

RETAIL PEOPLE

M A G A Z I N E

Beyond Boundaries: Exploring New Horizons



Featuring:
Ali Sajwani
Managing Director
Damac Properties

P12

SHAPING DREAMS
A Conversation with
Mohammad Alawi

P16

OMAN AVENUES MALL
Oman's First Food Hall
Redefining In-Mall Dining

P26

SEAMLESS SYNERGY
Tech & Human Connection
In MENA'S Retail Revolution

SHAPING DREAMS

A CONVERSATION WITH MR. MOHAMMAD ALAWI ABOUT THE POINT ABHA

In the midst of Saudi Arabia's sweeping wave of modernization and transformation, a major development endeavor is underway in the enchanting region of Aseer. Spearheaded by the visionary Mr. Mohammad Alawi, The Point Abha Project emerges as a testament to innovation, seamlessly melding lifestyle, retail, hospitality, and entertainment offerings. Embark on an exclusive one-on-one interview with Mr. Mohammad Alawi as he led us into the dynamic narrative of The Point's Journey.

Can you share a brief background of yourself and your journey on how did you end up in the shopping centre and retail industry?

My path into the shopping centre and retail industry was unexpectedly intriguing. While my academic background lies in Business Administration and Technology Management, my career trajectory took an unexpected turn. I initially managed airport operations, but destiny led me to the real estate sector, which owned hotels and shopping malls. This transition around 1994 marked the inception of my deep involvement in the retail property and shopping sector. My engagement with industry organizations such as ICSC and



MOHAMMAD ALAWI

CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

RED SEA MARKETS COMPANY LIMITED

With over 30 years of expertise, Mohammad Alawi excels in managing properties, assets, facilities, and shopping malls with top Saudi companies. He has played a major role in positioning Saudi Arabia in key regional and international shopping mall organizations. Mohammad is a sought-after keynote speaker at economic and real estate forums, conferences, and seminars.





MECS+R played a pivotal role, culminating in my election as the first GCC President in 2007-2008. My passion for the industry and continuous learning drove me forward, leading to various roles, including being the Chairman of the Executive Committee at The Point and The Red Sea Markets Company.

The Point – Abha Project represents a strategic partnership between the Red Sea Markets for Real Estate Investment Company Asir and The Tourism Development Fund of the Saudi Ministry of Tourism. Could you provide an overview of the project and its significance within Red Sea Mall?

The Point – Abha Project perfectly aligns with Saudi Arabia's tourism goals and vision. Acquiring the land in 2016, the Saudi government had already established funds to support tourism development as part of Vision 2030. Asir, specifically Abha, has been chosen for a transformative shift in a year-round resort destination, capitalizing on its natural allure – from high mountains to pleasant climate. With governmental support and Asir's strategic plan, our venture thrived. The Tourism Development Fund from the Ministry of Tourism became our valuable partner, providing not only financial backing but also reducing governmental procedures for approvals. The project encompasses a lifestyle shopping mall, entertainment, F&B, hotel, and serviced apartments, in collaboration with Hilton. Partnering with Dubai's DLR for design and expert consultants for leasing, environment, lighting, and landscape, we stand as a tourism hotspot not only for Abha but the entire Asir Region, reinforced by unwavering government support.

What inspired you to initiate The Point Abha Project, and what were your key goals for the venture?

The driving force behind The Point - Abha Project was the need for a lifestyle and shopping destination that caters to the region's growing tourism potential. Our primary goal is to create a landmark project that aligns with the national vision of diversifying the economy through tourism and trade. Asir, with its rich culture and breathtaking landscapes, deserves a modern and vibrant space for locals and visitors alike. The government's commitment to the development of the region and the continuous support from Asir Development Authority made it a conducive environment to embark on this venture.

How does The Point Abha Project align with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and contribute to the growth of the country's tourism market?

With 15 years of tourism involvement, including Red Sea Mall's successful 15-year run, we've hosted millions of visitors, at least 20-30% of them are tourists from inside and outside the country. The Point is an added value to the whole strategy of tourism and the Tourism Fund. This project is more than just a shopping destination; it is set to become a landmark for the Asir region, attracting tourists from far and wide.

In line with Vision 2030, The Point is aligned with the government's efforts to promote tourism, enhance the economy, and diversify from a petrochemical-focused economy to one that thrives on tourism, trade, and technology. By offering a dynamic mix of retail, entertainment, and



hospitality experiences, the project will cater to the needs of both local and international visitors, bolstering Saudi Arabia's reputation as a must-visit destination. The Point is positioned as a flagship attraction that not only contributes to economic growth but also elevates the cultural and tourism landscape of Asir.

Could you highlight a few distinctive features that set The Point - Abha Project apart and make it a compelling destination for both local and international visitors?

The Point stands out with its unique features and attractions, setting it apart from conventional shopping destinations. Its design is a homage to Asir's cultural heritage, seamlessly integrating the region's identity into every facet of development. This cultural immersion offers an authentic and engaging experience, connecting visitors to the essence of Asir. Moreover, the project will not only boost the region's economy but also create over 20,000 job opportunities upon completion. Additionally, the utilization of local materials underscores its commitment to tourism and cultural authenticity. Our involvement extends to a youth centre, a collaborative effort with the government to enhance youth development through activities and training. Comprising lifestyle shopping, captivating entertainment, and exceptional hospitality, the project caters to Asir residents and visitors. Our unique hotels and serviced apartments promise unparalleled experiences, and our collaboration with consultants enhances placemaking design for maximum attraction.

How does The Point - Abha Project align with the vision and goals of the Red Sea Mall, and how does it enhance the overall visitor experience?

Red Sea Mall is a renowned retail and entertainment destination, prioritizing visitor experience with high operational standards, numerous awards and a dynamic tenant mix that caters precisely to market demands. The mall's vitality is evident through its 360 annual activities. As we mark our 15-year anniversary alongside Disneyland Paris' 30th year, we're offering captivating activities and a chance



to win a week's visit to Disneyland Paris. These strengths seamlessly extend to The Point, poised to become a regional lifestyle shopping hub. With a focus on retail, F&B, and entertainment, we're committed to delivering exceptional customer experiences. Just as we excel in these areas, we'll also prioritize hospitality and tourism, ensuring The Point becomes a thriving destination. In essence, our successful strategies from Red Sea Mall will shine at The Point, creating a vibrant and engaging haven for residents and visitors alike.

Are there any noteworthy partnerships, whether with local or international brands, that will be part of The Point - Abha Project?

In the initial leasing stage, we engaged Phil McArthur's team and reached out to major retailers both nationally and internationally, including prominent Dubai groups like Al Shaya, Chalhoub, and others. Their feedback on the project was highly positive. Simultaneously, we value our local brands and operators, a key part of our strategy.

Construction is underway, with the main contractor scheduled to begin by October. As the site preparation concludes, we'll gradually unveil the brands that have partnered with us. The tenant mix will feature a blend of international and local brands. Additionally, exciting collaborations with the entertainment authority and other companies will bring diverse events and activities to the project, to be announced soon.

Could you provide insights into the key features of The Point - Abha Project and its expected completion timeline?

The Point - Abha Project is poised to be a transformative hub. From cinemas and entertainment zones to hotels and terraces that embrace Asir's natural beauty, every aspect has been meticulously designed. The project is set to be completed in stages, with the mall projected to open its doors by the first quarter of 2026. During this journey, we envision creating an experiential ecosystem that resonates with both the local community and international visitors, setting new standards in retail and hospitality.



THE FUTURE, NOW

The evolution of malls has been a steady process for sixty years, with a focus on creating desired places for people to gather. Places immersed with leisure and attractions, for work and living where these functions are no longer separable. Places of comfort and aspiration; protection from the elements; third places to connect and live; a haven from the surrounding, constant city created through disruptive growth. At its heart, the shopping centre is the city centre. Yet, radical changes are coming as malls reach their existing limits and are directed to the accelerated desires of consumers. The best will continue to thrive—the rest must adapt, fast.

As cities urbanized rapidly, with influxes of people and migration, traditional patterns became displaced as new formats emerged. Retail centres cannot instantly absorb the shifting proportion of F&B, entertainment, and work. While financial projections are predictable, the orchestration required of centre operators now are far greater, with constant curation and anticipation of future concepts in demand. Dubai, Riyadh, Jeddah, and Doha are not in competition with one another, but vie for attention with Europe, America, India, East Asia; they race against Macau Cotai, Singapore Marina Bay, the Las Vegas Strip, 5th Avenue New York, for pre-eminence.

One of the key changes we can expect to see in existing malls is a focus on retrofitting and adaptive re-use. This creates a sustainable future and better practice of updating spaces, with a focus on modularity, prefabrication, and materiality, economic strategies as methods become industry wide.

Robotics, vehicles, automation, and programmatic design will play a key role in infrastructure, distribution, delivery, and fulfilment systems. Consider how quickly concepts have shifted over the recent ten years, with acceleration continually increasing. Long-term leases may be required to confirm key branded tenants. Major brands are in laboratories inventing immersive experiences focusing on customer relationships rather than how products look on display. On a regional scale, these journeys are multi-generational, multi-cultural; understanding what is in stasis, and



PHIL KIM
CHAIRMAN
JERDE

Phil Kim is Chairman of Jerde, with offices in Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore. The firm has been recognized with 170 awards that draws over a billion visitors annually. He is also Chair of the Urban Land Institute Hong Kong Council and a Global Governing Trustee, a Founding Member of the Institute of Sustainable Urbanization and a long-time juror of the ICSC Design Excellence Awards.

what is in constant motion.

The future of malls will be focused on combining technology and place. Wearables, implants, contact lens-projection, AR, and generative-AI will all be used to create a fully immersive experience, venues surrounding customers creating a sense of connection and community. The fundamentals remain in the understanding of human places.

Adaptation isn't only a means of addressing outgoing tenants and bringing in the new. The Commons, in the Thong-Lor and Saladeng districts of Bangkok, has spent the past ten years experimenting with a department store-sized format virtually 100% F&B. It combines street food and gourmet experiences around a central intertwining public space, amphitheatre, and vertical circulation. What allows The Commons to thrive is responsive and creative management—the complete engagement of the owners to their tenants, and support of the sustainable community and individual needs that they address in personalised ways.

Namba Parks Osaka constantly shifts experience. 20,000 plants and trees change seasonally in coloration, scent, shadow—the human need to viscerally connect with the world around us is of the present and the future. Even the extreme desert conditions of the Middle East have proven that both indoor and outdoor environments can heighten

our connection with place and one another. With the wealth of knowledge and funds available in this growing region, unique ecosystems define its near future of retail.

Commitment to the future is evident. Attention is on what Dubai has become, where Saudi Arabia is aiming. Yet, challenges have existed since the invention of the modern shopping centre in North America in the mid-1950s, the super-regional shopping entertainment centres of the late 1990s and 2000s, Asia's dense, vertical centres these past fifteen years. How many can one city sustain? Customers know too much, have been to many places, are too quick to judge. The mall isn't dead, but bad malls are.

Retail is an infinitely flexible format. While we may hold onto the safer understanding of yesterday, this moment in time is a confluence of knowledge, travel, technology, transport, mixed-uses, densification, and experience. Our industry is ready to redefine malls as unique places that define a region—a mystery to many outside, but a chance to make a culturally relevant, tech-immersed series of places that fit.

The mall isn't dead, but long live human-centric places that matter.

