

Homesick Balham boy buys Britain-shaped island for £43m

Martin Delgado / 17th January 2009

Like many expatriates, Safi Qurashi misses home.

But now the Dubai-based shopkeeper's son from South London has solved the problem. He has bought Great Britain.

Mr Qurashi, 39, has paid £43 million for the Britain-shaped island in The World, a man-made archipelago off the coast of Dubai, where each piece of land represents a different country, state or city.

'Britain' is one of 230 islands in the spectacular aquatic development, which has attracted interest from celebrities including David Beckham, Angelina Jolie, Michael Schumacher and Rod Stewart.

Mr Qurashi enjoys a millionaire lifestyle as one of the Gulf state's most successful property developers – but still cherishes memories of the streets of Balham where he grew up.

He said: 'I am proud of my British heritage and not a day goes past when I don't miss London. It's home at the end of the day and who doesn't miss home?'

Now he plans to turn his 11-acre island into a showcase for Britain by importing architectural styles from home and building a replica of a traditional London pub.

Mr Qurashi said he aimed to create 'the best of Great Britain in the sunshine' by building apartments not only for the super-rich but also for those with more limited budgets.

He said: 'It will have a residential side to it together with a five-star resort. There will be lots of green and an eco-friendly environment.

'We are currently assessing a number of iconic buildings in the UK to see which one can be represented on the island. I think when we finalise the plans, Britons will want to live there.

'There will be a sense of pride in owning an apartment or villa and hopefully the same sense of pride that we will have in building it. Britain has always led the way in engineering and design.

It has set the standard, which is what we are also trying to do.'

Viewed from the air, the archipelago, which is constructed largely from sand dredged from the sea, resembles a map of the world. Costing an estimated £10 billion, the project was launched by Dubai's ruler, Sheik Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, in 2003.

Mr Qurashi revealed his purchase of the island in an interview with Piers Morgan for a television documentary about Britons who have made their fortunes in Dubai.

The son of an Indian-born Muslim who emigrated from Pakistan to Britain in 1961 with only £3 in his pocket, Mr Qurashi began to hone his business skills when he was at school, helping out in his father's tobacconist's shop in Tooting after lessons.

When he was 11, he won a scholarship to independent Emanuel School in Battersea.

Then, after a number of business projects in London, he moved to Dubai with his family in 2004.

He said: 'Although I have always loved Britain, I was growing tired of the weather and the high crime rate. I was sure something good and exciting was happening in Dubai so I thought, let's give it a go. It was a big move to leave friends and relatives.'

In Dubai he bought an off-plan apartment and three months later sold it for twice the price he had paid.

Since then business has boomed – his company Premier Real Estate Bureau turned over £400million last year and employs 80 staff.

Meanwhile, the Russians had better look out. The boy from Balham who became a Dubai property developer has also bought the island of Moscow.

Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1120695/Homesick-Balham-boy-buys-Britain-shaped-island-43m--8211-London-pub.html>