

INSPIRING WOMEN | ZAHA HADID

The need for greater gender equity for women in the workplace is one of the greatest challenges we face today as a society. Fashion—an industry that has much room for improvement when it comes to its treatment of women—is a top offender. For perspective, as of 2019, women lead just 12.5% of major retail apparel companies (PwC).

Disparity, however, exists across the board and fashion isn't the only industry that is scrambling to find a solution. Architecture, fashion's distant cousin, is coming under fire for the androcentric culture it has maintained throughout the 20th century—and disappointingly far into the 21st. In this post, we pay tribute to the late Dame Zaha Hadid (1950-2016), one of the most recognised architects of all time born in Iraq and a naturalised citizen of the UK—who refused to be pigeonholed by her physical identity as she took the world of architecture by storm.

Zaha, also known as the “Queen of the Curve,” is a total inspiration to us at LUXTRA where we strive to challenge the status quo of the fashion industry by innovating ethical and responsible luxury goods. Zaha broke down conventional thinking in architecture through her progressive designs which include the London Aquatics Center, the Guangzhou Opera House, and the Sheikh Zayed Bridge in Abu Dhabi.

"I think it's all aimed at making a better world," Zaha once stated in an interview with her enigmatic blend of composure and intensity. "I maybe in a way still believe in the 20th century dream that architecture could contribute to a better life" (Architects' Journal).



Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku, Azerbaijan

Designed by Zaha Hadid Architects



Antwerp Port Authority, Belgium

Designed by Zaha Hadid Architects

The context in which Zaha excelled as an architect makes her achievements even more admirable. Sexism in architecture is well documented. The 2017 Women in Architecture survey, completed by 1,277 women and 340 men of whom 70% are based in the UK, revealed that 30% of women would not recommend a career in architecture. Why? *“More than half of women surveyed...say they have experienced discrimination, indirect or direct, during the past year, including sexism, bullying and/or sexual harassment”* (Architectural Review). If this was the situation in 2017, the year after her passing, one can only imagine the discrimination Zaha encountered throughout her career, respectively.

“Would they still call me a diva if I was a man?”

These words, attributed to Zaha and which have garnered somewhat of a cult following, are a reference to the name-calling that women frequently experience as a reaction to their behaving assertively, a quality often praised in men. In an op-ed memorial for the *New York Times*, Tegan Bukowski, then an architecture and product designer at Zaha's firm, Zaha Hadid Architects, wrote: "Many great architects, like [m]any great artists, are often difficult to relate to, and Ms. Hadid, so intensely focused on her unique vision, was no exception. For male architects, such traits are often taken positively, as proof of genius. But the news media insisted on portraying Ms. Hadid as harsh, exacting, difficult – "diva" was the usual term of reference."



Pierres Vives Building, Montpellier, France

In a different memorial also from the *New York Times*, American architect Thom Mayne echoed this sentiment: "Everybody knows her as a diva and as a tough woman. She's tough because she's in a profession that takes toughness to get through it. She has this great sense of humor and is actually a very motherly, caring person. Funny, incredibly loyal. She was a sweetheart. And it's not the part that most of the world sees."

Zaha was the first female recipient of architecture's highest honour, the Pritzker Prize, in 2004. In the 41 years since the creation of the award, there have been just two women to receive the prize after her. Later in her career, Zaha did her part to change this. "Zaha did not want to be defined by her gender, and she didn't define anyone else that way, either," Tegan shared. "In her studio, she offered my female colleagues and me a chance to prove ourselves equal to our male counterparts. She quietly created an environment where I could look around and see women in positions of power next to men, not in spite of them. She showed us how gender could fade into the background if it was systematically taken out of the equation in favor of an appreciation of sheer talent. There are no token women at Zaha Hadid Architects."

We have chosen to honour Zaha's exceptional life and career by naming our upcoming belt bag the "Zaha."

And our meditation for today will be this:

"Architecture is no longer a man's world. This idea that women can't think three-dimensionally is ridiculous." - Dame Zaha Hadid




An emblematic Zaha sketch

Discover more of Zaha's designs [here](#).

The Zaha belt bag will be available in September. Follow LUXTRA on [Instagram](#) to keep up to date.

By [Jordan Borg](#)

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