



# WOMEN IN BUSINESS WEDNESDAYS INTERVIEW

MIJONG LEE  
FOUNDER AND CEO  
EMMELLE Design & MIJONGLEE

**WF: What motivated you to go into the business of fashion and how did you know it was your calling?**

**MIJONG:** Even when I was a student of Sociology minoring in art at Cornell, the Fashion and how it connects with empowerment and empowered women has always fascinated me.

As a young child, I always remembered watching my mother (a true female trailblazing entrepreneur) metamorphosize at her friend's couture salon from a business woman coming in from a meeting, to a glamorous wife of an ambassador to sweep into a gala. I truly believe that the multidimensional life of an empowered woman should be reflected in her choice of wardrobe, not dictated by the trends.

**WF: Where do you draw inspiration from for your clothing designs?**

**MIJONG:** Each collection starts with an original print that draws inspiration from an Artist, art movement or regional art tradition of a travel experience.

But the true inspiration for any design that I do is the women that inspire me.  
I am surrounded by them in our amazing Women's forum.

**WF: Where have you found your support systems and how crucial have they been in the development of your brand MIJONGLEE?**

**MIJONG:** I am a member of WPO and Women's Forum as well as a sponsor of C-200. I have found that women helping other women is a sisterhood of strength and support that cannot be measured in any other format than generosity of women empowered by others that came before, are held by those within the embrace and will become a continuous foundation for those that come after.

**WF: What are some changes you would like to see within the fashion industry?**

**MIJONG:** Our fashion industry has been at the cusp of change for the last few years. The implosion has just been accelerated by the onslaught of COVID. When renowned brands like Burberry and H&M are both burning inventory, we know something is drastically wrong.

The enslavement of women through, beauty dictates, trends, and exclusionary, manipulation had to end. I applaud the back to basics of quality, originality and timelessness that support sustainability and long term value of clothing.

**WF: If you could choose, what has been your most favorite collection you have created?**

#WBW #wfnnyWBW #womensforumNY



# WOMEN IN BUSINESS WEDNESDAYS INTERVIEW

**MIJONG:** As a print, I love the Frida Kahlo inspired calla lilies of Spring 2018 and Yayoi Kusama inspired Spring 2020 brush print. So, those 2 are some of my favorites.



**WF:** What has been your most memorable experience in your career thus far?

**MIJONG:** When I collaborated with a photographer Ernestine Ruben and created 6 pieces for the LA MAISON EUROPÉENNE DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE, I was so honored to breach the 2 dimensions of photography with 3 dimensions of garment.

I also had the honor to have dressed for a long time 2 secretary of State (Madeline Albright and Hillary Clinton). Amazing inspirations of empowered strong women for all of us

**WF:** Has COVID-19 affected your business and if so, how have you adapted your business to meet these current social changes?

**MIJONG:** It has been a journey, the last 6 months. In March, I had returned from the most successful beginning of trunk show season and found that I had contracted the Virus, given it to my husband. As we were quarantined, my business was shut down in all 3 aspects of retail, manufacturing and design. I had to furlough or let go of 99% of my employees and had to pivot in a matter of weeks into PPE gown production.

I am grateful that through stubbornness and a lot of support from women's Forum sister members, I was successful in this pivot. I formed a coalition of small NYC manufacturers and managed to keep the jobs in the industry through city contracts for the PPE gowns.

#WBW #wfnYWBW #womensforumNY



# WOMEN IN BUSINESS WEDNESDAYS INTERVIEW

It has been very tough but it has also given me a chance to do good in our community as well as maintain our companies for a chance to rebound, reassess for the next era.

**WF: What are some tips or advice you would give to other female entrepreneurs who are just starting out?**

**MIJONG:** It has always been said that we need to be committed to our vision and our passion. Persevere through the inevitable difficult periods. I add to this, do not be blinded by your passion. Remember to lift your vision above and be able to assess objectively.

Be open to different peripheral sights that surround your vision so that you are able to pivot, short term or long term when you need to. We need to be able to bend when the gust is too strong so that we don't break. I have had to learn this just this year and I am grateful.