

Tomorrow's Architecture

Perspectives from the Visionaries

Immerse yourself in a refined dialogue where the future of architecture unfolds with quiet clarity. This exclusive interview is part of our "Tomorrow's Architecture" series, a carefully curated encounter with the visionaries who are redefining the built environment.

At Zora, we celebrate the thoughtful intersection of experience and vision, inviting you to dive into this exclusive interview with Ali-Al Farhan, Architectural Designer at Zaha Hadid Architects, and engage with a legacy of architectural excellence.

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Interview With Ali-Al Farhan

Your journey from Baghdad—steeped in cultural and historical heritage—to Dubai and then London, experiences in two global hubs of contemporary architecture—must have been transformative. How have these multicultural experiences shaped your perspective? What aspects of your background—educational or professional—do you believe were most instrumental in enabling you to collaborate with renowned brands—DAMAC Properties and Zaha Hadid Architects?

Absolutely—it's been a journey of contrasts and convergence. Growing up in Baghdad grounded me in a deep appreciation for history, geometry, and craftsmanship.

Coming from Iraq, I had always heard about Zaha Hadid and was captivated early on by her firm's visionary style—I read everything I could about her work. That fascination eventually led me to London, where I had the privilege of working with Zaha Hadid Architects.

Before that, I worked on a DAMAC project in Iraq, which allowed me to blend local narratives with global ambition. These multicultural layers have shaped my perspective—teaching me to design with both memory and momentum.



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Interview With Ali-Al Farhan

Your academic path, from Al-Nahrain University to the University of East London with a focus on computational and façade design, must have been pivotal. How has this journey influenced your current role, design philosophy, and professional growth at Zaha Hadid Architects? In your view, how has your academic foundation supported your trajectory and opened up opportunities to work with such a globally recognized brand?

Learned alot from my colleagues from the technical stuff and software to the bigger things like design ideas and their passion to architecture and some of my tutors were really helpful to encourage me pursue my design ideas and career plans, Fulvio Wirz, my tutor in UEL had the big positive impact on my study and career.



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Interview With Ali-Al Farhan

Your time at DAMAC Properties appears to have been a turning point in your professional journey. What were your core responsibilities there, and what challenges did you face? Which strengths or skills do you feel were key to your success within such a dynamic, high-profile setting?

In the project with Damac was the real kickoff of my professional life with, a big housing project in Iraq I was part of the design team which had to do the designs for the housing units and the interior designs of them, more importantly to see how coordination works in projects this big.

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Interview With Ali-Al Farhan

Transitioning from DAMAC Properties to Zaha Hadid Architects must have presented unique professional challenges. What were some of the key hurdles you encountered during this shift, and how did you navigate them? Did you have mentors or advocates who supported your transition, and what impact did they have on your journey?

The transition from DAMAC Properties to Zaha Hadid Architects was both exciting and challenging. Moving from a developer-led environment to a design-centric studio meant adapting to a completely different pace, mindset, and level of conceptual rigor.

One key hurdle was shifting from a focus on efficiency and delivery to an environment where exploration and iteration are integral to the process.

I was fortunate to have mentors—both formal and informal—who offered guidance and encouraged me to trust my voice while staying open to new ways of thinking. Their support helped me navigate the learning curve with confidence and curiosity, and it made the transition a truly transformative chapter in my journey.

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Interview With Ali-Al Farhan

As an Architectural Assistant at Zaha Hadid Architects, what are your primary responsibilities, and how do you contribute to the realization of the firm's complex and ambitious projects? How has your design thinking evolved since joining ZHA, especially in contrast to your previous role at DAMAC? How does the team at ZHA approach the creative process to achieve a shared design vision?

At Zaha Hadid Architects, I work closely with design teams on concept development, 3D modeling, and visual storytelling—translating bold ideas into buildable forms. The projects are complex, but the collaborative energy makes them come alive.

Compared to my role at DAMAC, where I focused more on contextual integration and practical delivery—especially in the Iraq-based project—ZHA has pushed me to think more fluidly, abstractly, and experimentally. Design thinking here is a shared language: iterative, research-driven, and always challenging norms. It's a place where innovation is collective and every curve tells a story.

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Interview With Ali-Al Farhan

Zaha Hadid Architects is celebrated for its visionary and boundary pushing design language. Within such an environment, how much creative freedom do architects have, and where do you see the boundaries of that freedom being defined? How are these limits shaped by leadership, and how would you describe the overall creative workflow within the brand?

Creative freedom at Zaha Hadid Architects depends on many factors. Worth mentioning are the project's stage, the client's brief, the budget, and the function or type of the project.

While the studio encourages innovation and bold thinking, these boundaries are often shaped by real-world constraints and guided by a strong design vision.

There's a balance—freedom to explore, but always within a framework that ensures coherence, feasibility, and alignment with the client's goals and the studio's identity.



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Interview With Ali-Al Farhan

Could you share insights into one project at DAMAC Properties or at Zaha Hadid Architects that holds particular significance for you? What distinguished this project in your experience, and what lessons or moments stand out most? Additionally, are there any independent projects from earlier in your career that you consider formative?

Al Khuwair waterfront development is a milestone project for me, to work on a project that's when realised gonna change the face of an important middle eastern capital city which is Muscat ,besides the impact this project has, it's also all the knowledge and experience I got from working on it.

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Interview With Ali-Al Farhan

In your opinion, how can architects today cultivate personal impact and establish a strong individual brand within the broader profession? At the same time, how can large firms sustain growth and innovation? What managerial principles or overlooked aspects of the profession do you believe are key to long-term success?

Architects today can cultivate personal impact by developing a clear design voice, staying curious, and consistently engaging with both theory and practice. Building a strong individual brand comes from authenticity—knowing what you stand for and expressing it through your work, communication, and collaborations.

For large firms, sustaining growth and innovation means nurturing diverse talent, staying adaptable, and fostering a culture that encourages experimentation without losing sight of delivery. In both cases, I believe one often-overlooked key to long-term success is empathy, understanding users, clients, and team dynamics. Strong leadership, transparent communication, and commitment to continuous learning make all the difference.



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Interview With Ali-Al Farhan

Reflecting on your diverse and inspiring path from Baghdad to London, what advice would you offer to young architects hoping to pursue a similar journey? If you could offer one piece of guidance to your younger self from ten years ago, what would it be?

To keep learning and be opened to new oppurtuniteis and ideas.



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Interview With Ali-Al Farhan

As we conclude, is there a topic or experience you feel is often overlooked in architectural conversations, but deserves greater attention? Is there a final perspective or insight you'd like to share?

Maybe One often overlooked topic in architectural conversations is the value of process over product. We tend to focus heavily on the final image or structure, but the journey –research, collaboration, iteration, even failure –is where real growth and innovation happen.

If I were to share a final insight, it would be this: architecture is as much about people as it is about buildings. Staying human-centered, empathetic, and open to learning is what keeps the profession meaningful and impactful in a constantly evolving world.

As we have unveiled this conversation, anticipate forthcoming dialogues within Architects of Tomorrows —a Zora-curated series featuring luminaries from esteemed institutions such as Zaha Hadid Architects, Foster + Partners, Bjarke Ingels Group, UNStudio, and other icons reshaping the design landscape.

Join us at Zora in celebrating the art of architecture and the inspirations that quietly pave the way for tomorrow. To follow the ongoing narrative, we invite you to stay connected.

