

THERE'S NO ALTERNATIVE TO HARD WORK

Architectural technologist's innovative designs have earned her a growing reputation as one of the best game-changers around

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Diphetlho Masemola is not a name that rings a bell outside the built environment sector but, according to experts within that industry, it is one worth remembering.

Masemola is a talented innovative designer of small spaces and green building projects.

City Press met for a chat with the architectural technologist - the application of the science of architecture - whose imaginative designs have earned her a growing reputation as one of the best game-changers around.

Born in Bela-Bela into a middle class family, Masemola and her six cousins were raised by her grandparents and schooled at the local Khabele Primary School, while her mother worked in the Sekhukhune area in Limpopo.

From an early age, Masemola reckons, she has always wanted to be financially independent.

"I was selling sweets and a lot of other stuff in primary school because I didn't want to ask my mother for money and have her ask what I wanted to use it for," she said.

Though her grandparents had a shop, she has never been involved and preferred spending time doing chores.

It was also at that tender age that she harboured ambitions of being a farmer.

"I spent a lot of time with my grandmother in the garden and she taught me a lot about working with my hands," she said.

She later moved to school in Pretoria where she spent two years at two different schools before her mother got a job in Polokwane, where she spent the last four years of her high school.

"Being raised by a single mother you always had to

plan everything so if I made my own money I would just ask for permission instead of money too," she said, adding that at the time the income was more for independence than for profit.

"Financial independence has always been the goal. To be able to do what I want to do without it being a burden on somebody else."

After matriculating from Florapark Comprehensive High School, she headed back to Gauteng but only because she could not get into a Durban-based institution for interior design qualification.

"The idea of studying in Gauteng was not appealing. I ended up in Pretoria TUT [Tshwane University of Technology] and it seems to have worked out," she said.

After graduating from TUT, she went back to Polokwane where she worked for a year as a trainee, before she was back in a lecture hall to continue with her studies.

"The plan has been to get a master's degree so if I had continued, I was always going to feel incomplete," she said, adding that during her second stint in

academe she dabbled between a number of jobs to stay independent, even though her mother was paying for her studies.

For her master's degree research, she chose to probe green building innovations and while studying for that degree she managed to get into a special three-year professionals programme in the department of public works.

"When the contract ended I was offered a full-time position but with a lower salary so I passed and within three days I got a call from an agency and that ended up with my being at Tsebo Outsourcing," she said of how she ended up being exposed to some of the most prominent corporate clients in the country.

After a year as an architectural technologist, with Absa as her main client, she was promoted to a project manager with a number of professionals reporting to

her.

With that level of exposure as a senior professional, she finally jumped ship to start her own shop last year, a move that she said was more exciting than frightening.

"I stopped enjoying my work and I was gradually dying inside so I left and opened my own shop," she explained about deciding to quit ordinary employment to pursue business under her current company Dikeamo & Associates.

Among the impressive projects the company has been involved in is the design of the Sanral e-toll kiosk and the City of Joburg's visitor centre, as well as a number of prominent private residential homes, corporate offices and a hotel.

"I find studying easier than interacting with people," she said, adding that her love for travelling has also helped her keep abreast with the latest innovation. She has travelled extensively, especially to western European countries, studying architecture and art.

Having to run her own business for more than a mere salary, Masemola has seen her hard work paying off and has even attracted clients from outside the country.

About the local sector, she said transformation is nowhere near impressive and black people are on the back foot, starting from varsity where, though bursaries and grants may pay tuition, there are a lot of additional costs involved.

"It's an expensive course to study and it's not affordable for everyone. So it favours more the privileged students and the industry itself is dominated by white males. Black females are at the very bottom," she said, and mentioned that projects in both the private and public sectors were dominated by the same faces.

"At this rate, we are not going to see a black billionaire architecture professional anytime soon," said Masemola.

"At the end of the day, if you don't work hard and believe, the alternative is not appealing," she concluded.



**DIPHETLHO
MASEMOLA**

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