

A Life Built on Innovation: Arup's James Chimeura Shares his Rise to the Top

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James Chimeura, an Associate Director at Arup, has had a journey that's as distinctive as it is inspiring. From his foundations in Zimbabwe to his current role as a leading voice in the North of England. Paving the way in the development of healthcare and cutting-edge research and development facilities, James' career has been marked by a deep-rooted passion for innovation, a commitment to community, and a genuine care for the teams and people he works with.

Although we are meeting by video conference, James is already relaxed and his charisma is shining through. And whilst I had never worked directly with James, our paths had crossed on many occasions in the past. Tellingly it was often through events supporting the development and growth of colleagues and young people in the industry. It's a theme that runs through so much of what we are about to discuss.

Early Years and a Passion for Engineering

James' love for engineering began at a young age. Growing up at home in Zimbabwe, he was fascinated by the way things worked and how they could be improved. This curiosity led him to pursue a degree in Mechanical Engineering.

After graduating, James joined Arup, the internationally renowned, sustainability development consultancy, in Zimbabwe. It was during this time that James landed his first major project role: the design and construction of new university buildings in Bulawayo and Gaborone. It was a tough ask for the novice engineer. Smiling James recalls that "Even back then, I was constantly being thrown in at the deep end, as a team we were constantly needing to innovate as we went along," James continues. "However, it gave me

the confidence to realise that I could rise to any technical challenge.” and without pause James states, “It was one of the most important lessons of my career.”

After working a few years in Bulawayo and Harare, James moved to the UK to complete a Masters qualification in Building Services Engineering and transferred to Arup’s London office. He has been based in Manchester since 2005, working on a mix of local, national and international projects.

A Career of Iconic Projects

James’ career has been marked by litany of iconic projects. And a scan of his CV, reveals developments spanning from education, health, rail and aviation to heritage, commercial buildings and technology facilities, to name just a handful.

One of his most well known early projects included the Kings Cross Station redevelopment being part of the team designing the ticket hall and concourse for the train station and London Underground’s northern ticket hall. This major project, in common with similar projects he has worked on, aided development of expertise on large and technically challenging schemes. It is clear that James is still very proud of the work that he was part of in his early career, stating “I still make a point of passing by the Kings Cross station ticket hall and the northern ticket hall, when I am down in London and time allows. It’s a great feeling having played a part in the renaissance of the station.”

Leading Healthcare Projects

In recent years, James has focused on healthcare development projects, both in the UK and overseas. One of his most significant developments has been the [Paterson Building](#), a revolutionary research facility at the forefront of cancer research.

“The opportunity to be part of something that is actively trying to change the trajectory of this disease was incredibly motivating,” James explains. “The Paterson Building is a truly unique facility that brings together patients, clinicians, and researchers to accelerate progress in cancer care and research.”

It is clear that the project which has brought together three central stakeholders, The Christie NHS Foundation Trust, The University of Manchester and Cancer Research UK, is close to his heart. “Our close working relationship with the three key stakeholders ensured that the new facility would significantly, better address the needs of both patients and the clinical professionals that would be working there.”. James continued, “the combined knowledge, expertise and commitment of the group was phenomenal and something that I still reflect on today.”

“The center itself is one of the first of its kind,” James explained. “The building is part of the Manchester Cancer Research Centre where leading cancer research scientists collaborate to develop and test innovative pharmaceutical solutions and conduct groundbreaking research aimed at improving patient outcomes and advancing our understanding of cancer.”

A Focus on Community and Collaboration

Here again we return to the theme of how James' work contributes to the improvement of society. His design focuses on helping to sustainably address the urgent climate issues in the world.

Throughout his career, James has always been committed to giving back to the community. He has worked on projects that have had a profound impact on the lives of people in both developed and developing countries. For example, his work on a new maternity hospital in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania that has helped to improve maternal and infant health rates and reduced childbirth mortality.

In Rwanda, James' team created cutting edge, agricultural buildings, directly impacting the lives and livelihoods of local people, ensuring at the same time focus on sustainability and minimal disruption to the environment.

As well as in the UK and Africa, James has also made his mark in the Middle East. His schemes include sports stadia, large infrastructure schemes and created one of the largest district cooling systems in the world.

James emphasizes the importance of collaboration. "The success of any project depends on the contributions of so many people," he says. "By working together, especially recognizing the value of local talent and expertise, we can achieve far more than we could ever do alone. We can also be part of a far reaching legacy, for the communities at the center of these changes"

The Future of the Built Environment

As James looks to the future, he sees a bright outlook for the built environment industry. He believes that firms like Arup have a vital role to play in shaping the world we live in by driving innovation, sustainability, and social responsibility. "We have the opportunity to contribute not just at the design and implementation stage, but more crucially at a policy level. Organizations such as Arup are leading the conversation globally, on how things need to change." He continues, "Our role is rightly to create innovation but we also need to be accountable for driving the transformation that is essential for society today and in the future."

Advice for Young Professionals

For young people entering the built environment industry, James offers some valuable advice to be curious, open-minded, and not to be afraid to ask questions. He says. "The industry can be daunting, but it's important that you are always on the look out for opportunities, that will give you a chance to experience different perspective, perhaps in a different technical context, setting or discipline, to what you are used to".

He also emphasizes the importance of building strong relationships with colleagues and mentors. "Networking is essential," he says. "By connecting with others, you can learn from their experiences, and find opportunities for your career growth."

Leading the Way

James is reflective as he says that one of the highlights of his career is the responsibility that he has for developing the careers of his teams and overseeing their well-being. "I see my role as critically creating the right environment for highly efficient and well-balanced teams, whose skill sets thoroughly complement each other and the projects that they are on." James continues "The leadership role has changed in so many ways over the years, and whilst developing team technical capabilities will always be important, there is also the essential need for us as leaders to be more empathetic and supportive of our teams. It is just as important that we focus on the people, not just the parameters of our projects".

As a final take away, James implores that as professionals the industry needs to be empowered at every level. Providing advice on solutions that will ultimately provide the best outcomes for the client, ensuring better and more sustainable outcomes and which overall minimizes the impact on the environment. It is a complex set of challenges.

A Legacy of Innovation and Impact

James Chimeura's career is a testament to the power of self-belief, innovation, collaboration, and a commitment to making a positive difference.

His work has had a lasting impact on the built environment and the communities around the world that his projects serve. As he continues to lead the way in his field, there is no doubt that he will continue to inspire others and shape the future of the industry.

You can find out more about the work that James is involved in via his [LinkedIn Profile](#), and a recent [short film](#) explains further the exceptional design and development of the Patterson Project.

James Chimeura is a Chartered Engineer and Member of the Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineering, American Society of Heating and Refrigeration Engineers. Alongside of which James is a registered mentor for the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. James has comprehensive experience leading project teams on a wide range of multi-disciplinary building projects worldwide, notably in the UK, Middle East, Europe and Africa. James leads the mechanical engineering team in Manchester office and Arup's Healthcare business in North West & Yorkshire. With his team responsible for the design and project delivery of new and refurbishment buildings projects. James has contributed to a number of industry publication and research papers including Sheppard, A, Gowthorpe B, Chimeura J, Whitley TDR. (2011) A Guide to low carbon heritage buildings 2011. Leeds: Yorkshire and Humber Region. Tim Whitley & James Chimeura, 'Assessing Performance and Identifying Areas of Improvement!' - North West Energy Forum Annual Conference 2008.

