

WOMEN IN **Building** CONSTRUCTION 2025



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The women paving the way in construction across the globe
Insights from 12 industry leaders driving change and innovation



FOREWORD

RICHARD STEER, CHAIR, GLEEDS WORLDWIDE



Last year, we published the very first Women in Construction in collaboration with Building magazine, showcasing the inspiring stories from some of the most remarkable female leaders in our sector.

The response we received was phenomenal, so I am thrilled to have been asked to support a second edition for 2025, featuring a host of equally impressive personalities.

Amplifying female voices as they forge their paths in this traditionally male-dominated field is one powerful way we can help break down longstanding barriers for others who still feel working in the built environment is simply not for them.

While the number of women working in our sector is slowly creeping upward, the path to gender parity is long and

progress frustratingly slow. Changing the perception that all jobs in our sector come with standard-issue steel toe-cap boots, hard hats and a dose of misogyny will not be easy, but change it we must.

In the following pages, we'll hear the experiences of a fantastic group of women who are reshaping the industry on a global scale in a diverse array of roles – sustainability experts, architects, engineers, project managers and tradespeople.

We'll learn how they rose to prominence, about the hurdles they've overcome along the way, and about their proudest moments in a field where they may once have struggled to achieve the success they so richly deserve.

Throughout my own working life, I have been lucky enough to encounter some

We celebrate not only the individual successes of those featured here but also their collective impact in redefining what is possible

Richard Steer,
Chair of Gleeds Worldwide and
and Building Commissioner

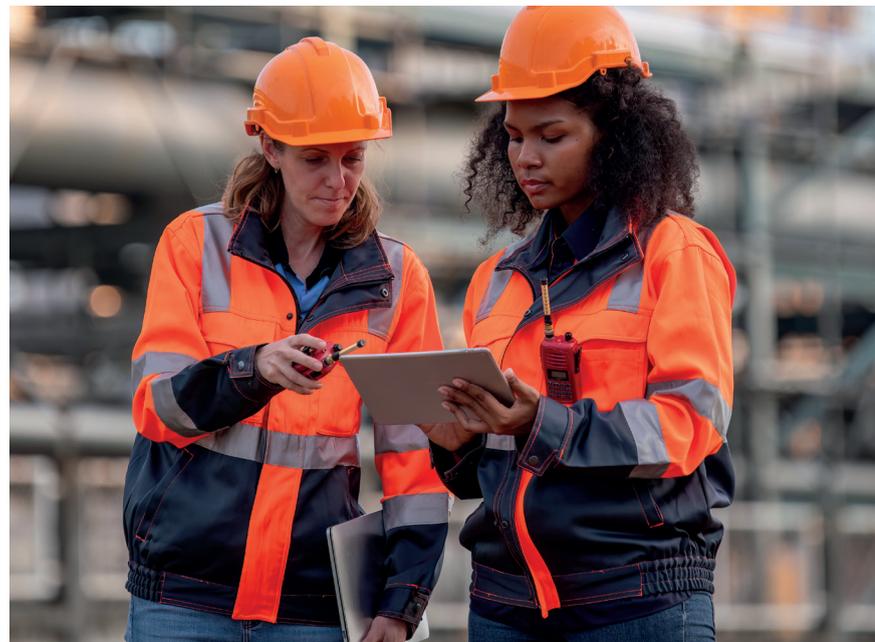
truly extraordinary female leaders whose resilience and determination have helped them accomplish great things despite operating in an often challenging space.

This collection of interviews further reinforces the deep respect I hold for all those who choose to pursue a career in an industry that, for too long, has failed to acknowledge their potential and closed doors that should have been held open.

These stories serve as a powerful celebration of diversity, inclusion and empowerment as well as a resounding call to action for the next generation

of women and girls who may never have considered the construction sector as a professional home. Moreover, they give me renewed confidence that real progress continues to be made and that tomorrow promises more.

Once again, we celebrate not only the individual successes of those featured here but also their collective impact in redefining what is possible. I extend my thanks to each of them for sharing their personal journeys, lessons learnt and visions for the future. I hope they pave the way for many more change-makers just like them.





CHLOË MCCULLOCH, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, BUILDING



For a second year, we have compiled the stories of 12 inspiring women who are blazing a trail through their work in construction and the wider built environment.

International Women's Day has become a focal point for many businesses to reflect on their contribution to women's progress in the workplace, and this year the event's central message is that we all need to do more to accelerate change.

Women can and are doing amazing work in this industry, and have career opportunities that were just not possible in previous generations. But we still do not have a level playing field: at a wider societal level the latest estimate is that on our current trajectory it will take till 2158 to reach full gender parity, according to the World Economic Forum.

The good news is that we can take action that will make a difference. And one simple way to do that is to learn about what works. If we can understand what helps women in the workplace, more people can be empowered to succeed.

I have learnt something from all of these interviews: each one is a window into the lives of talented and determined professionals who have encountered challenges at various points in their careers and navigated their way through.

These women come from very different backgrounds, working in Africa, Asia, Oceania, Europe, North America and South America for companies that range from large multinationals to start-ups. Their technical

These women credit mentors, family and supportive colleagues for advancing their careers – and now they are finding ways to lift others up, which in turn renews their own sense of purpose

Chloë McCulloch,
Editorial director, Building

expertise varies greatly too, from trade skills and project management to architecture and environmental consultancy. They show that women can do it all.

We asked each of our interviewees if she sees herself as a role model for other women; some absolutely do, while others are a bit more ambivalent about the label. I can understand that it might feel like an additional burden: not only do you have to be brilliant at your day job but you also have to go out

there and inspire others.

But that is exactly what they are doing, whether they intend to or not. These women credit mentors, family and supportive colleagues for advancing their careers – and now they are finding ways to lift others up, which in turn renews their own sense of purpose.

I'm proud to be able to showcase these leading women's stories – making women in the industry visible can help us all make positive progress faster.





LEANNE BRODERICK, MANAGING DIRECTOR FOR REGIONAL BUILDING, SISK



“I’ve always enjoyed problem-solving, maths and seeing projects come to life, which made engineering a natural fit for me,” says Leanne Broderick, managing director for regional building at Sisk.

Originally from the west of Ireland, Broderick studied civil engineering at the University of Galway before joining John Sisk & Son in 2004. “I’ve spent over 20 years working across Ireland and the UK. While I don’t have a fixed location, Galway is my closest office,” she explains. In her current role, which she took up in October last year, she oversees business operations, project execution, financial performance, client and stakeholder management, and team leadership.

Her journey in construction began with a conversation that shaped her future. “After graduating, I explored different career paths and spoke to a number of people. One of them worked at Sisk and gave me

great insight into the industry. That conversation led me to my first role as a graduate engineer on site with Sisk in October 2004,” she recalls.

After joining Sisk, Broderick moved to London, where she became a design manager and later led her own projects for several years. In 2020 she returned to Ireland to take up the role as regional director for the contractor’s Dublin business.

Rather than identifying a single defining moment, Broderick credits a series of opportunities that she embraced along the way for accelerating her career. “Each project and role has contributed to my growth. I’ve been fortunate to have great mentors and work colleagues who shared their knowledge, challenged me and shaped my approach,” she says. “Their support, along with working in strong teams, has played a huge role in my development.”

The construction industry is not without challenges, but Broderick views them as opportunities for learning and growth. “Every project comes with its challenges, but each one has been a learning experience. The key has always been to stay adaptable, work through problems with a great team, and use every challenge as a chance to develop,” she explains.

What’s the best project she has worked on? “I’d have to say two: The Convention Centre and Wilton Park in Dublin. The

We should highlight how professionals from other industries can bring valuable, transferable skills to the sector

Leanne Broderick,
Managing director for regional building, Sisk

Convention Centre (in Dublin, pictured below) was special because it was one of the first projects I worked on from start to finish. Seeing it come to life and knowing it’s now a landmark venue is incredibly rewarding. Wilton Park stands out for its exceptional quality and the strong team dynamic. The collaboration and attention to detail made it a truly fulfilling project to be part of,” she says.

Broderick acknowledges the industry has made strides in attracting women. “Sisk now has 20% female representation across the business,” she notes. “To continue this progress, we need to introduce young girls to the wide range of careers

available in construction. At the same time, we should highlight how professionals from other industries can bring valuable, transferable skills to the sector.”

Asked whether she sees herself as a role model, Broderick is modest. “I wouldn’t necessarily call myself a role model, but I do hope that by sharing my experiences I can encourage more women to pursue leadership roles in construction. It is fantastic to see more and more women on sites and in our offices,” she says.

Speaking of her career achievements, Broderick says: “There’s a real sense of accomplishment every time a project is completed. Seeing something you helped build come to life – and knowing it will leave a lasting impact – is always incredibly rewarding.”

Her advice for women considering a career in the built environment is simple: “Dream big, work hard and trust in your abilities. Whether it’s engineering or another area of construction, there are so many opportunities if you stay curious and dedicated.”





SIROBÈ CARSTAFHNUR, LEASING PROJECT MANAGER, US GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

“Historically, black people have been in spaces where our culture, traditions, wants and needs were not represented at the table – I wanted to change that,” says Sirobè Carstafhnur, leasing project manager at the US General Services Administration (GSA), when asked what drew her into the sector.

Carstafhnur’s path has been a varied one that began with a bachelor’s degree in architecture from Mississippi State University. “After working for a few years, I returned to school to earn a master of science in urban planning and policy design from Politecnico di Milano in Milan, Italy,” she says. “I chose Milan to experience life in a city that balances modernisation and evolution while preserving its traditions and uniqueness.”

Now, with nearly 20 years of experience in design and construction, Carstafhnur plays a crucial role in federal leasing. “I oversee the entire process of acquiring and managing lease agreements for government agencies, including identifying space needs, negotiating lease terms, managing project timelines and ensuring compliance with GSA regulations,” she explains. Her work involves balancing financial oversight with real estate expertise while co-ordinating with landlords, tenants and various stakeholders.

Her career progression reflects a broad skillset, having held roles

from project architect to senior project manager.

A key mentor was Ken Cook, her former supervisor at the US Army Engineer Research and Development Center. “Without his mentorship and advocacy, I wouldn’t have had many of the professional opportunities that shaped my journey,” she says. “He made sure I had a seat at the table and encouraged me to speak up and own my expertise – especially as a woman in the industry.”

Despite her success, she has faced challenges. “One of the biggest challenges was falling out of love with the industry and questioning whether my work was making the impact I had envisioned,” she reflects. “I found my way back by mentoring young black men and women who sought advice about careers in architecture. Mentorship became my way of reigniting that passion.”

Among the projects she has

worked on, the Ralph Lauren expansion at Starrett-Lehigh in 2018 stands out. “The deadline was impossibly tight, so much so that I was supposed to be on vacation but ended up doing drawings on the plane!” she recalls. “We had an incredible team working tirelessly day and night, and we delivered.”

Another memorable project was the Jackson Convention Complex, her first major project after graduating: “I was entrusted with designing the interiors while the rest of the team focused on the facade. It was Mississippi’s first-ever convention centre – a milestone for the state and a historic moment for my home. It felt like my love letter to Mississippi.”

If the industry is to attract more women, she says, “we need clear pathways for career advancement and a greater focus on retention. Incorporating flexible work schedules and highlighting more women hold executive roles will showcase that success in this industry isn’t an either-or choice – you can lead, innovate and still maintain a fulfilling life beyond work.”

Speaking as a role model for other women, she says: “I maintain an open-door policy, where anyone – especially women – can come to me for guidance, support or simply a space to breathe and be heard. Women in this industry wear many hats, balancing professional demands with personal responsibilities, and



I strive to be a safe space where they can seek advice or just pause and recharge.”

Asked about her heroines, Carstafhnur names Melody Hobson, “a brilliant powerhouse who has mastered the art of leadership while consistently lifting others up along the way. She embodies the kind of influence I aspire to.”

To women starting out, she says: “Learn every role, not just yours. I’ve stood on scaffolding with bricklayers, mirrored inspectors and shadowed accounting managers. Understanding how all the pieces fit together makes you more knowledgeable, adaptable and invaluable. Your expertise will make you a stronger leader and team member.”

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Sirobè Carstafhnur,
Leasing project manager,
US General Services Administration



AMY FITZPATRICK, FOUNDER AND OWNER, PINK SPARKY

“I was born with a tool belt on. As a little girl I was swinging off my dad ‘helping’ around our small plot of land with fencing, building chicken coops, and other small jobs around the house,” says Amy FitzPatrick, founder and owner of Pink Sparky, an all-female electrical contracting company based in New Zealand’s Waikato region.

With 20 years of experience as an electrician and eight years running her own business, FitzPatrick is not only an expert in her field but also a passionate advocate for women in the trades. Her company has grown to a team of six, including three qualified electricians and two apprentices, and she is dedicated to training women and helping them get qualified.

Her journey into the electrical trade began with sheer persistence. Despite excelling academically and being encouraged to attend university, she was drawn to hands-on

work. “I always knew I wanted to work with my hands,” she says. When she found an electrical apprenticeship advertisement in the newspaper, she applied immediately but received no response. Undeterred, she approached a local electrical contracting company in Cambridge, Waikato, and repeatedly visited its office until the boss finally relented. “If you stop coming in every day, I’ll give you two weeks’ work experience,” he told her.

Those two weeks proved life-changing. “They put me through my paces, testing my resilience. But I loved it,” she recalls. Her determination paid off when she was offered an apprenticeship, becoming the company’s first female apprentice. Her talent was soon recognised when she won the Most Promising Apprentice of 2005 award.

FitzPatrick credits much of her success to her mentor, Larry Finn, who taught her the intricacies

I decided to set up a company where women could thrive, learn and be supported

Amy FitzPatrick,
Founder and owner, Pink Sparky

of the trade and has supported her throughout her career. Today she is paying it forward, ensuring own apprentices receive the same level of guidance and encouragement that she did.

Despite her strong work ethic and ability to hold her own on job sites, FitzPatrick faced challenges when transitioning into an office-based project manager role. “I was bullied badly by a co-worker over a period of time, to the point where I quit,” she shares. The experience, though painful, became the catalyst for her to start her own business. “I vowed that I would never be treated that way again. I decided to set up a company where women could thrive, learn and be supported.”

Eight years into running Pink Sparky, FitzPatrick finds immense fulfilment in seeing her team excel. “Going into business was the scariest thing I’ve ever done, but by far the best thing,” she says. “We’ve been churning out some fantastic electricians, and the relationships we’ve built with our customers have been incredible.”

FitzPatrick has also become an active voice for women in the trades. As a committee member for the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC), she regularly speaks at women-in-trades events, encouraging aspiring female electricians to pursue their dreams. “We need to continue being visible and speaking out when we’re treated unfairly. The more we support each other, the more change we will see,” she says.

“It can still be rough for a woman putting on a tool belt and showing up to a site. But it can also be one of the best things we ever do. There’s something special about building something with your own hands and seeing it come to life.”

In July 2024, FitzPatrick was named Outstanding Leader of the Year (Site Based) at the National Association of Women in Construction Excellence Awards. “That award meant a lot to me,” she says. “But my biggest career achievements are seeing the women I’ve trained become qualified electricians and watching my apprentices win awards of their own.”

Asked what advice she would give to women considering a trade career, FitzPatrick is direct: “Just do it! There are so many great employers and teachers out there who will support you. Seek them out, join organisations like NAWIC, and connect with the women in trades community. You won’t look back – I know I haven’t.”





IRENE GARCIA, BUILT ENVIRONMENT LEAD, CARBON NEUTRAL CITIES ALLIANCE

“Cities have immense potential to improve people’s lives and drive transformative change,” says Irene Garcia, built environment lead at the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA).

Based in Berlin but working across a global network of cities, Garcia works with local governments to decarbonise urban building stock, focusing on whole-lifecycle approaches to reduce emissions. “My role involves funding transformative urban projects, advancing methodologies and governance frameworks, and fostering knowledge-sharing among cities to scale solutions quickly,” she explains. A key part of her work is collective advocacy, influencing policy changes at multiple levels to accelerate progress toward carbon neutrality.

She joined CNCA in 2021 at a pivotal moment when cities were starting to acknowledge the need to address embodied carbon. “Every building tells a story of energy and emissions long before anyone steps inside,” she says. “From excavation to construction, from material transport to operation, every step consumes resources and generates carbon emissions.”

Recognising this, she has led projects across Europe, supporting cities like Stockholm, Nantes and Madrid in integrating low carbon and bio-based building materials, fostering circular construction models and embedding sustainability

into procurement policies.

Her path into the built environment was shaped by her academic background in international relations and urban governance, with a focus on climate change. “I’ve always been passionate about working with cities because they hold unmatched potential for systemic transformation,” she reflects. “One of the most critical challenges today is decarbonising our building stock, but this transformation must be inclusive, benefiting everyone, not just the few.”

A defining moment in Garcia’s career came when she worked with the Brookings Metro programme and Esade University to analyse economic support systems for major cities such as Los Angeles and São Paulo.

“It was during the aftermath of the 2007-08 financial crisis, and deepened my understanding of how urban governance can steer resilience and drive strategic growth,” she recalls. “That experience sparked

Dive in confidently and remember that your unique perspective is needed to shape inclusive, sustainable spaces for everyone

Irene Garcia,
Built environment lead, Carbon
Neutral Cities Alliance

my passion for policy-making and leadership in urban development.”

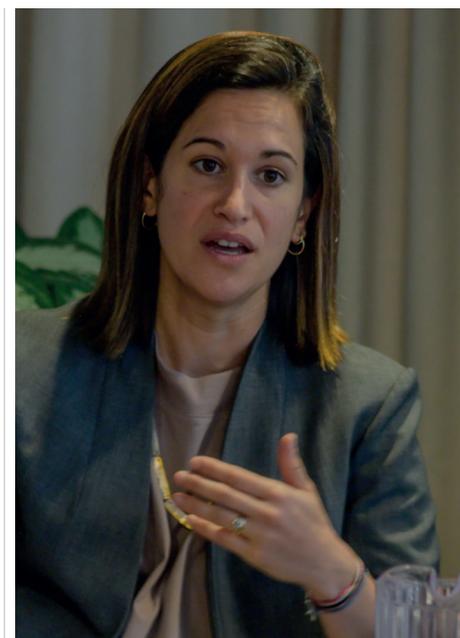
Garcia acknowledges the challenges in shifting mindsets within urban governance. “Decarbonising our cities requires more than technological innovation – it demands a complete rethink of how we design, build and manage the built environment,” she says. “Overcoming resistance to these changes has been difficult, but by advocating for progressive policies and demonstrating the practical benefits of sustainable practices, we’ve been able to shift perspectives.”

One of her most rewarding projects was organising a 2017 workshop in Detroit, where she collaborated with architects, urban planners and city leaders to explore adaptive reuse strategies for vacant buildings.

“Detroit had thousands of empty structures, each with untapped potential,” she says. “The ideas generated during that workshop were remarkable, and while some sites were unfortunately demolished, the experience reinforced my commitment to advocating for building preservation.”

To attract more women into the sector, Garcia believes representation and mentorship are key. “We need to showcase female leaders and provide supportive networks to help women navigate career challenges,” she says.

Some of the women who



inspire her most are “the women who are quietly and consistently reshaping the built environment, each in their own way... They demonstrate courage, resilience and a deep commitment to making our cities better places to live,” she says. “And they all possess an extraordinary ability to combine intellect with emotional intelligence, quickly reading a room and designing pathways that invite others to join them in their vision.”

To women considering a career in the built environment, she advises: “Dive in confidently and remember that your unique perspective is needed to shape inclusive, sustainable spaces for everyone. Seek out peers and mentors both within and beyond the sector. Their advice and support will be invaluable.”



MARZENA HALLAM, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR AND BRAND AMBASSADOR, GLEEDS



“Construction wasn’t initially on my radar, but it quickly became a passion,” says Marzena Hallam, associate director and brand ambassador at Gleeds.

Based in a remote-working role in Melbourne since 2020, Hallam has spent over 20 years in the professional world, with 12 of those years living and working in Qatar. Since joining Gleeds in 2015, she has played a pivotal role in the company’s growth, marketing and brand visibility. Reporting directly to the chairman, she supports the Middle East region and spearheads initiatives such as the International Dispute Advisory Group (IDAG) webinars and regional newsletters.

In addition to her responsibilities at Gleeds, Hallam is deeply involved in mentorship and knowledge-

sharing. “I mentor two incredible women, run training courses, and facilitate workshops to foster learning and collaboration,” she says. She also juggles her professional commitments with running Emoly.com.au, a natural skincare business, and pursuing a life coaching certification.

Her career trajectory has been defined by adaptability and perseverance. “Initially, stepping into the construction sector felt intimidating,” she admits. “However, I saw opportunities to blend my project management skills with creativity and business improvement, and that kept me engaged.”

A key turning point in her career came when Gleeds chairman Richard Steer told her: “Don’t wait for the perfect moment – just start.” This philosophy has guided her through numerous global

initiatives, from knowledge-sharing webinars to high-profile corporate events.

Despite the success, her journey has not been without challenges. “Working in a male-dominated industry in the Middle East was daunting at first,” she recalls. “But by embracing small wins, taking calculated risks and continuously learning, I built confidence and became part of the leadership team I once found intimidating.”

One of her most significant achievements was leading a high-profile kick-off meeting in Qatar for 129 leaders, with government representatives and the media in attendance. “The pressure was immense, but I turned what was meant to be a formal presentation into an engaging workshop,” she says. “That experience reshaped my confidence and opened new doors for public speaking and media opportunities.”

Hallam is a strong advocate for

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Marzena Hallam,
Associate director and brand
ambassador, Gleeds

increasing female representation in the construction industry. “Women make up just 7.3% of the global construction workforce,” she points out. “To attract more women, we need to start young – partnering with schools, promoting role models and addressing outdated perceptions.”

She also highlights the importance of fostering a supportive work culture and implementing policies that aid career progression, such as flexible working arrangements and mentorship programmes.

Asked if she sees herself as a role model, Hallam responds humbly. “I hope so. If my story can inspire other women to step forward with confidence, then I’ve made a difference,” she says. She cites Zaha Hadid as one of her personal heroines, admiring her fearless innovation and perseverance in a male-dominated field.

Reflecting on her journey, she offers advice to women looking to enter the industry: “Be persistent, confident and vocal. Don’t wait for the perfect moment to start – just go for it. Build relationships, own your achievements and never let intimidation hold you back.”

She leaves aspiring female professionals with a final thought: “The danger and beauty of today’s life is that if you don’t move in your own direction, others will move you in theirs. So keep pushing forward on your own terms.”



MARIAM ISSOUFOU, FOUNDER, MARIAM ISSOUFOU ARCHITECTS

In the dynamic world of contemporary architecture, there are figures that stand out. One such figure is Mariam Issoufou, founder of Mariam Issoufou Architects.

An architect from Niger, Issoufou has dedicated her career to exploring the intersections of identity, place and history through her design practice and academic contributions.

"I have always wanted to be an architect, but growing up in Niger, particularly in the Sahara desert where I spent most of my youth, I did not know that this was a career," she says. "But I was always influenced by the centuries-old architecture

around me and the way adobe buildings provided us protection from the desert heat, for example. After high school I studied to be a computer scientist, and only in my 30s did I go back to school to study architecture, my first love."

Issoufou earned her master's degree in architecture from the University of Washington, as well as a master's degree in computer science from New York University. This combination of disciplines has enabled her to incorporate cutting-edge technology into her architectural practice while maintaining a strong connection to cultural heritage and sustainability.

In 2014 she established Mariam

Issoufou Architects, a research-driven firm that has since made a significant impact in Niger and beyond.

The practice now has offices not only in Niamey but also in New York and Zurich, and it is between the latter two that Issoufou currently splits her time.

The practice's notable projects in Niger include the Hikma Community Complex, a library and mosque complex that won two Global Lafarge Holcim Awards for sustainable architecture. Other works include the Niamey 2000 Housing project, a response to Niger's housing crisis which was shortlisted for the 2022 Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

Upcoming projects include Yantala Office in Niger, the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development in Liberia and the Bêt-bi Museum in Senegal.

Issoufou's work has been recognised on prestigious international platforms, with her designs exhibited at the Venice Architecture Biennale twice. In 2021 she showcased *The Makings of an Artisan's Valley* in the Arsenale, and in 2023 she presented *Process in the Giardini*.

Her impact on the sector extends beyond physical structures: Issoufou is currently a professor of architecture heritage and sustainability at ETH Zurich, having previously held teaching positions at Brown University and Harvard's Graduate School of Design.

On top of her design and academic work, Issoufou plays a crucial role in shaping the future of architecture through her advisory positions. She sits on the advisory board for Diversity in Architecture and serves as a trustee for the African Futures Institute, reinforcing her dedication to fostering inclusivity and innovation in the field.

When asked what the sector needs to attract more women, she says: "The more that women see examples of other women running different kinds of firms, in different geographies, using different approaches, the better – as someone can look at you and know that it is possible."

And as for the one piece of advice she would give to women from Niger looking for a career in the built environment? She keeps it simple: "Do it. We need more of you in this sector."

The more that women see examples of other women running different kinds of firms, in different geographies, using different approaches, the better – as someone can look at you and know that it is possible

Mariam Issoufou,
Founder, Mariam Issoufou Architects





ELLY HOULT, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER AND DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, PEABODY

“Housing is a great career for women, but we need to do more to highlight the variety of roles available and the flexibility within them,” says Elly Hoult, chief operating officer and deputy chief executive of Peabody and Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) president.

Based in Cheltenham and working primarily in London, Hoult leads the operational running of one of the UK’s largest not-for-profit housing associations, overseeing 109,000 homes across London and the South-east.

With a career spanning over 25 years, she has progressed from a supported housing officer to executive-level roles, demonstrating resilience and a deep commitment to the sector.

Hoult’s journey into housing was not a conventional one. “I left school when I was 16,” she recalls. “As a teenager, I worked as a shop steward in a hydraulics factory. Purely by chance, I took an admin job at Cherwell Housing Trust, which ultimately became A2 Dominion, and worked my way up.

“I grew up living in social housing, and from my early days working in the industry, I could see the profound difference that housing associations make in people’s lives. So housing just felt like a good fit for me.” Now, as CIH president, she is on a mission to raise awareness of housing as a career choice through her Choose Housing campaign.

Reflecting on pivotal moments in her career, Hoult credits

We need to offer more part-time roles, and we need to have a more nuanced conversation around care responsibilities (which, sadly, still fall largely on women) and what women need from their employers

Elly Hoult, Chief operating officer and deputy chief executive officer at Peabody and CIH president

Barbara Harrington, a former senior leader at Cherwell Housing Trust, for inspiring her early on. “She was so approachable and such a strong advocate for women, including junior women like me,” she says.

“She inspired me and encouraged me to go for my first promotion – that’s when I became a housing officer.”

Despite her achievements, the journey has not been without challenges. “The pandemic was particularly difficult. But we had a responsibility to carry on, and we found ways to adapt,” she says.

She has also faced sexism in the workplace and has been a strong advocate for gender equality. “As a woman, I have experienced sexism at different points in my career, and coming into the sector I definitely suffered

from imposter syndrome,” she explains. “I call out sexism when I see it, and I encourage men to be anti-sexist... It’s not enough for women to say, ‘don’t be sexist’ – we need men to say the same.” She actively mentors women in the sector, helping them advance their careers.

Among the projects she is most proud of is CIH Futures, an initiative she helped establish to give young housing professionals a voice in shaping the industry. “As a society, we often think experience is purely down to age, and I feel young people are often overlooked. We need to listen more to that generation,” she says.

Hoult believes attracting more women to the housing sector requires structural change. “We need to offer more part-time roles, and we need to have a more nuanced conversation around care responsibilities (which, sadly, still fall largely on women) and what women need from their employers,” she notes. “It’s really important we see more women in senior positions – in roles where they have a say and can make the changes we need to see.”

Asked whether she sees herself as a role model, Hoult is clear: “I recognise the position of influence I’m fortunate to hold, and I see it as my duty to pave the way for more women to come through.” She draws inspiration from leaders such as Kate Henderson, chief executive of the National Housing

Federation, as well as political figures like Florence Eshalomi MP and deputy prime minister Angela Rayner. “They’re both incredible leaders who’ve grown up in social housing – just like me,” she says. “I am sure they would have had to have worked twice as hard to achieve their success.”

For Hoult, career success is not measured by titles or accolades. “I don’t measure myself in terms of big career achievements. It’s my privilege to be in a position where I can make decisions that help people,” she says.

Her advice to women considering a career in housing is simple: “Don’t wait for things to come to you – you need to take up space, know your worth, and be confident in what you can bring.”





JULIE KJESTRUP, HEAD OF POLICY AND THOUGHT LEADERSHIP, VELUX



Julie Kjestrup has dedicated her career to influencing policy and sustainability in the built environment. Not only is Kjestrup the head of policy and thought leadership at Velux, she is also the president of Efficient Buildings Europe.

Based in Brussels, she leads external relations and sustainability strategies, ensuring that key stakeholders are engaged in discussions about the future of buildings. "My job isn't to know everything; it's to know who knows everything," she says. "We need to work very closely together to ensure buildings are fit for the future."

With over a decade of experience in the built environment sector, Kjestrup has played a pivotal role in advocating for policies that drive sustainability. "I studied in the UK before moving to Washington, DC, and later settled in Brussels," she recalls. "I originally considered working

in healthcare or biotech but made a conscious decision to move towards sustainability and the green economy. At the time these topics were seen as niche, but now they are mainstream."

Kjestrup's work ensures that buildings are not only energy-efficient but also prioritise human wellbeing. She highlights the importance of projects such as the Healthy Buildings Barometer, which evaluates the impact of buildings on mental and physical health. "Buildings influence every aspect of our lives, from our wellbeing to our productivity," she explains. "We need to move away from seeing sustainability as a nice-to-have and recognise it as a fundamental part of building design."

Her career has been shaped by the network she has built in Brussels. "Brussels is a small place in many ways, and the connections you build are everything," she says. "I have always been conscious of giving people time, just as others gave time to me." She emphasises that professional success often comes from keeping doors open and being prepared for new opportunities.

However, one of her biggest career challenges has been ensuring that sustainability and efficiency are properly reflected in policy. "We still have a long way to go in embedding these principles at the highest levels," she notes. "We must continue pushing to make sustainability a central part of building

regulations and standards."

Kjestrup says that while this has been a challenge, the conversation has definitely moved forward – with topics like renovation rates for innovation now in the mainstream.

One of her proudest achievements was seeing her work featured on the front page of the Danish equivalent of the Financial Times. "That moment underlined that I had arrived as an expert," she says. "It was particularly meaningful because it came after a personally difficult period. It reinforced that my knowledge and opinions are valued in the industry."

Kjestrup is a strong advocate for diversity and inclusion in the sector. "We need to take diversity seriously, not just talk about it," she asserts. "In Denmark, for example, some still don't see it as a priority. But diversity targets matter, and we need to meet them. Companies

I originally considered working in healthcare or biotech but made a conscious decision to move towards sustainability and the green economy. At the time, these topics were seen as niche

Julie Kjestrup,
Head of policy and thought leadership, Velux

should be held accountable for making real progress."

She also highlights the importance of creating attractive career pathways for women. "We need to ensure that women not only enter the field but also stay in it," she says. "That means offering flexible work arrangements and ensuring that leadership roles are accessible to women. We should not be afraid to set clear goals for female representation in senior positions."

Asked whether she sees herself as a role model, Kjestrup responds thoughtfully. "I'd like to be a role model, but not just because of my gender," she says. "I am a woman, a partner and LGBT+. We like to put people into boxes, but companies need to rethink how they structure workplaces. The construction sector is not known for being a first mover, but we are now looking for different profiles, including IT professionals. The industry is changing, and we need to embrace that change."

For women looking to enter the built environment, Kjestrup has clear advice: "Network. Women tend to hesitate before asking for help, whereas men don't. Most people are happy to offer advice and guidance, so don't be afraid to reach out." She also encourages women to own their place in the industry. "Don't apologise for your gender or your agenda," she says. "If you are given an opportunity, take it. You deserve to be there."



JHOANA MONTALBÁN, DEPUTY MANAGER OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE FINANCING DEPARTMENT, COFIDE



Based in Lima, Jhoana Montalbán, deputy manager of the infrastructure financing department at Cofide, Peru's development bank, has spent her entire career in finance. "I lead a team of five professionals, securing financing for large-scale infrastructure projects such as airports, ports, highways, hydroelectric plants, schools, hospitals, and water and sanitation systems," she explains. "We actively promote public-private partnerships (PPPs) to drive sustainable development." With a portfolio of approximately US\$350m (£278m), her team is responsible for structuring and managing projects that improve the quality of life for Peruvians.

Her passion for finance began early. "I studied economics at San Marcos University in Peru and, on completing my

degree, I wanted to specialise further in this field," she says. A pivotal career decision was choosing an extension course at Cofide over an internship at a commercial bank. "After three intensive months, I secured a position at Cofide in the business area," she recalls. Over the years, she advanced within the organisation and found her calling in project finance. "It is a challenging yet fascinating field – especially in a development bank, where our mission goes beyond numbers to create lasting social impact."

Montalbán acknowledges that Peru's infrastructure landscape is still developing. "There are significant regional disparities. Financing infrastructure projects helps bridge this gap, by providing essential services such as roads, electricity and telecommunications. This in turn fosters the integration of rural areas into national and global economies, promoting greater social equity."

Among the projects she has worked on, one stands out: the financing of Ergon Perú SAC, which enabled the installation of 150,000 off-grid photovoltaic systems in remote areas. "Being part of an initiative that directly improves lives by delivering reliable, clean energy was deeply fulfilling," she says. "Additionally, (it) aligned with Peru's sustainability goals and energy transition efforts." Overcoming logistical and

technical challenges reinforced her ability to manage complex, multi-stakeholder projects. "The long-term impact on local communities is what makes this project truly special," she notes.

Montalbán believes more needs doing to attract women into project finance. "Government needs to actively promote education across the country, particularly in remote areas where the gap remains significant. Addressing this is essential," she says. "The industry should engage with younger generations by supporting educational programmes in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as financial literacy initiatives targeted at women."

Creating an inclusive work environment is key. "The industry must actively provide opportunities for career growth, address barriers that hinder women's advancement, and

foster mentorship programmes," she argues. "Promoting work-life balance, tackling unconscious bias and celebrating the achievements of women will help build a more diverse and dynamic workforce – one that drives innovation and progress."

When asked, Montalbán doesn't shy away from the label of being a role model for aspiring women leaders. "While everyone's journey is unique, my experiences can serve as inspiration for other women – especially young professionals who may not see many female leaders in these sectors," she says. "Being a role model is about demonstrating that, with dedication, resilience and authenticity, women can break barriers and lead with impact."

In terms of career highlights, Montalbán names as her biggest achievement her professional trajectory itself. "Every milestone, every challenge I've overcome and every leadership role I've taken on has shaped my success," she reflects. "My career is more than a job – it's a testament to my passion, resilience and commitment to making a lasting difference in project finance." Looking ahead, she is driven by a desire to create more opportunities for people in remote areas. "Coming from a remote area myself, I understand first-hand the importance of providing these communities with the resources they need to thrive," she adds.

Coming from a remote area myself, I understand first-hand the importance of providing these communities with the resources they need to thrive

Jhoana Montalbán,
Deputy manager of the infrastructure financing department, Cofide



MOLATELA MOTSEPE, HEAD OF PEOPLE AND CULTURE FOR THE UAE, MCLAREN CONSTRUCTION

The workplace should be a positive and enjoyable place to be. Achieving business goals is important, but we also need to foster wellbeing, which has a huge impact on our mental health," says Molatela Motsepe, head of people and culture for the UAE at McLaren Construction.

Originally from South Africa, Motsepe lives and works in Dubai, where she leads a diverse HR team. She says: "My day-to-day responsibilities include shaping and executing the company's HR strategy, implementing talent development initiatives, managing performance appraisals, overseeing employee engagement and ensuring our HR processes align with business goals and legal requirements."

Motsepe's journey into construction was not planned, but when the opportunity arose, she embraced it. "Construction wasn't originally in my plans, but I was drawn

to the dynamic nature of the industry and the potential to make a tangible impact on both people and organisational culture," she recalls. Before joining construction, she built her career in insurance broking and digital marketing, where she developed a strong foundation in HR practices.

A defining moment in Motsepe's career was stepping into leadership roles that enabled her to drive organisational change. "This shift gave me the confidence to step into the construction industry, a sector I hadn't initially considered," she explains. "Leading the people and culture team in the UAE at McLaren Construction was a turning point. It allowed me to take ownership of strategic initiatives that were aligned with my passion for employee engagement and for diversity and inclusion."

The unplanned transition into the male-dominated construction industry brought challenges, but Motsepe tackled them head-on. "Being young and transitioning into a space I knew nothing about meant I had to prove myself while also adapting to a completely new industry," she says. "Leading a team of people older than me was initially daunting, but I was lucky to have an incredible team that was open and supportive."

Among the projects she has been involved with, the Chef Middle East industrial and logistics project stands out. "Although

Success in the built environment requires both technical expertise and the ability to lead with empathy, vision and inclusivity, which are qualities women bring in abundance

Molatela Motsepe,
Head of people and culture for the UAE, McLaren Construction

I didn't physically work on the project, I had the privilege of supporting the team throughout the process. Watching an empty plot of land transform into a completed project gave me a great understanding of what we do as a business," she reflects.

Motsepe believes the industry must do more to attract women. She explains: "Creating inclusive environments where women feel valued and supported, offering mentorship programmes, flexible work arrangements, and actively promoting diversity will help attract and retain more women."

Does she see herself as a role model for aspiring women leaders? "Yes, I do... particularly in the construction industry and within HR. I want to show that leadership comes in different forms and that success isn't about fitting into a rigid mould but about staying true to your values," she says. "One of the things I'm passionate about is

changing how HR is perceived – we are not just about hiring and firing. HR should be about creating a positive and engaging work environment where people feel supported, valued and empowered to do their best."

Asked about her heroines in the industry, rather than name individuals Motsepe praises women who have paved the way for those now coming through, and says: "While I've drawn inspiration from many leaders throughout my career, I also find motivation in the women I work with every day – those who challenge the status quo and push for more inclusive and diverse workplaces."

Her advice to women looking to enter construction? "Embrace your uniqueness and confidently bring your perspective to the table. The construction environment needs diverse voices to drive innovation, creativity and inclusive practices. Your experiences and skills are valuable assets, so don't shy away from leadership opportunities," she advises.

"Seek mentorship, build a strong support network (...) and don't be afraid to ask questions. The more knowledge you gain and the more confident you become in your field, the stronger you will be in your career journey. Success in the built environment requires both technical expertise and the ability to lead with empathy, vision and inclusivity, which are qualities women bring in abundance."





SMITA SAWDADKAR, DELIVERY HEAD FOR QUALITY MANAGEMENT, GLOBAL TECHNOLOGY CENTER, ATKINSRÉALIS

Engineering is not just about structures and systems; it is about shaping the future, according to Smita Sawdadkar, delivery head of the quality management team at the Global Technology Center for AtkinsRéalis.

A chartered civil engineer and fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE), Sawdadkar has spent two decades in the built environment sector, with the first 10 years in the UK and the subsequent decade in India. Based in Bengaluru, she plays a crucial role in overseeing technical quality assurance across projects delivered from the Global Technology Center (GTC).

"The GTC is a global centre of excellence and an integral part of AtkinsRéalis's delivery model, providing capabilities and talent to support our global operations," she explains. Since joining the company in 2013, she has held various leadership roles that have enabled her to push the boundaries of engineering excellence. Her passion for innovation and commitment to quality ensure that project deliveries consistently meet and exceed client expectations.

Her journey into engineering was fuelled by an early fascination with the interplay of design, construction and innovation within natural landscapes. "I pursued civil engineering at the College of Engineering, Pune (COEP), which has a legacy of producing distinguished

engineers," she says. Inspired by engineering pioneers such as Sir Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, she aspired to leave a lasting impact on the industry.

Sawdadkar's career has been shaped by moments of resilience and determination. "One defining moment was holding my daughter for the first time. It reinforced my responsibility to contribute to a more equitable world and be a role model she could look up to," she reflects. She credits her father as a constant source of inspiration, along with her husband, children and siblings, who have provided unwavering support.

Balancing career aspirations with motherhood has been one of Sawdadkar's biggest challenges. "Entrusting my children's care to others was



difficult. However, supportive line managers and a robust family network helped me navigate this phase," she says. AtkinsRéalis's flexible working policies played a crucial role in enabling her to achieve a work-life balance.

Among the many projects she has contributed to, her work with Highways England stands out. "Leading multidisciplinary teams across India and the UK was a rewarding experience," she says.

Sawdadkar is also a staunch advocate for increasing female participation in engineering. "The industry needs to highlight its modern, transformed landscape and the diverse skillsets required today," she asserts.

Retaining women, particularly during life transitions such as maternity and menopause, remains a challenge for the industry. She commends initiatives such as the Menopause Network at AtkinsRéalis, which provides vital

support to female colleagues.

Her influence as a role model is evident. "I know women closely follow my journey and find inspiration in my experiences," she says. Her advice to aspiring female engineers is: "If I can do it, you can do even better."

She finds inspiration in everyday heroines – women engineers who, though unrecognised, tirelessly balance professional and personal commitments. On a broader scale, she admires the leadership of Indira Gandhi and the scientific achievements of Marie Curie.

While being awarded a fellowship of the ICE was a significant milestone, Sawdadkar considers becoming a chartered engineer via the technical report route her greatest achievement. "Without a formal mentor, I had to carve my own path. This accomplishment affirmed that I can achieve anything I set my mind to," she reflects.

For women considering a career in the built environment, Sawdadkar offers compelling advice: "Creating a high-quality built environment is equivalent to delivering quality of life. Women are not only needed to create the world but also to sustain (it). Be self-aware, identify your strengths, and work collaboratively with confidence to build a better future."

She leaves aspiring engineers with a final thought: "Don't give up if you're tired. Pause, rejuvenate and come back stronger."

The industry is about delivering quality of life. Women play a crucial role in sustaining our communities and tackling global challenges

Smita Sawdadkar,
Delivery head of the quality management team at the Global Technology Center, AtkinsRéalis



MONIQUE SUKSMANINGSIH, PRINCIPAL AND HEAD OF THE SINGAPORE STUDIO, BROADWAY MALYAN



After more than 15 years in the industry, it is impossible not to see Monique Suksmaningsih's passion for her work in the built environment.

Suksmaningsih, principal and head of the Singapore studio at Broadway Malyan, is an urban planner, and her belief in the profession is undeniable. "We are the connectors – we have the opportunities to shape who we are with," she says. "The built environment affects our health and our wellbeing, our entire world. What we do in our professions can change lives."

Now based in Singapore, she has spent the last 14 years at Broadway Malyan, having previously worked in London with KPF and in the Netherlands. "I manage the office but I am still very much hands-on. I work with different studios across Broadway

Malyan, covering regions such as South East Asia, the Middle East and parts of India, collaborating with teams in London, Warsaw and other locations," she says. Her day-to-day responsibilities involve overseeing multiple projects while fostering collaboration within her teams and with clients.

Suksmaningsih's journey into urban planning was driven by her passion for sustainability and interdisciplinary collaboration. "What we do with cities, the importance of community engagement and community empowerment – these are the reasons I chose this field," she says.

She has had strong mentors throughout her career, who helped shape her path. "I've had very good mentors, both male and female, and good supporters. I've had great opportunities – and when you give me a challenge, I will take it and be ready for the next one."

A key moment in her career was being asked to lead the Singapore studio. "You're not doing it on your own. It was a big next step, but collaborative working helped me navigate that," she says.

Suksmaningsih believes that teamwork and support are essential to overcoming challenges in the industry. "Every project has its own challenges and, whether in the workplace or on site, collaboration is key to solving them."

One of her most rewarding

projects, she says, is the urban transformation initiative in Dolly, Indonesia, a former red-light district. "It's a project close to my heart," she says. "Empathy and humility are crucial in urban transformation, and through the Future Global Cities Programme we worked on a vision for a more inclusive future." She also highlights high-profile transit-oriented development projects across 200ha as particularly meaningful contributions to the built environment.

Suksmaningsih acknowledges that the industry has evolved to become more inclusive for women. "The industry has done a lot compared to 20 years ago. There have been real efforts to attract more women," she notes.

"We now have more female partners in architecture, and I see female colleagues who manage to be on top of everything and excel in the workplace," she adds.

She does see herself as a role

model – "I try to be," she says – but believes there is always more to learn. Her biggest career achievement, she says, is not a single project but the ongoing ability to make a positive impact. "I'm still learning, and I believe that we do have a role to play in shaping the world and communities," she explains.

For women looking to enter a career in the built environment, she has the following advice: "Never stop learning, keep being involved in challenging projects, and embrace your network and collaboration."

She also emphasises the importance of interdisciplinary thinking and inclusivity. "As urban planners, we connect different disciplines. We must consider equity, vulnerable communities, and the broader social impact of our work," she says.

Suksmaningsih has worked on a variety of large-scale projects, including transit-oriented developments and urban planning initiatives in Bangkok and Jakarta. "Bunda Malaysia and the first LRT in Jakarta are projects that stand out. They highlight the need for thoughtful urban development that integrates mobility and community needs," she says.

Her passion for urban planning remains strong, and she continues to push for innovation and inclusivity in the industry. "We have the ability to shape cities and lives through our work. That's what drives me every day," she concludes.

I've had very good mentors, both male and female. I've had great opportunities – and when you give me a challenge, I will take it and be ready for the next one

Monique Suksmaningsih,
Principal and head of the Singapore studio, Broadway Malyan

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