



# An Interview with Mena Uchendu-Wogu (MScSM '24)

Congratulations Mena for receiving  
Official Selection for the DNA Paris  
Design Awards 2023!

## **What encouraged you to pursue the DNA Paris Design Awards?**

Well first, I had been awarded an [Architecture MasterPrize 2021](#) prior to this recognition and that experience built my confidence to be able to compete on a global level. To have achieved something that significant did encourage me to put more of my work out there for recognition. Most importantly, I have always wanted to share my creative ideas on green buildings and how their principles and practicality could translate into sustainable living spaces, all of which are just by-products of my dedication to delivering a sustainable future for all.

## **What was the process of putting together your submission like?**

I had conceptualized the design for this entry a long time ago, sometime right after defending my undergraduate project in Architecture School back in 2019. When I learned about the DNA Paris Design Awards in December 2022, I rededicated myself to refine the design concept and satisfy all the award's evaluation criteria. The process was quite demanding, requiring extensive reflection on the Green Architecture features in the building and my meticulous attention to all that made awarded entries stand out to the world-class jury. Indeed, it took a cumulative of five months from Dec 2022 – April 2023 of relentless effort and discipline to perfect my submission entry for the DNA Paris Design Awards.

## **What do you want to see happen more in the architecture landscape?**

I hold a firm belief in the fact that solutions to many problems lie in the design phase of any project. And as architects, designers, creatives, and thinkers, it is our duty to be conscious of the tiny, detailed solutions that we integrate into the design of any space. However, I'd like to see conducive spaces and resilient structures that function sustainable within the built environment. I also advocate for the sole use of clean energy sources to power buildings, whether they are under construction or retrofits, for the widespread benefit of delivering a sustainable future for all. In my design entry, the total electrification of the building's energy infrastructure was a key component which, complemented by other energy-efficient systems, contributed to its significance as a Green Architectural masterpiece.

## **How do you feel about receiving the Official Selection from the DNA Paris Design Awards 2023?**

First of, I am deeply grateful to God, for all the ingenious ideas and specifically, the innate ability to create that He's blessed me with. Being able to compete on a global level at this age and win against millions of entries whilst handling the compounding pressure is truly a blessing that I don't take for granted. It brings me immense satisfaction to witness sustainable architecture and green buildings finally receive the recognition they deserve. In the past, green architecture wasn't as widely recognized like other typologies, but now, given the urgency of the climate crisis and surrounding factors, it's heartening to see world-class juries recognize more work in the Green Architecture categories. I take pride in being acknowledged for my dedication to stewarding such a cause.

## **What would you like to share with your MScSM colleagues and others that may want to apply?**

Drawing from my own experience, I have found that cultivating an 'Excellence' mindset is incredibly beneficial. It propels you beyond the mental boundaries and hinderance you set in your head, encouraging you to compete in spaces that you may not initially consider. Confidence is key for sure, coupled with a 'championship mentality', and you must ensure your submission surpasses the expectations of the Jury. Notwithstanding, I must highlight the tremendous value I gained from my first year in the MScSM program – the knowledge and experience obtained have been invaluable even on this global level. This program equipped me with requisite skills to effectively communicate my concept in ways that diverse audiences could assimilate in seconds, regardless of their background or expertise. Remember, the award is open to creative thinkers and makers from various fields, not only architecture. Having the ability to develop and refine your idea/design/concept/research and translate it universally is a crucial skill you can build overtime. You can only win if you stop 'Dreaming' and start 'Doing.' And if you do decide to compete at an international level, always know that I am rooting for you. Thank you!