Newcomer to the Middle East market, sbe is already making waves for its unique offering and forward-thinking approach to lifestyle. Here, Sam Nazarian, the luxury hospitality company’s founder and CEO, talks about expansion plans in the region and the importance of constant innovation.

How has sbe revolutionised the contemporary hospitality industry, and what makes your company unique on the luxury landscape?

sbe’s culture and mission have always been perfectly straightforward: abandon all conventional wisdom about what a hotel, restaurant, or nightclub should be; formulate new thinking by analysing and anticipating the desires of our clients; forge strategic alliances with the world’s most forward-thinking and innovative designers, architects, chefs and developers, and always be sure that the legendary style for which sbe is known never eclipses the substance of flawless service.

From cuisine to design, to residences, hotels and entertainment, sbe creates destinations for our guests with 360-degree experiences they can’t find anywhere else.

You use the term ‘luxury lifestyle’ to define your unique brand of hospitality. How would you describe this concept and how does sbe stand out from the ‘lifestyle’ crowd currently vying for market attention?

sbe is about creating a destination. Look at the recently opened SLS Baha Mar – it is a truly spectacular destination that embodies our ethos. A hotel with incredible design and culinary concepts such as Cleo, Katsuya, F1/ia and Bungalow Pool Bar & Grill, and unmatched nightlife and entertainment options including Monkey Bar, Bond, Privilege and Skybar, the first-ever rooftop bar in Nassau to open later this year. Baha Mar’s shared world-class amenities complete the luxe experience with guest access to the beach and pools, the Caribbean’s largest casino, 18-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature designed golf course and a flagship ESPA spa.

You recently opened the Mondrian Doha. What were the key motivations for selecting Qatar as the destination for your first property in the MENA region and how are you hoping to shake up the luxury hospitality scene in the country?

Doha is one of the most rapidly developing cities in the world and is poised to become one of the premier cities in the Gulf. With our incredible partners, SouthWest Architecture and Marcel Wanders, we knew we could create an incomparable destination for locals and global travellers through our innovative take on design, cuisine and entertainment.

Mondrian Doha is already being recognised as one of the world’s most unique luxury destinations, a perfect complement to Doha’s growing lifestyle scene. The hotel features 270 distinctive rooms, four unbelievable restaurants showcasing both local and international cuisine, including Morimoto and CUT by Wolfgang Puck, as well as Magnolia Bakery, two curated bar and nightlife outlets, the world’s largest ESPA spa and one of the largest and most ornate ballrooms in Qatar. I recently travelled there and already it is establishing itself as a creative hub and culinary emporium, ideal for Qatari connoisseurs and foreign travellers looking for unique experiences.
sbe has a busy expansion pipeline of over 25 hotels in the next few years, including a Mondrian in Dubai. Can you tell us a bit about this upcoming hotel and how you plan to make your mark on the destination?

We’re really excited about opening a Mondrian in Dubai and are currently expecting it to open in 2020. Mondrian is a brand with international allure that oozes ground-breaking design and progressive programming. True to the brand’s DNA, Mondrian Dubai will infuse the essence of Dubai into the design of its rooms, restaurants and nightlife offerings – becoming its own unique destination within the vibrant city.

Do you have any plans in place for further expansion within the MENA region? If so, which destinations are you looking at and why?

The Middle East is an extremely important market for the growth of our hotel brands, including Delano, Mondrian, SLS and Hyde. We have plans to open Delano Dubai in late 2018, with SLS Doha following in 2019 and Hyde Doha in 2020, to name a few. The Middle East is a significant part of sbe’s growth story and we’re thrilled to work with leading partners in the region to help us expand our footprint to some of the most exciting cities in Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and more.

Innovation is an important part of your company ethos. Can you tell us a bit about how you employ this element in your luxury hotels and how important is it to innovate in today’s increasingly competitive market?

If you’re not innovating, what are you doing? Our industry, like most, is experiencing disruption, and in order to be successful, those in the industry need to embrace this. At sbe, we have a reputation for being trailblazers in the crowded field of hospitality; disruption is part of our legacy. As hoteliers, we are expected to deliver comfort and service, but that is just the beginning. We take it one step further: we curate moments and create destinations. We are in the business of making memories, creating experiences, evoking feelings, and most of all, giving guests a reason to look back at their time with us and yearn to come back. The only way to do that is to anticipate your guests’ desires and never stop innovating.

How has luxury changed over the past decades and where do you see this industry heading in the future?

The new luxury is all about experiences and lifestyle. Where once it was white table cloths and white-gloved waiters, luxury customers are now looking for incredible experiences and exclusivity. The concepts are really interchangeable, with lifestyle concepts being at the heart of all our hotels. It always goes back to curating memorable moments and creating destinations.