



INTERIORS

## *The Great Escape: Inside Nadia Zaal's Stylish Surrey Sanctuary | Exclusive*

BY Natasha Faruque / [September 30, 2023](#)

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*The Grange offers the Zaal clan a pristine green scene for bucolic English country escapes— real estate mogul Nadia Zaal explains how this Surrey sanctuary is the perfect fit for her family*

Picture this: an eight bedroom estate with its own swimming pool, tennis court, equestrian fields, greenhouses, and a playground, spread across 16 perfectly landscaped acres of wildflowers and foliage in the heart of the Surrey countryside. There's even a peacock that's made itself at home in these grand surroundings.





That's the new Cobham retreat that three generations of the Dubai-based Zaal family are lucky enough to call their summer holiday home. "What first drew me to the house was the garden," enthuses Nadia Zaal, the founder and CEO of Zaya, who was entrusted by her clan to secure them this dreamy escape. "My family really wanted to enjoy English summers, and the garden is absolutely incredible. It's looked after by someone that actually works at one of the most famous gardens in England, RHS Wisley. Apart from the garden being beautiful it also has an amazing greenhouse and a veggie patch. It's priceless to be able to eat food straight from the yard."





Keeping this grand Aga was non-negotiable for Nadia, despite the home's interiors being redone to suit the multigenerational Zaals

Given that the real estate mogul's father Zaal bin Zaal is the mastermind and CEO of Dubai's verdant Al Barari – a prestigious oasis in the middle of the desert landscape – it's no wonder lush spaces were a big draw, and made them feel at home.

The family have also always had an affinity with the U.K. as Nadia's mother Leslie is British, "But I think honestly what really made us decide is that now that we all have kids that are between the ages of two and 10 we wanted them to get out, [be] in nature. Us all becoming parents is really what made us decide. It's just a very wholesome family environment." The location was also ideal. "Within 35 minutes we can be in central London, so it's the best of both worlds," Nadia reveals.



There are four reception rooms throughout the property

## GLOBAL CITIZENS

A seasoned property mogul – Abu Dhabi’s spectacular Zaya Nurai Island was Nadia’s pet project before she sold it to Aldar Properties in 2022 – the founder and CEO of Zaya’s personal portfolio also stretches to an apartment in New York, and she and her husband Kabir Mulchandani just sold their place in the South of France; they are already having regrets as the allure of Provence still beckons. Ibiza is another favourite destination; “That’s something that we’re looking into, but it’s not something I want to rush because I would really like to get my hands on an old farmhouse.”



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Adding wallpaper might have been a major investment, but it added great character to every facet of the house

Although the exterior of this new Cobham manor – The Grange – was enchanting, the "house definitely needed a lot of work," Nadia admits. "And that's actually what drew me to it. It has a large main house and potential for further outbuildings, so the developer in me was very drawn to this home. As they say, the bones were incredible. It's got a beautiful feeling and history too. We have finished phase one and I am awaiting planning permission for the rest."





"The brief was English country, but not too chintzy" Nadia Zaal

When prodded as to what 'the rest' entails, Kate Instone of Blush International, who has been tasked with the project, elaborates that "we will add an outhouse with a further three guest bedrooms and staff housing as well as upgrade the stables." There are also designs to redo the pool, and to add a pool house meets entertainment area.



The timelines for Kate were tight, but she rose to the challenge. “My family wanted to use the home on August 15 and we got keys to start work on June 15!” recalls Nadia. Luckily “We decided from the beginning just to work on the main house and not to make structural changes, it is such a beautiful home with such a lovely old country feel we didn’t want to ruin that.” But their Middle Eastern roots demanded one non-negotiable creature comfort: “adding air conditioning was important to my parents,” she laughs.



The Blush International team ensured they fulfilled Nadia’s wishes to put together an “eclectic feel that multi-generations could appreciate.” Another key consideration was functionality, as all the family will be gathering together and using this country holiday home every summer

## **ENGLISH COUNTRY CHIC**

“A strong sense of place,” was important when designing the house. Nadia explains, “The brief was English country, but not too chintzy.” Functionality was also a key factor for the multi-generational household; “So, in the living room, having lots of seating, a dining table that could expand... and wheelchair access for my father.”





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Kate, whose work Nadia trusted implicitly, adds that although there was a traditional overall feel, it had to have "a Nadia edge. Confident and strong but also soft, maternal, and nurturing. It needed to be impactful, but also a family home that feels comfortable and safe." This was achieved by mixing hand sourced antiques from Europe with more contemporary and 20th century vintage items.

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"We sourced from many different places. We used the Ashley Starks collection of rugs from Stark carpets, mirrors and occasional pieces from Soho Home Studio, Julian Chichester for furniture and bespoke items were made locally by Ben Whistler."





## ALL IN THE DETAILS

Wallpaper is “a quick way to bring a strong feeling into the home,” Nadia tells us, while musing over her biggest investment when it came to decorating.

Kate agrees, adding, “We used a lot of bold wallpaper to really give the space character and warmth. We sourced wallpaper from Zoffany, Foraseti, Jane Churchill, Colfax and Fowler and Zuber.” When it came to fabrics, there was juxtaposition, with “Rich velvets next to Aztec prints and heavy French linens. We wanted the house to feel cosy when it is grey and miserable outside, but also fresh and inviting when enjoying a balmy hot summer’s day.

It is also full of art, the walls are a rich tapestry of prints, water colours, oils, charcoals and drawings. From contemporary pieces to classical studies of birds and flowers. It really is an exhibition that everyone will find something they enjoy!”





The Grange has eight bedrooms, and although the gardens and facade of the space were kept intact, the interiors were redone and additional creature comforts and accessibility added throughout

Were there any non-negotiables? "I definitely wanted to keep the Aga," Nadia replies immediately. "And I didn't want to touch the garden. So much love had been poured into that."

The discerning Emirati admits she is a tough client to please; "I think me being a developer probably makes me trickier as a client. However, because it was Kate and I had the utmost trust in her, this was a really easy working relationship. Perhaps with the contractors, not so much. But I really delegated this because I was so busy building my developments in Dubai."





The previous owners of the property had green fingers, which is why the landscaping and greenhouses were so perfect when the Zaals took over the Surrey estate

## **PLENTY IN THE PIPELINE**

Greenery and beautiful surroundings as incredibly important to this entrepreneur, who admits most people would be surprised to hear that she's a bit alternative in her thinking, and doesn't fit the stereotype you might ascribe to her. "I'm an advocate of non-mainstream education," the owner of Zaya Early Learning which aims to disrupt the educational status-quo states, adding that "I had home births, very disciplined with my rituals and meditation, take ground walks in nature, have a gratitude journal and encourage non-tox living. I think people find that it's strange that a Dubai developer who's into high fashion is also a bit of an earth mama too."





One half of a dynamic duo – her husband is the Chairman and Founder of FIVE Holdings – leads to the household “constantly talking shop, but I think we love what we do so much, so it doesn’t really feel stressful. We’re constantly bouncing ideas off of each other and inspiring one another. I think some of my friends find it overwhelming when they come over and listen to us. We are both intense people.” And given that Kabir has just acquired Pacha and Destino from Ibiza, and expanded FIVE internationally, adding a jet into the mix too – “that’s been insane,” she says.





Although most might be tempted to rest on their laurels – and fly from one international home to another – Nadia is still looking to expand her horizons work-wise. “We have lots of villas under construction in Al Barari. I also recently acquired Zuha Island off the coast of Jumeirah in Dubai, with a beautiful view of the skyline – it has incredible sunsets and beaches. It’s definitely a challenge, but we’ve recently started construction on that as well, so that’s going to be a resort as well as residential community,” she divulges of the island that promises to be “bigger and better than anything anyone has seen here.”

Given her track record, and her own painstakingly curated houses, no one would ever underestimate this impressive dynamo.

**Photography:** Sean Myers

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