



WOMEN WHO

# mspore

Meet six phenomenal women who are pushing boundaries and being the very best they can be.

Interviews by || BIDDI RORKE

From entertainment icons Charlize Theron and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, to long-serving Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Chief Justice of Ghana Georgina Theodora Wood, or fearless South African Public Protector Thuli Madonsela, Africa and the Indian subcontinent have given rise to some of the most influential women in history.

Overcoming enormous challenges, these powerhouses have achieved positions of strength and significance in all industries – from the glitz and glamour of Bollywood and Hollywood to multi-national boardrooms, rural community initiatives and the corridors of government. As we mark Women's Day in South Africa this month, we celebrate some of those who are making a difference today.

# Zahira Asmal

**Sector** Design

As an author, curator and publisher, Zahira Asmal's projects address democracy, inclusive design and city-making. She is founder of DESIGNING\_SOUTHAFRICA, a non-profit organisation that advocates the use of design to bring about positive and meaningful social change. Zahira works closely with governments, designers, architects, academics and the media all around the continent and the world.

*'When there is belief and passion and good intention in what you do, others will share in your vision and join you in your journey.'*

▶▶ **How - and where - will you be celebrating Women's Day this year?**

I am hoping to be on a stand-up paddle board in solitude but the reality may be a work day for me.

▶▶ **Your greatest achievement so far?**

Freedom. I was raised in a patriarchal, racist and diminishing society. My goal was always to simply be free of this. Free of judgement, free to express myself socially, politically, culturally... and move and travel freely.

I detest a society that expects us to slot into predetermined roles and parameters. I want to carve my own path in my own way. That is my personal and professional quest, and any advance I make in this regard is an achievement for me.

▶▶ **Who is your greatest (female) role model? And why?**

Tina Turner. Since I was a kid I've looked up to her as a strong, self-defining woman. She has managed to rise against all odds. I reflect on this in my own journey.

▶▶ **How do you define success? And what inspires or drives you to succeed on a daily basis?**

Success for me is about having agency. This is important for me largely in South Africa as it is something women of colour need to continuously 'fight' for. It's tough but it's a path we need to carve for ourselves and others.

▶▶ **What personality traits have helped you get to where you are today?**

When there is belief and passion and good intention in what you do, others will share in your vision and join you in your journey. I am also an idealist, which keeps me positive. I believe people have good intentions and wish the best for society and for their own roles in life and work.



# Trevyn McGowan

**Sector** Export

Through her company Source, which she co-owns with husband Julian, savvy businesswoman Trevyn McGowan has been exporting South African design to the international market for 10 years.

The dynamic duo have also established Southern Guild as a forum for South African designers to challenge and support each other. The collection now has a reputation for innovation and excellence.

▶▶ **How do you define success? And what inspires or drives you to succeed on a daily basis?**

Success is being able to create connections on this brilliant continent, where creatives are able to execute the most incredible pieces of work and show the world what we are capable of.

We have a truly unique voice and I'm inspired to continue on this trajectory, transforming how we are perceived as Africans through the landscape of design.

▶▶ **Your greatest inspiration?**

The team of amazing women I work with every day (27 out of 28 of our employees are women). They challenge me to think smarter, work better and lead stronger.

▶▶ **Your life motto?**

'That's a brilliant idea, let's do it!'

▶▶ **How - and where - would you like to celebrate Women's Day this year? And why?**

At home, sorting out the attic. Can't wait!

▶▶ **Your greatest professional achievement so far?**

Putting Southern African design on the map through all our channels. This includes exporting 70% of South African design through Source SA; launching the collectible design industry in our country and showing the incredible pieces at international events such as Design Miami through Southern Guild; hosting the GUILD design fair and our annual Business of Design conference; curating and consulting for the V&A Watershed and Work Shop New Town; launching two shops, Odeon and Mon Âme, working with designers from West to East Africa for Design Network Africa, and our NGO, the Southern Guild Design Foundation.

▶▶ **The greatest piece of personal advice you ever received from another woman?**

Don't come at arguments head on, but rather gently invite your 'opponent' to imagine themselves in your shoes. Empathy is everything.

▶▶ **What is the most valuable piece of professional advice you've ever received?**

'You don't charge enough.'

▶▶ **Please finish this phrase. Young women today are ...**

...holding more power than ever before. >

*'Don't come at arguments head on, but rather gently invite your opponent to imagine themselves in your shoes.'*

