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FEATURED / NEWS IN JOBURG SOUTH

FORCE OF NATURE



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Adorned with a wreath of indigenous flowers encircling her head, international climate activist, social entrepreneur and food security advocate Catherine Constantinides posed with poise and purpose for her portrait shoot for photographer and filmmaker Adrian Steim's 21 ICONS South Africa series.

Surrounded by the very ecosystem she fights to protect, Constantinides sat down with young South African photographer Gary Van Wyk to discuss what it means to be a climate activist, the power she believes that education can have to uplift society, and the vital role women must play in preserving our environment.

Set on Llandudno Beach in Cape Town, the shoot formed part of the acclaimed short film series 21 ICONS – a project that uses photography, film and narrative to showcase the pivotal moments of South Africa's nationbuilding journey through powerful people who inspire multitudes via their impact, integrity and influence. Constantinides was selected as one of 21 young iconic South Africans for season three of the series which focusses on the next generation of South African leaders, influencers and role models, and explores the lives of these creative and exceptional young people who are shaping our future. She was chosen due to her plethora of achievements including her involvement in the establishment of numerous community outreach projects aimed at preventing climate change, as well as starting initiatives that show the way forward for the next generation to aspire to be socially conscious and active citizens.

Former Miss Earth, Executive Director of Lead SA and an Archbishop Tutu African Oxford Fellow, Constantinides featured as the fifth icon in 21 ICONS South Africa Season 3: The Future of a Nation on 04

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October on SABC 3, revealing how her roots have always been firmly entrenched in a passion for the protection of our environment and the development of Africa.

"If we don't invest in looking after our natural heritage, our children and our grandchildren will suffer. We must protect the environment for the generations that we'll never meet," says Constantinides.

As a passionate humanitarian who has worked throughout Africa and across the world championing human rights issues and empowering women, Constantinides ensures that the continent is included in global conversations regarding the development of Africa and improving the lives of the broader community.

She has travelled across the world promoting sustainable community development, social entrepreneurship and food security through Generation Earth, of which she is the co-founder, an international youth leadership initiative that engages students and learners to discuss sustainable development, low carbon futures and resource management – specifically in Africa.

She says, "I'm driven by a passion to empower women through the environment and conservation to take on larger roles in their communities. Those women are the pillars in our communities, they're the women that stand up and understand that they are the pivotal change-makers."

As a budding social entrepreneur she started her own eventing, branding and marketing business at the age of 16 in order to create awareness for social and environmental issues in South Africa.

She reflects on how she had her sights on becoming South Africa's first female president. At the age of six she wrote numerous letters to President Nelson Mandela and after many months of writing received a series of responses from the desk of the President. She eventually met with Madiba and she indicates that her engagements with him had a major influence and impact on her life.

"People will look at me and they'll put me in a specific box. As we do. It's human nature," explains Constantinides. But don't dare underestimate her: "I have never let my circumstances determine who I will become. The choices that I make will determine that."

On the future of South Africa, she comments, "We can each be a building block to the kind of South Africa we believe is possible if we all live as active citizens, every single day."

While meandering in between the boulders of Cape Town's beautiful Llandudno beach, the climate activist marvels at the natural beauty that surrounds her. As the team sets up the shot, she stares out across the ocean and appears to briefly lose herself in its magnificence. "This," she says quietly, "is why I do what I do."

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