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Dubai builders 'focusing on smaller, efficient homes'

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Dubai has built its fame developing some of the tallest, largest, and most magnificent construction projects in the world. Recognized globally as a luxury destination, the emirate might have a surprise in store, said an expert.

Dubai is now focusing on building more compact and efficient developments in response to market demands, revealed Ahmad Bukhash, the director of Urban Planning at the Dubai Creative Clusters Authority (DCCA).

An architectural expert, Bukhash is solely responsible for reviewing and regulating iconic masterplans that fall within the jurisdiction of major master developers in the emirate such as Dubai Holding and Meraas.

"In response to a growing request, most master developers are building residential units that are both smaller and more efficient," stated Bukhash, while speaking to organisers of The Big 5, the region's leading construction event.

He has a Bachelor of Architecture degree from the Wentworth Institute of Technology from Boston in 2002. Following his graduation, Bukhash received the prestigious monbukagakusho scholarship from the Japanese Government in collaboration with the UAE ministry of higher education to continue his Architectural Master Studies in Japan at the Kyoto Institute of Technology, which he completed in 2006.

He then returned to the UAE and was employed by Dubai Properties Group from 2007 until 2014 as the Director of Urban Planning and Design.

During his work career, Bukhash identified the need for developments to reflect the identity of their own culture and embody the spirit of place through modern abstractions and reinterpretations of traditional archetypes.

This instigated him to establish his own architectural design practice in 2009 named Archidentity. The main purpose behind the firm's establishment was to define a unique architectural identity suited to the present age in line with the Emirati traditions and customs.

"The new trend is in full swing. Driven by demand, today the average size of villas is smaller in comparison to the previous market offer. Residential apartments follow just the same trend, with studios and 1-bedroom units being the most requested," he added.

According to him, the shift goes well beyond the size of the units.

"More than building smaller, the new trend is about building affordably. This is why the crucial question for architects in Dubai is to understand what affordable housing really means," he stated.

These iconic developments encompass prominent developments such as the Dubai Design District, Dubai Harbour, Dubai International Financial Center, Dubai Hills Estate and Dubai Creek Harbour Developments.

The answer, according to Bukhash, is clear. Developing affordable buildings means first and foremost building efficiently.

The expert pointed out that minimizing the cost for the developer was the best way to provide affordable buildings.

"Going forward, we need to understand how to save on construction costs and use new technologies to speed up the construction process," he explained.

"Building efficiently requires a combination of new regulations, building materials and guidelines that allow developers to use innovative technologies and implement prototypes," stated Bukhash, who remains heavily engaged in the field of Architectural Education as a Member of the Dubai Advisory Committee for the Architectural Program Development at the American University of Dubai.

He was even awarded the Sheikh Rashid Award for Academic Excellence in 2010.

Josine Heijmans, the portfolio director of The Big 5, said: "There's an unprecedented call for innovative technologies and efficient building solutions to come into play in the emirate's fast paced construction industry."

"This is why the 2018 edition of The Big 5 will fully focus on innovation," she stated.

"Under the theme 'Shaping the future of construction', the event will introduce the brand new Live Innovation Zone, where demonstrations will feature some of the newest and most innovative products available, and the Start-up City, gathering the next construction tech disruptors," explained Heijmans.

The show will also present the first FutureTech Construction Summit, exploring future trends and technologies through case studies, panel discussions and thought-provoking presentations, she added.

More than 2,500 construction companies from around the globe are expected to take part in the 39th edition of The Big 5 in Dubai, where they will meet 60,000 industry professionals looking to source products for almost 12,000 construction projects currently active in the UAE.