Inside the Work & Lives of 8 Visionary Women
2018 has been called the Year of the Woman, and the design industry is ripe for its own revolution. Meet our shortlist of the leading female changemakers and boundary breakers as they share their stories.

Keia McSwain
Holly Hunt
Wendy Goodman
Deborah Berke
Aneeqa Khan
Susan Lyne
Kelly Wearstler
Clodagh
I read. I decided there and then. My father wanted me to do classics and mathematics and become a professor, but I went against him. My mother gave me 400 pounds—and my father locked me out of the house. He [only] welcomed me back about 10 months later, after the Irish Cancer Society gave me a fundraising fashion show at this smart hotel and it got written up in the Times. It got lots of photographs. I never had a game plan. I just wanted to be the best that I could be in whatever I did—ever. So I tried to be the best in fashion. When I left fashion, left Ireland, and changed husbands, I tried to start what I’m doing now—and again, I just wanted to be the best at it. Not the best in terms of fame and fortune, but in having people be really happy in the buildings and gardens I design.

They say that a rolling stone gathers no moss, but I’ve gathered lots of wisdom over my many, many trips to over 100 countries in the world. I’m always looking and testing what makes people happy, how people behave and what the cadence of their voice is to see what I can bring back, and to enrich what I’m doing. The lovely thing about being a designer—whether it’s for one man in an apartment or a 400-room hotel—is that you actually affect an awful lot of people. If you affect them in a beneficial way, you’re doing your job.

Leadership is doing what you think is right, quietly, not going on about it. It’s being an example that people can follow. I want people who work with me to say, “I feel safe with you. I can come in and talk to you about anything.” I think that’s leadership—that people feel safe with you. Showing up is also important in leadership. Being aware of the faces of people who are working with you, and if you see the shadows there, trying to find what you can do to help. I don’t feel like a den mother, but I do feel we’re a team, and each part of the team is very precious to me—whether it’s the newest intern or the highest architect, it doesn’t matter.

I challenge my team: “Have you walked through this place? Where are you going to sit? Are you sure?” I’m challenging myself at the same time. When our project director is doing presentations, I’ll treat myself like the client and poke holes in the presentation. So I’m not coming at it from a design point of view but from a hotel guest’s point of view, or from the budget point of view. I’ve always felt you have to hire people that are better than yourself. I try to follow Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh’s teachings and make everything I do bring myself back into mindfulness. I follow Buddhism because it’s about kindness, compassion and mindfulness. Those three things encapsulate the kind of person I want to be.