



CLAIRE D'ADORANTE

PARAGON INTERFACE

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Claire has nearly 20 years of experience in the interior design industry, working across multiple design environments in corporate workplace, retail, residential, healthcare and education sectors. She holds a BA Honours Degree from Greenside Design centre. She began her career in commercial interiors, then explored the world of retail and residential interiors but ultimately returned to her roots in commercial and workplace design. Claire worked for a large multi-disciplinary practice in Australia there for six years, returning to South Africa in 2012 in the role of director at Paragon Interface. She secured two of the largest fitout projects in the country - the new Head Office for Sasol and the new Discovery Campus.

WHO INSPIRES YOU?

I am consistently inspired by the women I work with. They are all completely unique, strong and purposeful, and have an amazing sense of themselves. In terms of famous women, I find Patricia Urquiola's design style and business acumen to be particularly inspiring.

WHAT UNIQUE CHALLENGES DO WOMEN ARCHITECTS FACE?

When I began my career, it was not unusual for me to be the only woman in a meeting or on site, and also being young at the time, I was often not taken seriously and often felt uncomfortable being on a site alone. In my personal experience, women in this industry have had to work harder to be recognised and have had to "toughen up" in order to be able to deal with what is sometimes a quite aggressive space.

**WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING
WOMEN BRING TO THE PROFESSION?**

One needs to understand how space affects the people it serves, and in my opinion, women bring a greater level of understanding through their inherent intuition to this part of the process. They are also more detail-orientated. And it is generally much easier to work with women!

**WHAT DO YOU THINK THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES ARE FOR
THE PROFESSION IN TERMS OF GENDER TRANSFORMATION?**

I believe that in recent years it really has changed. The presence of women within all sectors of construction, both the professionals and on site, has notably increased. Women have always had a strong presence at Paragon. We currently employ more women than men and have a 50/50 split at director level. Perhaps that's one of our advantages!

**WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG
WOMEN STARTING OUT IN THE PROFESSION?**

Just be yourself and trust in your unique skills. This is a wonderfully self-validating profession. For me, there is nothing more rewarding than to be able to create physical space that impacts others positively. Challenges will always arise, but these are part of life and only serve to make one stronger and more resilient.



RENKE HALLER

dhk ARCHITECTS



Renske is managing director at dhk Architects and sits on the firm's design review board. She joined the practice in 2006, was appointed a director in 2009 and took on the role of managing director in 2014. Renske studied at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and has worked in South Africa, the UK and the Netherlands where she also gained experience in urban design. Her experience lies in a range of projects at varying scales and complexities, from spatial development frameworks and master planning to individual buildings, public spaces and landscapes, including Norval Foundation and Delaire Graff Estate. Renske currently leads a team working on several private residences, boutique hotels, restaurants and galleries.

WHO INSPIRES YOU?

I have been following the work of Elizabeth Diller of Diller Scofidio + Renfro for the last few years and find her interdisciplinary approach in blending architecture with the visual and performing arts particularly inspiring. It was fantastic when TIME Magazine named her the world's most influential architect last year as I do not believe the achievements of women in architecture are celebrated enough.

WHAT UNIQUE CHALLENGES DO WOMEN ARCHITECTS FACE?

By all accounts, the construction industry in South Africa remains a very male-dominated space, with women frequently citing experiencing prejudice, particularly when working on construction sites. I have experienced numerous challenges when leading projects on-site and have found that in the past I have had to work extremely hard to gain an equal level of respect and recognition as my male counterparts. I do, however, believe that the industry is slowly starting to transform.

**WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING
WOMEN BRING TO THE PROFESSION?**

I believe that women bring balance to the profession.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES ARE FOR
THE PROFESSION IN TERMS OF GENDER TRANSFORMATION?**

More needs to be done to retain women in the profession and support them in building their careers. We are pleased to say that 51% of the architects and architectural technologists employed at dhk are women. We are geared towards equal pay and promotion and have entrenched progressive policies and systems which are aimed at supporting motherhood. We allow for family responsibilities, paid maternity leave, flexible working hours and accommodate family events wherever possible.

**WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG
WOMEN STARTING OUT IN THE PROFESSION?**

Architecture can be a tough profession for any young person starting out but embrace it. Immerse yourself in architecture and design, be passionate about the projects you are involved in and enjoy your work.