

The Practice

A licensed property broker and a dog trainer. Both say the work is with the person, not with the apartment or the dog.

THE FEATURES



Nº 12

Regina Gaitova

Licensed at ADREC, working Saadiyat Island



Nº 13

Gina Sokolow

She trains the other end of the leash



THE PRACTICE

N° 12

Regina Gaitova

A trusted advisor at Metropolitan Capital Real Estate, working with investors on Saadiyat Island and helping families find their perfect homes in Abu Dhabi.

WORDS BY **GULF TIMES NOW** · PHOTOGRAPHS
COURTESY **REGINA GAITOVA** · GTN SPOTLIGHT

BEFORE
Tour guide across the emirates

REGISTERED
Individual broker, ADREC licence 202503519202

FOCUS
Saadiyat Island, premium residential

A licence, a market she chose and a ranking recalculated every month.

REGINA GAITOVA IS REGISTERED WITH THE ABU DHABI REAL Estate Centre as an individual broker, licence number 202503519202, working under Metropolitan Capital Real Estate. Her market is Saadiyat Island and the premium residential property around it.

On its own website Metropolitan Capital Real Estate gives itself as the Abu Dhabi arm of the Metropolitan Group, dates the group to 2008 and lists agencies in Dubai and Vienna. The same site gives the Abu Dhabi office as Guardian Towers, in Danet, describes the business as an accredited broker for licensed developers in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah, and states that it is the official broker of Aldar.

“The biggest lesson for me is that honesty is always better than just a quick check.”

The crossover began as a favour. An agency needed someone who could work with its Russian-speaking clients and she stepped in. The side role did not stay a side role, because she was doing what she had always done, translating what she knew about a place into something useful for the person in front of her. Only now the stakes were a major financial investment rather than just a day's excursion.

The change was not gentle. She had to move her thinking from entertaining people to payment plans, numbers and property law, and she had to do it quickly. She describes the market as fiercely competitive and says that at the start nobody knew who she was. She built the reputation the slow way, working day and night, one client at a time.

She holds Property Finder's SuperAgent ranking, which the portal recalculates every month from response times, listing quality, completed transactions and customer ratings. It is a performance measure rather than a job title, and in her case it is the more useful of the two, because part of what it scores is what her clients say afterwards.

Regina Gaitova's journey in the UAE began with a deep admiration for the country's vision and its unique ability to bring the best of the world into one place. This passion naturally led her to her first role here, showing the country to visitors. However, for her, being a guide was never just about logistics or standard tours. It was about creating an unforgettable experience of a place, sharing its soul and ensuring the people in front of her had the best possible time.

It also made her, without her planning it, a specialist in the map. She came to know every emirate, in her own phrase, like the back of her hand: which district was which, what was going up where and how the pieces fitted together.

Her work has narrowed to Saadiyat Island, a location she chose rather than one she was handed, and to premium property: quiet deals for investors, homes for families settling here. Property Finder also lists her across Al Reem Island, Yas Island, Al Ghadeer and Khalifa City.

If she looks at a project and it does not convince her, she says so. “If I look at a project and feel it's just not good enough, I will tell my client the truth.” For her it is not about making the sale, and she reports the return on that plainly: clients stay with her for years.

What she wants out of Saadiyat is not a run of transactions. “I want to build real trust with my clients, so they know they always have a good, trusted advisor here in Abu Dhabi.”

She would like other agents to notice that the straight route also works, and she says she does not want to be remembered for a number.

The advice she would give her younger self is short, and she has not softened it. Do not be frightened by the size of the market. Stay calm. Look after the client. “Your honesty is your main superpower.”



Gaitova at a developer's masterplan model. Guiding taught her the map first.

Photograph · courtesy Regina Gaitova



THE PRACTICE

N° 13

Gina Sokolow

Gina Sokolow specialises in reactivity and aggression, the part of canine behaviour most owners meet at their worst moment. She runs Dog Training by Gina on in-home sessions across Abu Dhabi, and she trains the dogs together with their owners.

WORDS BY GULF TIMES NOW · PHOTOGRAPHS
COURTESY GINA SOKOLOW · GTN SPOTLIGHT

SPECIALISM

Reactivity and aggression

TRAINING

Practical canine behaviour studies in Germany

VOLUNTEERING

Mussafah Dog Project

She trains the other end of the leash.

GINA SOKOLOW SPECIALISES IN REACTIVITY AND AGGRESSION, the part of canine behaviour most owners meet at their worst moment. Practical studies in Germany led her there. She runs Dog Training by Gina on in-home sessions across Abu Dhabi, and she trains the dogs together with their owners.

The interest is older than the business. She was fifteen when she got the chance to help at a veterinary clinic. She had grown up around family dogs and already loved them, but the clinic turned affection into curiosity, and she began paying attention to what dogs were

“ *Every dog can learn.* ”

Today she takes dogs of every kind: puppies learning the basics, fully grown dogs in need of a little more direction, reactive dogs, dogs that need guidance on the leash, family pets learning everyday manners and dogs working through more complex and aggressive behaviour. She has worked with dogs of every size, small breeds such as Yorkshire Terriers as readily as larger ones like Golden Retrievers and Saluki mixes. The breed is never the whole story to her. The real work is the individual dog, the root cause of the behaviour and what that animal needs in order to succeed.

The method is positive reinforcement, delivered in the owner's own home. Rescue dogs need more of everything, and above all they need time. She still volunteers with the Mussafah Dog Project when she can, supporting foster families and adopters through the early weeks while a dog settles into a new home and works out whether it is safe.

Like most people running something small, she has had stretches of doubting it. Am I good enough. Can I actually do this. Encouragement did not answer those questions. Watching dogs change did, and watching owners change with them.

actually doing: their body language, the different ways they communicate and how much of what a dog is feeling is legible to anyone who has learned to read it. The bond she had with her own dogs became the thing she wanted other owners to be able to reach.

The professional route began with volunteering at the Mussafah Dog Project. That grew into a wish to understand dogs at a level she did not yet have, which sent her to study, and the study turned an interest into a profession.

That is the principle the practice runs on. Lasting progress happens only when the owner is part of it, which is why she coaches the owner rather than simply handling the dog. Keeping people motivated, involved and confident is most of the work, and it is what has to continue long after a session ends.

Two things occupy her now, and neither is a client list. The first is education. Children in the UAE should be taught how to approach dogs safely and respectfully, and anyone thinking of getting a dog for themselves or their children should research what ownership truly involves beforehand, because a dog is a major, long-term responsibility. The second is muzzles. She wants the stigma around them gone. Used responsibly, a muzzle is a safety tool that protects the dog, the owner and those around them.

She is not after a bigger client list here either. She wants dog training, education and animal welfare treated as ordinary in the UAE. Not every owner needs a trainer or can reach one, she points out, but every owner can learn to read their own dog better than they do now. Better education and more responsible ownership, she argues, would mean fewer dogs needing rescue or being surrendered in the first place.



Sokolow coaches owners rather than handling dogs for them. The work has to continue long after the session ends.

Photograph · courtesy Gina Sokolow

ABOUT GULF TIMES NOW

Edited in Abu Dhabi.

Gulf Times Now is a business and culture magazine. Abu Dhabi is the beat we cover first and closest, and the lens stays Gulf wide. Online we publish every day. In print the magazine slows down and takes the longer story, the one still worth reading in a year.

This edition runs to twenty-five women across six sections and publishes on Emirati Women’s Day. The imprint on page 2 carries the publisher, the licence and the policies.

15

ON THE RECORD

10

NEVER ASKED

6

SECTIONS

54

PAGES

Every figure above is counted from this edition itself: its flatplan, its folios, and the record set out on the pages of *The Abu Dhabi Ten*.

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The next edition *is not written yet.*

A feature, a double-page spread, or the back cover. Commercial features are published under the GTN Spotlight mark and carry it on the page. Rates are sent privately. If you have built something in this city, or you know who has, the desk is open.

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03

Correct us

If something in this edition is wrong, send the page number and what is incorrect. We check it against our records and reply.

WRITE TO THE DESK

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MARGOT OUD

The point was never another beautiful fragrance.

Around six years of blending, and one collection drawn from the Ghaf tree. Margot Oud begins with the story, not the scent.

ASMA MUSABBEH ALKAABI HAS BEEN BLENDING FOR AROUND SIX years, and she can name the point at which Margot Oud stopped being a set of perfumes and became a brand.

That point was Erth & Otr, Heritage and Fragrance, a collection drawn from the Ghaf tree. She took the Ghaf leaf into the bottle design and gave each fragrance a name reflecting an element, a feeling or a connection to the tree. She names it the defining moment, because it brought together the two things she values most: Emirati heritage and the art of blending.

The interest was inherited rather than acquired. She grew up among Emirati women who combined saffron, oud oil, musk and other traditional ingredients into scents that became part of their identity. She remembers greeting older women and noticing a scent she could not mistake. One traditional blend she names is Sanaa, which she says combines ingredients such as saffron, musk and mahlab and has long been used to perfume the hair.

“Perfume was never simply an accessory; it was part of a woman’s identity, beauty rituals, hospitality and the way she expressed her presence.”

The first years went on learning and experimenting. The turning point was a decision rather than a formula. “I did not want to create perfumes simply for the sake of creating another fragrance.” What came next was harder than blending. She had to honour the heritage without reproducing it, and she describes that difficulty as what eventually gave the brand its strength.

The lesson she draws is commercial as much as creative. “There will always be new perfumes and new trends, but authenticity is what makes a brand memorable.” It changed the order in which she works. She no longer starts with the fragrance. She starts with the story, the emotion and the identity behind it, and she wants every release to carry a reason.

The ambition is put as a hope rather than a plan. In the long term she wants to see Margot Oud grow beyond the UAE and bring a wider audience to the fragrance identity of Emirati women. Her own measure of success is narrower and harder: “a scent that remains in the memory even after the woman has left the room”.

BRAND

Margot Oud

COLLECTION

Erth & Otr, drawn from the Ghaf tree

LONG TERM

To grow beyond the UAE, her stated hope

Instagram @margot.perfume
WhatsApp 050 533 3565

A Margot bottle. Photographs courtesy Asma Musabbeh Alkaabi.



07

The Abu Dhabi Ten

Beyond our contributors. Ten women whose work runs through this emirate, written about without their involvement.

An independent editorial selection by Gulf Times Now. This section was not sold and could not have been. Nobody in it paid, nobody was approached for payment and nobody was told the section was being written. The women here are public figures written about as commentary; they are not affiliated with, and do not endorse, this publication. The order carries no judgement. Titles were checked in August 2026 against each organisation's own current records. Where a claim could not be traced to a primary source, it has been left out. Portraits are reproduced from Wikimedia Commons under their stated licences, cropped to a single plate and credited on each entry.

The Abu Dhabi Ten

Ten women whose work runs through Abu Dhabi. Nobody in it paid, nobody was approached for payment and nobody was told the section was being written. Seven of the ten hold a post in the government or in an institution the state owns. That is not a flaw in the list. It is what this emirate looks like.

Nº 01	Sarah Al Amiri	Minister of Education	Nº 06	Mariam Almheiri	Presidential Court; 2PointZero Group
Nº 02	Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak	President, IUCN	Nº 07	Amal Al Qubaisi	Speaker of the Federal National Council, 2015 to 2019
Nº 03	Noura Al Kaabi	Minister of State, Foreign Affairs	Nº 08	Habiba Al Safar	Dean of Medicine, Khalifa University
Nº 04	Lana Zaki Nusseibeh	Minister of State	Nº 09	Zahra Lari	Chief Executive, Emirates Skating Club
Nº 05	Shamma Al Mazrui	Minister of Community Empowerment	Nº 10	Shaikha Al Maskari	Chairperson of the Board, Al Maskari Holding

These ten never needed us to say so.

THE TEN



01
AMIRI



02
MUBARAK



03
KAABI



04
NUSSEIBEH



05
MAZRUI



06
ALMHEIRI



07
QUBAISI



08
SAFAR



09
LARI



10
MASKARI

The Abu Dhabi Ten



01 Sarah Al Amiri

MINISTER OF EDUCATION, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Science lead of the Emirates Mars Mission, now Minister of Education

Sarah Al Amiri was sworn in as Minister of Education at Qasr Al Watan in Abu Dhabi on 18 July 2024. The same reshuffle folded the Emirates Schools Establishment and the Federal Agency of Early Education into her ministry. She led the science team of the Emirates Mars Mission. The Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre records that when the Hope probe reached Mars on 9 February 2021 the UAE became the first Arab country and the fifth country to reach the planet. She formerly chaired the UAE Space Agency; the post is now held by the Minister of Sports, Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi. In May 2025 the UAE Cabinet introduced artificial intelligence as an official subject in public schools, a curriculum her ministry develops and delivers.

Photograph World Economic Forum / Sikarin Fon Thanachaiary / Wikimedia Commons
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02 Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak

PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN)
Re-elected IUCN president in 2025; second woman to hold the post

Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak has been president of the International Union for Conservation of Nature since 2021 and was re-elected to a second term in October 2025. IUCN records her as the first president from West Asia and the second woman to hold the post. Her re-election came as the IUCN World Conservation Congress closed in Abu Dhabi on 15 October 2025. IUCN says the congress was held in the UAE for the first time and drew more than ten thousand people on site and online. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs lists her as Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Nature. The same page gives her as managing director of the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund and of the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi.

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03 Noura Al Kaabi

MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
Minister of State; former culture minister and chair of twofour54

Noura Al Kaabi has been a Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since February 2023, and her Abu Dhabi record long predates the post. Among her former posts the ministry lists chairperson of the Media Zone Authority in Abu Dhabi (twofour54) and chairperson of the board of directors of Abu Dhabi Media. She was Minister of Culture and Youth before moving to foreign affairs. She was president of Zayed University. The ministry credits her with leading the UAE's participation in UNESCO's Revive the Spirit of Mosul initiative. UNESCO puts the UAE's contribution at 50.4 million dollars. She chairs the UAE National Orchestra.

Photograph U.A.E. Ministry of Culture and Knowledge Development, c. 2016 /
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The Abu Dhabi Ten



04 Lana Zaki Nusseibeh

MINISTER OF STATE
UAE’s first woman Permanent Representative to the UN; now Minister of State

Lana Zaki Nusseibeh has been a Minister of State in the UAE government since September 2025. Before that she was the country’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations from September 2013 to April 2024, the first woman the UAE appointed to that post. She held it through the UAE’s second term on the Security Council, secured in June 2021 with one hundred and seventy-nine votes, a term in which the UAE co-penned Resolution 2686 on tolerance and hate speech. She was president of the UN Women Executive Board in 2017 and a vice president of the General Assembly the same year.

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05 Shamma Al Mazrui

MINISTER OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Became a UAE minister at twenty-two, reported then as the world’s youngest

Shamma Al Mazrui has been Minister of Community Empowerment since the former Ministry of Community Development was elevated and renamed on 8 December 2024. She had held the community portfolio since 2023, and before that was Minister of State for Youth Affairs from 2016, appointed at twenty-two. Her ministry’s own record describes that appointment as making her the world’s youngest cabinet minister at the time. In May 2025 she set out a shift from a development model to an empowerment model, targeting ten thousand financially independent families by 2030 and one million volunteers by 2031.

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06 Mariam Almheiri

HEAD OF THE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS OFFICE, PRESIDENTIAL COURT; VICE CHAIR AND MANAGING DIRECTOR, 2POINTZERO GROUP
Led the UAE’s bid for COP28; now heads Presidential Court international affairs

Mariam Almheiri has headed the International Affairs Office at the Presidential Court since January 2024, having served until then as Minister of Climate Change and Environment. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum’s announcement credited her with leading the UAE’s bid for COP28. That summit produced a commitment of two hundred million dollars from the UAE and the Gates Foundation for agricultural innovation, and she hosted its first progress review in November 2024. In December 2025 the board of 2PointZero Group elected her vice chair and confirmed her as managing director.

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The Abu Dhabi Ten



07 Amal Al Qubaisi

SPEAKER OF THE FEDERAL NATIONAL COUNCIL, 2015 TO 2019
First woman to lead the UAE's Federal National Council, 2015 to 2019

Amal Al Qubaisi presided over the Federal National Council from 2015 to 2019, the first woman to hold the chair of the UAE's parliament. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, the global body of national parliaments, called her the first ever woman Speaker of an Arab national parliament. The record behind it is an Abu Dhabi one. She was the first woman elected to the council in 2006, became its first female deputy speaker and was made director general of the Abu Dhabi Education Council in 2014, the body now known as the Department of Education and Knowledge. She trained as an architect, with a doctorate in architecture from the University of Sheffield, for a thesis on the architectural heritage of the United Arab Emirates and its future.

Photograph The Council of the Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation / Wikimedia Commons · CC BY 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ · cropped by Gulf Times Now



08 Habiba Al Safar

PROFESSOR AND DEAN, COLLEGE OF MEDICINE AND HEALTH SCIENCES, KHALIFA UNIVERSITY
Genetics of type 2 diabetes; Belgium's Knight in the Order of Leopold

Habiba Al Safar is professor and dean of the College of Medicine and Health Sciences at Khalifa University, where her research is on the genetics of type 2 diabetes in the UAE population. The university credits her with the first genome-wide association study of Emirati Bedouin populations, and with leading the team that published the first two whole genome sequences of UAE nationals, in Scientific Reports in 2019. In November 2025 she received Belgium's Knight in the Order of Leopold, which Khalifa University says makes her the first UAE scientist to hold it. In May 2026 her college graduated forty physicians.

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The Abu Dhabi Ten



09 Zahra Lari

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND FIGURE SKATING COACH, EMIRATES SKATING CLUB

First UAE figure skater to compete internationally, in the words of the world university sports body FISU

Zahra Lari is chief executive and a figure skating coach at Emirates Skating Club. In FISU’s words she was the first UAE figure skater to compete internationally and the first woman to wear a hijab before a panel of international judges. FISU also records her as the first UAE athlete to compete at its Winter Games, where she carried her country’s flag at the opening ceremony. The club records her as a five-time UAE national champion and gives her degree as a bachelor of science in environment health and safety. The International Skating Union staged a Junior Grand Prix event at Zayed Sports City Ice Rink in Abu Dhabi from 8 to 11 October 2025.

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10 Shaikha Al Maskari

CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD, AL MASKARI HOLDING

Chairs the family holding company that grew out of a 1968 Abu Dhabi oil trading firm

Shaikha Al Maskari is chairperson of the board of Al Maskari Holding, the Abu Dhabi company that holds her family’s commercial interests. The firm dates itself to 1968, when it began as Al Maskaria Establishment in oil and general trading and in services to the oil and gas fields, under the family matriarch Azza bint Saif Al Maskari. It was renamed the Tricon Group in 1989 and folded into Al Maskari Holding in 2008. Its lines now run from oil and gas field services to defence, information technology, power generation, real estate and health care. Among its origins the company counts the Al Maskari Medical Center at Bida Zayed, which it calls the first private hospital in the emirate’s Western Region, opened in 1969 to serve the oil fields.

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— THE LAST WORD

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“I want to build real trust with my clients, so they know they always have a good, trusted advisor here in Abu Dhabi.”

Regina Gaitova

Trusted advisor, Metropolitan Capital Real Estate · Abu Dhabi

LICENCE

ADREC 202503519202

MARKET

Saadiyat Island, premium residential

RANKING

Property Finder SuperAgent

Before the licence there were the tours. She says her clients now stay with her for years.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY REGINA GAITOVA

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