

THE TASTE OF DISTINCTION

Architect Mokena Makeka is the Creative Director and MD of Makeka Design Lab. Passionate about creating a sound African aesthetic, he sits on the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council for Design, is an external examiner at the USA's Columbia University School of Architecture and lectures at the University of Cape Town. He spoke at TEDxMfuleni 2011.

What's your vision for the future of architecture?

We live in a fast-paced world of instant gratification and that produces a malnourished and violent society. Architecture and exercising the right to nurture and an inspiring and safe environment is how we measure civilisation. Without this, we're mere beasts. We need to invest in architecture as we'd invest in our own children, with a long-term view to making a difference. I hope for a future where there's a more enlightened public and a state that values architects as much as poets, artists and politicians, because what we build lasts beyond the ballot box.

What inspires your innovative designs?

People – regardless of class or culture – appreciate beauty, functionality and comfort. I innovate in order to demonstrate the many ways in which these can be addressed, within limits.

What are the most important lessons you teach your protégés?

That no one can succeed without knowing failure, that you need both self-esteem and the courage to say "no", that technology without humanity is meaningless, that budgets measure cost, but can't measure value, and that you should never take advantage of a client's ignorance.

You've said you dream of opening a South African Design Museum. Tell us about it.

Design defines how we live: it structures our roads, cars, shapes the forks we eat with, the computers we use and the shoes we run in. Design's role is to make the drudgery of life bearable. I want society to appreciate the effort and creative thinking that enable our existence. A museum would celebrate these ideas.

How will Cape Town's title of World Design Capital in 2014 help the country?

It will show SA, and the rest of the world, that we have world-class talent which needs to be given responsibility and trust.

Who have been your mentors?

Matthew Barac, professor of architecture, currently based in London. He gave me the foundations for critical thinking and creativity and demanded excellence, but displayed patience. Another one was Matthew Cook of Designmatters, an architectural firm in Cape Town, who taught me how to draw and build properly.



IN A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

When it comes to individuality, exceptional brandy has a lot in common with exceptional individuals. Both set their own standards, never compromise on quality and let their mastery speak for itself. And, once encountered, neither of them is ever forgotten.



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