

JUNE
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From
**VISION TO
VICTORY**

*Mastering the art of
Entrepreneurship*



Bank & Entrepreneur | AFRICA

JUNE 2025



**“IT IS
POSSIBLE”**

**MERYANNE
LOUM-MARTIN**

*Her blueprint for building
enduring beauty, business, and
impact - against all odds*

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FROM THE EDITOR

WHEN EXCELLENCE SEEKS ITS KIND

The numbers don't lie. With the box office triumph of *Mission: Impossible – The Final Reckoning*, **Tom Cruise** reminds us why he's still the gold standard for cinematic excellence. Known for doing his own stunts and pushing creative boundaries, Cruise surrounds himself with environments that reflect his perfectionist ethos.

So, when a few years ago, Mr. Cruise chose to retreat to **Dar Tamsna**—a serene luxury boutique hotel in Marrakech created by the visionary **Meryanne Loum-Martin** (our June 2025 Cover person)—it wasn't coincidence. It was alignment. Here was a place that matched his uncompromising standards: excellence or nothing.

Dar Tamsna has evolved into a larger property named **Jnane Tamsna**, with both establishments collectively welcoming high-profile guests such as Brad Pitt, Nicole Kidman, David Bowie, Iman, Giorgio Armani, Donna Karan, Princess Caroline of Monaco, Hugh Jackman, Naomi Watts, and Amelia Windsor (a member of the British royal family), heads of government and other royalty

In April 2025, **Numeris Media** had the honour of being hosted by Meryanne en route to GITEX Africa, Marrakech – the largest tech and startup show on the Continent. Our stay at **Jnane Tamsna** was epic, as you'll see in the pages ahead.

But more than a retreat, our readers sent us on our own 'Mission Impossible': to decode Meryanne Loum-Martin's entrepreneurial success. We came armed with sharp questions, all rooted in curiosity about how she, alone and undeterred, became the first black person (and female) to build and sustain a world-class boutique hotel in foreign territory.

They wanted the raw truth: the idea, the setbacks, the triumphs, the audacity, and the strategies that made it all possible.

Ms. Loum-Martin answered—with candour and clarity.

This edition offers an immersive look at Meryanne's **entrepreneurial trajectory**, her vision, and the enduring legacy she continues to craft in hospitality, design, and cultural diplomacy.

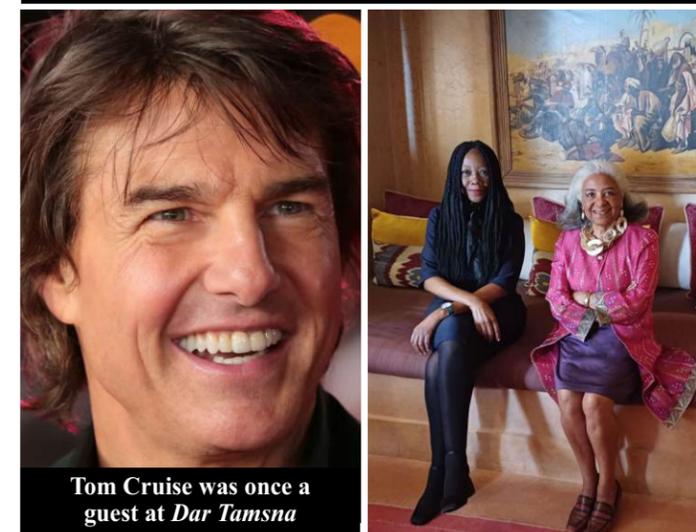
Anne Nguzi

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Photo credits: Numeris Media & Getty images
Cover photo (L): Isabel Bronts



A warm welcome for team Numeris Media at *Jnane Tamsna* (L-R): **Meryanne Loum-Martin** (Founder & owner of luxury boutique hotel, *Jnane Tamsna*); **Anne N. Agbakoba** (Founder at Numeris Media, publishers of *Bank & Entrepreneur Africa*); **Meekam K. Mgbenwelu** (Editor-at-Large at Numeris Media & Founder, Nzuko Labs); **Dr. Elizabeth Shaw** (Editorial Board Member at Numeris Media & Founder, 1000 Black Voices)



Tom Cruise was once a guest at *Dar Tamsna*

PRICELESS



A member of the Editorial Board at Numeris Media and founder of 1000 Black Voices, Dr. Elizabeth Shaw brings a nuanced perspective to her recent stay at the acclaimed *Jnane Tamsna* in Marrakech. In this poignant and personal reflection, Dr. Shaw invites us into a sanctuary that inspires a deep appreciation for cultural elegance.

At the heart of *Jnane Tamsna* lies a clear devotion to preserving heritage — all while transporting you to a paradise that extends your perception of serenity and hospitality.

Michelin-approved and thoughtfully appointed, *Jnane Tamsna* is as enriching as it is elegant. I truly did not want to leave!

This is the place you long for when seeking a true escape from technology. The TV-free rooms — which I personally love — invite you to unplug and reconnect with yourself.

Here, the intersection of culture, architecture, literature, and art creates a space where visitors can rediscover themselves in subtle, powerful ways. It's all in the detail — and every member of the team makes you feel genuinely special.



The Gardens and the Produce that comes to the table



My room was expansive, with a gorgeous deep bath and large shower

Homegrown and local produce: This raises the bar in how to honour the land, offering up living and dining inspiration from *Jnane Tamsna*. Menus depended on the produce of the day and the fresh vegetables picked from the gardens. Our first-ever dinner was a “Tender lamb shoulder, slow-roasted with garden herbs, served with crushed violet potatoes and oven-baked vegetables tossed in herb butter”. Such a treat.



Swimming pools at *Jnane Tamsna* are serene, and you could have one to yourself or share with others

Photos by Elizabeth

UNFORGETTABLE ESCAPE



Meekam Mgbenwelu (*Editor-at-Large*, Numeris Media) casts a thoughtful lens on his recent stay at the serene and storied *Jnane Tamsna* in Marrakech, distilling an experience of quiet luxury, connection, and deep reflection.

My stay at *Jnane Tamsna* was truly unforgettable — a perfect blend of serenity, taste, and style. Some of the images and memories I captured offer just a glimpse into the magic of this extraordinary place.

Breakfast

Each morning began with a beautifully arranged breakfast: fresh, organic, wholesome, and deeply satisfying. The staff were wonderfully attentive, happily accommodating preferences such as lactose intolerance (almond milk in place of cow's milk) and oil-free frying. Personal highlights? The freshly squeezed orange juice, creamy goat cheese, and vibrant greens, picked straight from the garden. Every bite felt like nourishment in its purest form.

My Chambers

Spacious and airy, my room opened to a balcony where sunlight poured in and birdsong mingled with the distant call to prayer. The bathroom, offering both

bath and shower options, was a quiet luxury. And with no television, there was space — and permission — to unwind, reflect, and truly disconnect.

The Lounge

The lounges at *Jnane Tamsna* are cosy and eclectic, with a mix of plush seating, antique furnishings, nostalgic photographs, and striking art pieces. Books and magazines lined the shelves — a true haven for the curious and contemplative.

The Gardens

The estate is graced with beautifully landscaped gardens, home to nurseries and vegetable patches brimming with organic produce. These green spaces created a soothing backdrop, perfect for a daytime stroll or a calming evening wander, when cool breeze and rustic pathways brought deep peace.

The Pool

With more than four swimming pools — several heated — there was always a tranquil spot for a refreshing swim. Whether in the crisp morning light or beneath a soft twilight sky, the pools offered both refreshment and repose.



Breakfast



Entrance to *Jnane Villa*

Photos by Meekam



The Lounge





THE AUDACITY TO CREATE

*From ground zero to global elegance —
Meryanne Loum-Martin's unshakable vision in foreign terrain*

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Every name usually carries a story or meaning—what inspired the name *Jnane Tamsna* and what does it mean?

In Moroccan Arabic, *Jnane* means "garden of paradise". *Tamsna* is the name of the village near Marrakech where I launched my first hospitality concept in 1990—*Dar Tamsna*, which means "House of Tamsna". That name quickly evolved into a brand that was discreetly known, yet celebrated in elite circles.

From 1992 to 2004, it garnered significant international media attention—from *Condé Nast Traveller* and *The Wall Street Journal* to features across Europe, the U.S., Australia, and Singapore.

As *Condé Nast Traveller* once wrote in 2002:

"Meryanne Loum-Martin, Senegalese-French corporate lawyer, who defected from Paris to Marrakech in 1995, since then becoming Morocco's most sophisticated name in travel".

And from *The Wall Street Journal* (October 2002):

"Mrs. Loum-Martin was the first to create a new type of tourism that appeals to affluent Western society. She has contributed enormously to the style of Marrakesh—not only through her sense of design."

Our first guest was **Brad Pitt**, followed by **Sade**, **Giorgio Armani**, the **Missonis**, **Donna Karan**, top CEOs,

and European royals. The place was stylish, intimate, and entirely exclusive. Our guestbook read like a social register—complete with Polaroids of **Princess Caroline of Monaco** sharing a laugh with our cook. It was in such high demand that **Tom Cruise** tried four times before finally getting a reservation.

Later, I restored a magnificent home in the Medina and named it *Ryad Tamsna*. It was a concept store in which everything was for sale – from Limoges china (custom-designed by the same artist who created bestsellers for Hermès), to artwork and even clothes.

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We opened in November 1999—just three months after the iconic Amanjena resort debuted in Marrakech. Their guests were told that the only place in the Medina that matched their standards was *Ryad Tamsna*. Success came instantly.

In 2001, *DEPARTURES*— a magazine published by American Express—ran an eight-page feature on my concept store. The cover story, titled "*The Essence of Chic*", showed a pair of shoes I'd designed using handwoven Senegalese fabric and a Tuareg silver detail. Everything was unique and curated with the warmth of a private home—and it all sold like hotcakes.

Between *Dar Tamsna* and *Ryad Tamsna*, it became clear that the name "Tamsna" was destined to stay with me.

Since 1998, I had dreamed of acquiring land to build a place where architecture and gardens could exist in perfect dialogue. My husband, an ethnobotanist, and I had already agreed that if this dream ever materialised, we would call it *Jnane Tamsna*—the garden of paradise in Tamsna.

For three years, I searched—dozens of plots, each with its own issues: either the soil, the title, or the location. Then one day, I found *the* piece of land. It felt like it had been waiting for us: over 600 century-old date palms and a rare, undulating topography in the otherwise flat Palmeraie. I bought it.

The day I went to the land registry to officially record the purchase, the clerk asked, "What will you name the land?"

I replied, "Jnane Tamsna."

He looked puzzled. "No", he said, "I mean, what *new* name will you give it?"

Again, I said, "Jnane Tamsna".

With a hint of exasperation, he responded, "So you don't know? That has *always* been the name of this land."

It was a moment of alignment—as if destiny had already written the story.

Photo Credit: Isabel Bronts

ROOTED IN RESILIENCE

How Meryanne turned heritage, hustle, and heart into hospitality greatness

Many aspiring entrepreneurs hesitate to start, due to fear of failure and self-doubt. What mindset shifts helped you push through, and take the first steps in creating *Jnane Tamsna*?

Jnane Tamsna wasn't a leap into the unknown—it was a natural evolution.

I had already learned to trust my intuition when I created *Dar Tamsna* in 1990, followed by *Ryad Tamsna* in 1999. As early as 1987, when the idea for *Dar Tamsna* first came to me, I was convinced that true luxury for discerning travelers—those who didn't equate style with money or excessive consumerism—would lie in privacy, authenticity, and curated experiences within elegant, intimate surroundings.

The unexpected global success of both *Dar Tamsna* and *Ryad Tamsna* (which I've since sold) gave me confidence. By the time I conceived *Jnane Tamsna*, it no longer felt like a risky leap, but rather a continuation of a vision that had already been validated.

Another key factor was scale. *Jnane Tamsna* was never meant to operate at an industrial level—so success was never tied to volume or aggressive growth metrics. That freedom allowed for a more sustainable and soulful approach.

Today, *Jnane Tamsna* offers 24 rooms, soon to be 30 by the end of the summer. We're fortunate to have a loyal and enthusiastic clientele. The atmosphere is constantly refreshed by creative events and retreats. By alternating between individual bookings and themed experiences, we maintain a strong occupancy rate and continue to build something meaningful—both personally and professionally.

How did you navigate the financial hurdles of launching a boutique hotel? What were some of the most unexpected challenges and how did you overcome them?

This question touches the very heart of my journey.

The first two properties I developed—*Dar Tamsna* and *Ryad Tamsna*—were family-owned and funded. But when I decided to strike out on my own to create *Jnane Tamsna*, things got far more complicated. I had just enough to purchase the land, but I needed financing to build the property. That's when the real challenges began.

Despite having an impeccable track record as a female entrepreneur—with two acclaimed hospitality ventures behind me, a press portfolio unmatched in the country, and a prestigious, global clientele—none of the three banks I approached were willing to support me. This, despite the fact that they were happily benefiting from the steady flow of foreign currency my previous properties had been depositing into their accounts each week.

“Despite having an impeccable track record as a female entrepreneur, none of the three banks I approached were willing to support me.”

I owned the land. *The Wall Street Journal* had described me as “the first to create a new type of tourism that appeals to affluent Western society.” I was on the cover of *AMEX's Departures*, 12 pages in *Condé Nast Traveller*, eight in *Australian Vogue*, another eight in *Architectural Digest*—part of a collection of 98 features over 12 years. Yet, not a single Moroccan bank would back me.

Many locals believe that the unprecedented global coverage of my work was what sparked the guesthouse boom in Marrakech. Today, the city hosts over 1,600 registered guest

houses. But in that moment, I felt crushed. Anywhere else in the world, I would have been a textbook case for bank financing. Instead, I felt trapped, disillusioned, and deeply discouraged.

I remember praying to my late mother for guidance. And then one morning, as if lifted by invisible springs, I leapt out of bed. I had remembered a letter from years earlier, written by the French head of a local banking group who had stayed at *Dar Tamsna*. In it, he wrote:

I've traveled the world and never had such fantastic holidays. If you ever consider a new project, please come to us first.

At the time, I had simply tucked it away in a drawer, never imagining that my usual banks wouldn't support my expansion. But now, it felt like a sign.

The first miracle: I remembered the letter.

The second miracle: I found it.

Those were still the days of fax machines. I called the bank's headquarters in Casablanca, confirmed the gentleman was still there, and asked for his office fax number.

I faxed the letter. Within 30 minutes, my landline rang. He couldn't have been more gracious. As it turned out, he was planning a trip to Marrakech in the coming weeks—with several of his directors. I invited them to *Ryad Tamsna*, presented my vision for *Jnane Tamsna*, and shared the blueprints I had personally drawn.

At the end of our meeting, he turned to his colleagues and said:

“Gentlemen, if there's one person who knows what she's talking about, it's this lady. I have lived her vision of new luxury. If the numbers make sense, we're financing”.

And that's how *Jnane Tamsna* came to life.

Photo Credit: Isabel Bronts

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*And that's how **Jnane Tamsna** came to life.*



AN ECOSYSTEM OF INSPIRATION

JNANE TAMSNA

Every inch of luxury boutique hotel *Jnane Tamsna* reflects the creative and entrepreneurial spirit of its founder, **Meryanne Loum-Martin**—a self-taught hotelier and interior designer. Her ability to combine heritage with contemporary sensibility has made the sanctuary a case study in brand authenticity and niche market creation.

Located in the lush Palmeraie of Marrakech, the estate spreads across nine acres of manicured gardens and organic farmland.

At first glance, it does enchant with its distinctive Moorish architecture, handcrafted interiors, and what one could call 'intimate scale' – five houses with 24 individually designed rooms. But beyond its visual elegance, *Jnane Tamsna* is quietly redefining the hospitality experience through some of its less known but truly valuable offerings.

Often under the radar, the estate has become a hub for global thinkers and creators, hosting salons, residencies, and getaways for authors, designers, wellness leaders, and entrepreneurs from around the world. It's not uncommon for casual conversations by the pool to lead to international collaborations.

Jnane Tamsna is increasingly recognised as an ideal location for high-impact business retreats and private celebrations. With multiple courtyards, meeting rooms, and shaded terraces, it easily transforms from tranquil sanctuary to dynamic gathering space—always offering an ecosystem of inspiration.

Image Credits: Hind Lahrichi. Jean Cazals. Buddy Oladeinde



Party Atmosphere



Pink Flowers Dinner



Entrance



Rooftop Entrance at Night



Moussaifir Garden Room Veranda



One of Four Pools



Indian Large Room



Courtyard



Edward Large Room



Salon Jnane



Fireplace, Main Lounge



Library



Rooftop Winter Party



Blue Garden Room



Art in the Courtyard

BRANDING *BEYOND BEIGE*

In a city steeped in history and saturated with hospitality offerings, Meryanne Loum-Martin didn't follow trends — she set them. By marrying soulful design, cultural authenticity, and an uncompromising vision of experiential luxury, she transformed Jnane Tamsna into a global icon. Hers is a masterclass in turning creativity into a brand, and exclusivity into a movement.

You launched *Jnane Tamsna* in a city with a rich history and established hospitality scene. What ideas did you have for differentiating yourself?

When I first arrived in Marrakech in December 1985, the city was a legend—whispered about in elite circles but largely inaccessible in its authentic form. Thanks to Yves Saint Laurent and his elegant, global entourage, Marrakech had become the stuff of fantasy. But that fantasy was only being lived by a very small group of people. For the average visitor, the experience was underwhelming. The city offered little more than impersonal, uninspired hotels that paled in comparison to the city's mystique. Unless you could afford the historic *La Mamounia*, the hospitality scene was a missed opportunity—and the rate of guest return was dismal.

I was fortunate to have a very close Parisian friend with a house here—one who was part of YSL's inner circle. Through him, I experienced the soul of Marrakech. I lived the discreet elegance, the cultural depth, and the lifestyle that people dreamed about but rarely accessed. That experience gave me the inspiration to create *Dar Tamsna*—a space that would allow guests to connect with the *true* magic of Marrakech.

At the time, this idea was a bold niche—offering travelers privacy, culture, and style in an environment that felt like a private home. The opportunity was obvious to me, even if the city's hospitality landscape felt like a desert at that point.

From the early 2000s, Marrakech saw an explosion of stylish guesthouses, but back then, the concept was entirely new.

What strategies helped you establish a niche, attract initial clientele, and position *Jnane Tamsna* as a unique luxury destination for the long term?

With *Dar Tamsna*, our positioning revolved around privacy, exclusivity, and scarcity. These values made it the most sought-after experience of its time.

We launched with a spectacular costumed ball, attended by guests from three continents. It was unforgettable—and it worked. Those guests returned home with stars in their eyes and became natural ambassadors of the brand in their own well-connected communities.

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The most powerful seed of a brand is uniqueness. And Africa is bursting with it. Creativity is, in essence, uniqueness—and that's what gives a brand soul.

But to be honest, these were not calculated strategies. My early success was rooted in a personal network I had built through years of study, work, travel, and friendship. The network was there before the business. What followed felt organic.

Back then, we relied on the quality of the experience and the ripple effect of word of mouth among an elite but diverse network of guests. Entrepreneurs now have a tool I never had: **social media**. Today, you can build a brand presence virtually, test your market, refine your concept—all before spending a single dollar on bricks and

mortar. If I were starting today, that's exactly what I'd do.

We are known as an *experience*. And that experience is becoming the foundation of a broader business model. I'm working on evolving *Jnane Tamsna* into a brand that celebrates Black culture and creativity.

Instead of the kind of luxury that focuses on marble or brand-name opulence, we curate a lived-in, art-filled, layered experience—with antiques, books, rugs, and culture at the heart of it. Where some define luxury through uniformity and beige minimalism, we define it through individuality and soul.

For us, luxury is not something you buy. It's something you're invited to experience.

What is your advice for hospitality entrepreneurs looking to position themselves distinctly?

Start by identifying what doesn't yet exist—or what could exist in a new way. Find a niche that doesn't require huge scale to gain visibility, but has potential for growth and scalability. That minimises both risk and upfront investment. Use social media as your grassroots “due diligence.” Let your audience help you shape the very product they don't yet know they're craving.

This won't be the path for everyone. Some entrepreneurs shine by following established models. Others, like me, thrive by creating entirely new ones.

The most powerful seed of a brand is uniqueness. And Africa is bursting with it. Creativity is, in essence, uniqueness—and that's what gives a brand soul.

Photo Credit: Numeris Media



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FROM HANDS-ON TO STRATEGIC

As a pioneering Black woman entrepreneur in Morocco's boutique hospitality scene, Meryanne Loum-Martin has long juggled design, strategy, and day-to-day operations at Jnane Tamsna. But as her vision scales, so does her leadership. With deep self-awareness, she's learning that true growth often begins the moment a leader steps back—and trusts others to step up.

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When starting a business, it is common to have to wear many hats. What skills from your previous career as a lawyer did you find most useful when beginning to run Jnane Tamsna?

One of the most transferable skills from my legal background is the ability to assess risk, approach decisions with realism, and think strategically. Those qualities were invaluable when I became my own architect, designer, client, entrepreneur, and manager—all at once. That's the true definition of wearing many hats.

Now, I try to focus more on the aspects I love most: design, architecture, guest experience, and creating a distinctive lifestyle. Of course, I'm still juggling several hats as we expand the hotel this September.

But being a former lawyer also means I'm not afraid to speak up, especially in tough situations. In a male-dominated world, particularly in construction and business, you sometimes have to raise your voice just to be heard and hold your ground with confidence. It may sound assertive or even controlling, but at times, it's the only way to move things forward.

As a foreigner and Black female entrepreneur—often the only Black person in the room—I've had to combine resilience with clarity, and

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Leadership, for me, has been a constantly evolving process. For many years, I wore far too many hats on my own—partly due to the medium scale of the business and partly because most roles didn't require highly specialised education. But over time, I've seen real growth in the team. Some employees have developed impressive skills, and I no longer need to be physically present for large-scale events—even those with over 200 guests, which Jnane Tamsna regularly hosts.

self-belief with precision. Being a lawyer is in my DNA: four generations on my mother's side and two on my father's. That part of me still shows up when needed—and proudly so.

As your business grew, how did your leadership style evolve?

Leadership, for me, has been a constantly evolving process. For many years, I wore far too many hats on my own—partly due to the medium scale of the business and partly because most roles didn't require highly specialised education.

But over time, I've seen real growth in the team. Some employees have developed impressive skills, and I no longer need to be physically present for large-scale events—even those with over 200 guests, which *Jnane Tamsna* regularly hosts.

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Even though I continue to initiate many of the larger projects, what I love most is that leadership in these settings isn't about hierarchy—it's about creative collaboration.

Our signature is elegance and style, and since I'm a self-confessed perfectionist, it's a relief that now, even when I'm traveling, a few WhatsApp photos are all it takes to reassure me that everything is aligned with our standards. It's gratifying to know that knowledge has been passed on successfully.

As I now shift into scaling up with new projects, I deeply value the teams I'm building. Having once failed out of architecture school in France because of my struggles with math, it's a special kind of joy to now sit at the table with globally celebrated architects who respect my vision. Discussing strategy and ideas with seasoned developers is equally rewarding.

Even though I continue to initiate many of the larger projects, what I love most is that leadership in these settings isn't about hierarchy—it's about creative collaboration. So today, I find myself navigating between leading intimate, hands-on projects and being part of larger, visionary teams that I'm proud to call my peers.

Photo, courtesy MLM

DREAM. DESIGN. DISCIPLINE - AND LEAVING SOMETHING GREATER BEHIND



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My advice to new entrepreneurs, especially women: Start with the mindset that your idea can grow beyond anything you imagine. Build scalability into every step. From the beginning, surround yourself with strong legal and financial advisors, and approach branding and marketing with a global perspective.

And above all, trust your intuition. If it tells you you're on to something, don't let anyone talk you out of it. Be discerning about whose advice you take—many people will have opinions, but few are truly worth listening to.

From boutique beginnings in Marrakech to becoming a quiet force of inspiration for women entrepreneurs worldwide, Meryanne Loum-Martin's journey reveals one powerful truth: scalability starts with mindset. If you believe your idea can grow beyond borders, it will, especially when backed by intuition, intention, and the right kind of advice.

What are the most important lessons you have learned about managing and inspiring a team?

Being a Black female entrepreneur in a foreign country has often left me feeling frustrated, impatient and at times, short-fused. In the early years, my team had to put up with those moods. But they would always say, 'We can handle your bad days because no-one works harder than you do.' Thankfully, with age comes perspective, and I've learned (I am still learning) to be calmer and more patient!

Inspiration, on the other hand, has never felt like something I needed to force. Being a fearless woman pursuing an unconventional path naturally resonates with people. You don't wake up thinking, 'Today I must inspire'—it simply happens. And I'm always touched when strangers reach out to tell me that my journey has meant something to them.

But when it comes to management — that's a whole different story. After years of running small businesses successfully, I hadn't really developed strong managerial skills. I relied heavily on instinct and creativity. One day, my son sighed and said, 'You may be a brilliant designer, but you're not a great manager.' He was right. That comment, and his subsequent reorganisation of the business, helped set us on a much better path.

Now, as we grow, I'm learning every day what it means to manage well—particularly how to shift from micro- to macro-management. My daughter, who's now involved in the

business, is brilliant at this. As for me, I'm excited for the day when I can fully let go of operations and focus purely on creativity. So perhaps the most important lesson is this: learning to let go isn't easy, but it's essential.

Looking back on your journey, what do you wish you had known at the start? And what advice would you give to aspiring entrepreneurs especially women looking to create something truly unique, for posterity?

Looking back, I wish I had understood the full potential of turning an idea into a brand. Not having a global vision from the start limited how big I allowed myself to dream. Perhaps the timing wasn't right back then—but if I had approached the business with scalability in mind from day one, my strategy would have been much broader and more ambitious.

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That said, I'm grateful the business grew successfully and that I'm now fully engaged in scaling up. It's only in recent years that I've truly grasped how my personal journey has resonated,



Meryanne and her daughter, Thaïs

especially with a new generation of women entrepreneurs, particularly in the U.S. Whether I'm invited to speak publicly or give interviews, I now see the impact my story has had.

If I had known how powerful that could be—as a tool to inspire and empower—I would have aimed even higher right from the start.

My advice to new entrepreneurs, especially women: Start with the mindset that your idea can grow beyond anything you imagine. Build scalability into every step. From the beginning, surround yourself with strong legal and financial advisors, and approach branding and marketing with a global perspective.

And above all, trust your intuition. If it tells you you're on to something, don't let anyone talk you out of it. Be discerning about whose advice you take—many people will have opinions, but few are truly worth listening to.

Photo credits: Noir House (L) & Terry Tsiolis (R)

