

Creating architecture for the African continent for the next 100 years



By [Louise Marsland](#)

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Architect Tshepo Mokholo credits the "fantastical house" he grew up in that no architect would put their name to, which had swooping walls, half-moon windows and narrow passages, with his career in architecture. He loved that house.



Architect, Tshepo Mokholo.

"You could argue that I fell in love with architecture in that house, or that I had no idea what architecture was." But he was hungry to learn, he told the audience at Design Indaba 2019.

Mokholo is one of 11 fellows who were chosen for the [African Design Centre's](#) inaugural fellowship. Based in Kigali, Rwanda, they worked on various projects designed to look at the future of design in Africa. Projects from furniture and product design, to architecture.

"I spent time exploring how new layers of creativity and ingenuity can be applied to existing cultural practices like pottery, weaving and woodwork, to add to the evolutionary process of making, and giving them a greater degree of value in a contemporary setting.

"I am also a firm believer that design can and should have a positive impact on communities. This can be done through

incorporating those communities in the design process. By harnessing their knowledge and skills, one can only create better design that is both appreciated and leaves a more profound impact. Through architecture, we can share skills and knowledge, and provide employment in the process, feeding back into local economies,” Mokholo said in his official bio.



On the Design Indaba 2019 stage: The African Design Centre in the hills of Rwanda, outside Kigali.

It is about creating architecture for the African continent for the next 100 years, Mokholo told the Design Indaba audience. “We want to cultivate new ways of thinking and a new strategy of design. To do that, we had to learn and listen. That genius is available on the continent to tap into.”

You can’t be afraid to get your hands dirty, though.

“We started making. We started playing. The language of making is universal. That inspired us. It made us want to create more things,” he said.

The African Design Centre opened officially in October 2018 and intends to shape and influence design and architecture on the continent.

Power to change

In an interview after his presentation with Bizcommunity.Africa, Mokholo said they worked on the basic premise that design can hurt or heal. “Bad architecture has the power to change and stimulate many things.”

“ *Economically, Africa has the potential to leapfrog the fourth industrial revolution in leaps and bounds.*

Creativity is free, we all have it. We just need to harness it. ”

One of his other beliefs is that good design should be a human right. “When we design buildings, townships, especially previously disadvantaged areas, we are communicating that everyone deserves the best design. We really need to move away from seeing design as a tool for only those who can pay for it. It enhances the disparities.



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“Designers are concentrating in urban areas and the one percent bubble, rather than using their tools to help others. Design can have an impact. That is how we start to heal people’s hearts. The Apartheid government was deliberate in their spatial design to separate us. Good design can unite us, create communities.”

Mokholo and the other fellows will move out across Africa and spread their design message and inspire others to adopt a similar approach.

“The design of the creative economy can change entire communities on the continent. Not enough people see that potential yet. Economically, Africa has the potential to leapfrog the fourth industrial revolution in leaps and bounds. Creativity is free, we all have it. We just need to harness it.”

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