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The South African Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions

— CONSTRUCTING NEW PERSPECTIVES —

Loving Law & Going Far

South African women working in the Built Environment are making their mark on the international arena! Recently, Zama Ngcobo, a South African-qualified construction lawyer, was appointed to the Board of the International Building Quality Centre (IBQC), a global thought leadership centre based in Australia. This edition of Shape Shifter takes a look at Zama's journey to this achievement.

Zama Ngcobo is the founder and attorney at WMN Attorneys Inc. She manages the construction practice and the firm, which includes overseeing and training the WMN construction team, providing strategic legal advice to clients, stakeholder engagement and business development.

“Trying to make a name for myself in an industry that has not historically made space for women of colour has been the biggest challenge. It is what inspired me to establish WMN Attorneys Inc.,” she said. Overcoming the challenges by learning to gracefully accept change, and accepting that everything happens for a reason, made the journey feel smoother for Zama, who sees positives in everything she does.

“There are so many highlights... getting to practice the law that I love in a healthy environment; solving complex legal issues and contributing to the development of the



Spotlight on Women in the Built Environment: Zama Ngcobo

African continent and its people in my own small way; being able to take decisions in pursuit of my passions; getting to work with people I admire and respect; the ability to choose every day the direction I want my practice and my life to take. It has all been very fulfilling”.

The Path to Success

Zama hails from Durban and a close-knit Christian, proudly Zulu family that holds the value of education highly. At the age of 22, Zama started her career at Africa’s largest law firm; she had completed my Master’s degree in law, and by the age of 26, she had been promoted to senior associate. Only two years later, she was running a practice as a construction law specialist, advising on all aspects on project delivery, including pre and post contract services, as well as dispute resolution.

The COVID-19 pandemic was life changing to Zama in that it pushed her to start her own firm. She launched WMN Attorneys Inc. which was, in her own words, life changing and eye opening in the best way, opening many doors.

“I was unable to find a suitable space for myself in the environments I was in, which led me to establish WMN Attorneys’ Inc. during the COVID-19 pandemic. In our first two years of business, the firm and its practitioners had been shortlisted for 11 awards, which confirmed to me

that I was definitely on the right path.”

And what a path it’s been!

Zama’s recent appointment to IBQC was an exciting step in her career” and she was excited to help further expand the IBQC’s footprint in Africa and contribute an African perspective in the development of international good practice guidelines in the context of building regulatory systems.

The IBQC were also very excited on her appointment and noted: “Zama is a very senior and award-winning construction lawyer in South Africa. We have not appointed a board member in over two years and Zama’s appointment is in keeping with the IBQC’s philosophy of reputational pre-eminence in a built environment area of expertise.”

When looking ahead, Zama sees herself growing to greater heights within the construction industry,

growing her expertise, contacts, and the firm: “I see WMN Attorneys Inc. growing into a leading specialist law firm in Africa. If we can expand beyond the borders of Africa, all the better!

Out of Office

When she’s not working, Zama enjoys travel, meeting new people, seeing new places and immersing herself in new spaces, eating different foods, and exploring the world of art. She enjoys reading biographies and historical fictions that allow one to escape into a different world, while also examining the past from a different perspective.

Her belief that South Africans are some of the friendliest, most creative, resourceful, and resilient people one would ever come across is also very clearly reflected through her own life and success. And we cannot wait to see what this shooting star will achieve next!

Zama’s message to aspiring youngsters pursuing careers in the construction industry:

Keep an open mind and always be willing to learn. The world is a very big place.

Find mentors to guide you along the way but remember that you know what’s best for you.

Pursue your dreams with unwavering conviction. Don’t doubt yourself.