

Striking the rock... literally, Q&A with Carol Hunter

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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Let's face it, toiling away in the bowels of the earth isn't every woman's ideal job, and until quite recently, women were actually prohibited from working underground on mines. But when the Mining Charter came into being in 2002, the industry had to do an about face changing and let women into this males-only bastion.

[Carol Hunter](#), a shaft rock engineer at [Lonmin Platinum](#), is one of the women who has dared to venture into this tough environment.



Carol Hunter, shaft rock engineer, Lonmin Platinum

■ ***What made you decide on mining as a career?***

Carol Hunter: Mining chose me. I had no clue what I was going to do when I completed my geology degree. One afternoon, Anglo Platinum visited the campus and told us all about rock engineering. I thought it sounded exactly like the career I wanted to go into. It encompassed the aspects of geology I love and a technical aspect that makes it more challenging.

■ ***What is your career history?***

Hunter: I graduated with a BSc Honours in Engineering Geology from the University of Kwazulu-Natal in 2007.

I then moved to Anglo Platinum's Mogalakwena open pit mine in Mokopane. In 2009, I attained my Chamber of Mines Strata Control Certificate and went to Rustenburg to work underground as a project strata control officer. I looked after capital development and shaft sinking at their Thembelani Mine.

In 2011, I moved to Lonmin Platinum and - after finishing my Chamber of Mines Rock Mechanicals Certificate - was appointed as a shaft rock engineer at 26 years old.

■ ***What exactly do you do on a day-to-day basis?***

Hunter: The aim of any rock engineer is to ensure the people on their shaft remain unharmed. We do this by looking at the rock mass, all the external influences exerted on it and how we can control these to ensure a rock doesn't fall and injure a person.

A rock engineer's legal appointment, in accordance to the Mine Health and Safety Act, states that we must be involved in the planning and design aspect of a mine, the approval of support units and any other general rock-related issues.

■ ***What is the biggest challenge you face as a woman in the mining industry?***

Hunter: Being young, female and english-speaking in a management position within a culturally diverse environment, where traditionally women are not often in a position of authority.

So I do get a lot of resistance and have to work harder to prove to the men that I can handle my job and responsibilities. That I am able to give them good rock engineering advice, which will ensure their health and safety underground.

■ ***What do you love the most about your job?***

Hunter: The rocks! The rock mass is a big puzzle and it's the rock engineer's job to figure it out. There are so many things influencing the rocks and you have to cover all possibilities while finding a solution to ensure everyone remains safe.

■ ***Where would you like to see the industry in the next five and 10 years' time in terms of gender equality?***

Hunter: In the next five years, I would like women to realise that they are responsible for their own future and destiny. No-one will hand it to them on a silver platter. So if they want something, they must take the initiative to go out and get it and not sit in a corner and cry because everyone is being "unfair" to them when they actually haven't done anything to deserve any recognition.

In 10 years' time, I hope women are held in the same regard as the men in the same position and any misconceptions and preconceptions have disappeared. The mining environment must adapt to having women working in it, but at the same time women must also adapt to the mining environment.

■ ***What is your idea of relaxation?***

Hunter: Being 100% in nature - no buildings, no traffic. Mountain biking is a great way of achieving this. My hubby and I love to go riding on remote trails and explore places you would never see by car.

■ ***Could you see yourself in any other career? If so, what would that be?***

Hunter: In a perfect world, where money wasn't a consideration, I would open up a no-kill animal shelter for dogs and cats on a farm and live out my days looking after them. I already have four cats and two dogs in a tiny place, so I'm on my way there!

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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