

## Buyers plan a slice of Britain for Dubai island

Daniel Bardsley / 19th January 2009

Two British men have bought the Great Britain island in Dubai's offshore development The World and announced plans to recreate the architecture of their homeland in the Gulf.

Safi Qurashi and Mustafa Nagri paid about £40 million (Dh216 million) for the 11-acre man-made island and hope to begin building on it next year.

The men, who run Premier Real Estate, a waterfront property agency they formed after meeting in Dubai in 2004, want the development to be a home away from home for fellow expatriate Britons.

Mr Qurashi, whose father came from what is now Pakistan but who was born in Britain, said it was partly a sense of patriotism that attracted him and Mr Nagri to the project. Mr Nagri, 45, was born in Tanzania.

"Both my business partner and I are from the UK, we're British citizens, and I've lived there all my life, so it was our first choice from The World," Mr Qurashi said. "Part of the attraction was the ability to take an empty island. It's like an artist being told he has a blank piece of canvas to do what he wants."

Flats, commercial buildings and hotels are planned. Some of Britain's best architecture is likely to inspire designers.

"It's not going to replicate. There's not going to be a small version of Buckingham Palace, but the designers will take inspiration from the iconic buildings to bring something tasteful and in keeping with the surroundings and The World development," Mr Qurashi said.

Mr Qurashi's and Mr Nagri's holding company, SafMus Holdings, which bought the island, is awaiting handover from the developer Nakheel.

Rue Kothari, Premier Real Estate's marketing director, said the company wanted to create a destination for all Britons, not just the rich.

"Dubai and the UAE are such a huge draw for British people. We want to create something that's accessible to the majority," she said.

SafMus Holdings has also purchased the Moscow island and the buildings there will take cues from Russian architecture.

"The concepts are very similar: to take inspiration from the countries and do something tasteful and a little bit more contemporary," Mr Qurashi said.

He said it would be a challenge to replicate buildings from the UK and Russia in the much hotter climate of the Gulf, especially considering the partners' goal to make the developments environmentally friendly.

"We're working with Nakheel to make sure it's green, it's using the right building materials and doesn't have a huge impact," he said.

While the worldwide economic downturn has caused a slump in Dubai's property industry, Mr Qurashi said he was confident that the developments would prove successful.

They are planned to be built over the next five to six years.

"It has made us more realistic about what we want to achieve. We're just reviewing it and making sure we get it right, although it's still pretty much on track," he said.

Premier Real Estate, based in Dubai Marina, has about 80 staff and last year recorded a turnover of about £400m.

Source: <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090119/NATIONAL/58423476&SearchID=73342635215811>