



# Vaso Vaina

## Smashing Stereotypes

**Vaso Vaina**, Architect & Managing Director for Specialist Car Park design consultancy talks to us about long hours and what happens when a junior wants to climb the career ladder.

There are long working hours and dealings with the construction industry that traditionally push many women out of the profession. This is because the female has been seen to lead the home and therefore couldn't possibly manage with all the additional hours.

Did you know? The Architects Registration Board recorded a female share of 28%, but there are encouraging signs that in younger professionals coming out of university this percentage is coming up to 48%.

Vaso loved designing from a young age and never considered whether the architectural profession was more suitable for men than women. She chose something that she could see herself doing for many years to come. Vaso approached each role with the same enthusiasm and appetite to learn, grow and develop.

At junior roles, Vaso did not notice any signs from male colleagues treating her differently because of her gender. However, the more senior she became, the more her promotions were met with scepticism. Vaso recalls - "I still remember when I joined a group of male colleagues discussing difficulties on site. I was not familiar with that construction site, so I was mostly listening in, until one of them stopped the conversation and said "I am sorry, we are monopolising the conversation. Shall we start talking about handbags now?"

There are many obstacles like this that as women we need to overcome. Mostly isolation, as mothers we are unable to socialise long after work and miss opportunities for promotion. We hear it so very often but when Vaso returned from maternity leave, she found out that a male colleague replaced her. Her involvement in projects was downgraded to the point that it felt they didn't need her anymore.

So, what were Vaso's next steps? "I explained to HR at a review process my concerns over missed opportunities for promotion. I even queried the pay gap between women and men with the same roles. When nothing happened, I decided that this battle was not worth fighting. I moved on. "I found a completely different culture at my next role. Who said women cannot combine family and career progression"!

What advice would Vaso give to women wanting to smash stereotypes?

"For all those starting your career in the construction industry now, if this is what you really want to do, don't hesitate. But be aware, the right office culture starts from the head".



International Women's Day