

'Be yourself and trust in your unique skills' - Claire D'Adorante, Paragon Interface

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

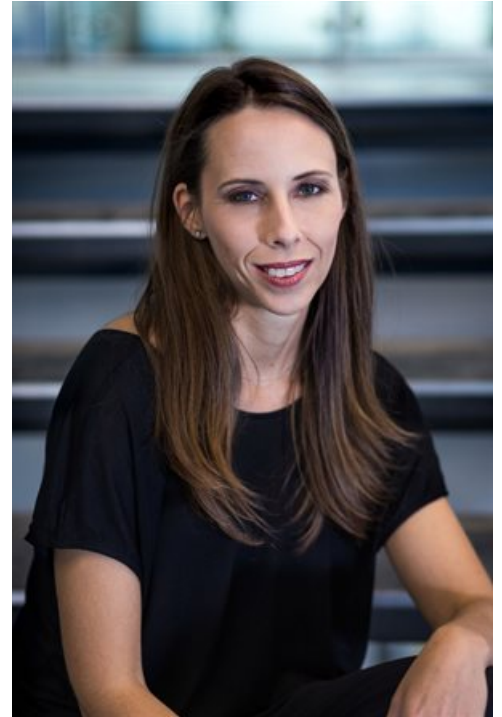
14 Aug 2020

Early in her career, Claire D'Adorante - now director of Paragon Interface - discovered interior design as a way to blend her passion for creativity with technicality and make a profession out of it. Awarded Professional of the Year in the Architecture and Design class of the Built Environment Category at the 2019/2020 SAPSA Awards, she has more than excelled in her field.

This Women's Month, D'Adorante shares with Bizcommunity a bit about her journey thus far in the industry, highlights from her career, and how Paragon Interface is supporting and empowering women in the workplace.

■ Tell us a bit about yourself and your background?

Claire D'Adorante: I have over 20 years' professional working experience in the interior design industry. I began my career in commercial interiors, then explored the different world of retail and residential interiors, but ultimately returned to my love of workplace design. Travelling to Australia in 2007, I worked for a large multi-disciplinary practice there for six years, which helped me to grow my personal design style and experience level. Returning to South Africa in 2012, I took on the role of director at Paragon Interface, which has been an incredible experience, where we secured two of the largest fit-out projects in the country – namely, the new head office for Sasol (67,000m²) and the new Discovery Campus (112,000m²).



Claire D'Adorante, director, Paragon Interface

■ Describe your role as director at Paragon Interface - what does a typical work day look like for you?

D'Adorante: The role is incredibly important to me. It means building and developing this business on a daily basis as something of my own and having built a close and amazing team who share a similar design ethos. I am hands-on with my team, I get involved in guiding people in the direction that they are going, including their career paths and growth in the industry, and believe in a collaborative design process that allows people's creativity to be explored.



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■ Congratulations on being awarded Professional of the Year award in the Architecture and Design class of the Built Environment Category at the 2019/2020 SAPSA Awards. What does the award mean to you?

D'Adorante: This award really is a recognition of some of the amazing projects that we at Paragon Interface have had the privilege of being involved with over the last five years. We have been provided incredible opportunities to push the boundaries of what is possible in terms of what workspaces can be. I am grateful to so many of our clients for the trust that they have placed in us, which has allowed these outcomes to be possible, as well as my amazing team who together made these visions a reality.

■ *What have been some other highlights from your career thus far?*

D'Adorante: The Discovery Place project in Sandton stands out. Its scale was significant, given that you are looking at a 112,000m² project. Very few people in the industry can speak of being part of a project of that magnitude in their entire careers. It was an overwhelming feeling standing in that atrium when we delivered the building. I am proud of the outcome we achieved and how it has been received by the industry, both locally and globally. The project won a 2020 German Design Award for Excellent Architecture – Interior Architecture. It was also the Office Design winner at the prestigious SBID International Design Awards 2018 in the UK. The space itself makes people's lives better every day. The staff there love the environment, and nothing is more rewarding and fulfilling than that.



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■ *As a successful women in leadership, how do you maintain a work-life balance?*

D'Adorante: I see design as an integral part of my life, as I'm passionate about what I do – which in a sense makes achieving a work-life balance easy! I try to find time each year to travel either locally or internationally, which allows one to expand your perceptions and thinking, and provides opportunities to freshen one's mind. In my downtime, I enjoy good food and regular yoga and spending time with family and friends.

■ *Based on your experience, what advice would you give to someone pursuing a career in interior architecture today?*

D'Adorante: It's a wonderfully exciting and diverse career. It requires a lot of hard work and dedication, but at the same time it's a very rewarding industry that's never boring. You need to trust yourself and learn as much as you can early on. Find a good mentor and a good company to start your career with. The first four to five years are critical, so you need to find a company that can give you a good grounding to enable you to succeed. I also believe in having a very strong work ethic, which is critical to this sometimes quite demanding career.



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■ *How is Paragon Interface supporting and empowering women in the workplace?*

D'Adorante: Paragon Interface has always been ahead of our competitors in the industry in terms of enabling women to excel in the profession, as well as developing their personal growth through structured career planning and training. We also have a flexible working policy that assists in supporting our women in the workplace. We have an amazing team of women at Paragon Interface, strong and purposeful, who have confidence, a sense of themselves and who trust their abilities. We currently employ more women than men and at director-level it is an even 50/50 split. Perhaps that's another one of our advantages in the industry!

■ *Do you have any pearls of wisdom to share this Women's Month or words of encouragement?*

D'Adorante: For women in the architecture and design industry, just be yourself and trust in your unique skills to be able to create. This is a wonderfully self-validating profession. For me, there is nothing more rewarding than to be able to create a physical space that impacts others positively on a daily basis. Challenges will always arise, but these are part of life and only serve to make one stronger and more resilient.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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