

Building for social change

 By [Ann Nurock](#)

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Most of the speakers at this year's [Design Indaba](#) were inspirational, but there were some who just consumed one with emotion in their quest to do good for society.

One that stood out for me was Christian Benimana, architect and programmes manager of MASS Design Group in Rwanda.

I had the privilege of chatting to him at [Design Indaba](#) and this is his story...

Christian believes that architecture must go beyond merely the design of a building and into the understanding of how buildings impact the lives of others. For him, exceptional buildings and infrastructure can actually address the health, economic, and social challenges the world faces today. This belief is demonstrated in the remarkable projects that Christian and the MASS Design Group have designed and built.

Design, build and advocate for better buildings

In Malawi, infant mortality is a major issue. The challenge for Christian and MASS Design was how to better design homes for expectant mothers and reduce maternal mortality. They addressed this issue by building the Maternal Waiting Homes, a facility within easy reach of a hospital or health centre where expectant mothers, after their 36th week, can stay until their delivery.



Burera District was one of the last two districts in Rwanda without a public hospital, limiting access to care for a population of over 340,000. So they designed the Burera District Hospital to mitigate and reduce the transmission of airborne disease through various innovative systems, including overall layout, patient and staff flow, and natural cross-ventilation.

The hospital was built with the use of local materials – such as nearby volcanic rock from the Virunga Mountains – and labour-intensive practices to deliver appropriate and sustainable design as well as stimulate the local economy through employment. This approach reduced the cost of the facility to two-thirds of what a comparable hospital would typically cost in Rwanda, saving 2 million dollars in construction fees but also providing over 4,000 jobs. The Butaro Hospital brought together architects, builders, and doctors directly to a community in need, providing a dignified, healing space for its population and solidifying for MASS the value of purposeful, human-centric design.

These are just two of the remarkable projects Christian and the MASS Group have designed and built for communities in Africa.

Their purpose is for architects to design, build and advocate for better buildings and empower the people who build them. Their challenge to them is: “how do your buildings contribute to improving lives?”

ABOUT ANN NUROCK

Ann is a Partner at Relationship Audits and Management, a global consultancy that measures and optimizes client /agency relationships. Her proprietary Radar tool is used by 30 corporates globally and as a result she interacts with over 80 agencies of all disciplines. Ann spent 25 years plus in the advertising industry as CEO of Grey Advertising South Africa, and head of the Africa region followed by President and CEO of Grey Canada. Contact details: ann.nurock@relationshipaudits.com | Twitter @Annnurock

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