Entrepreneur wears neon power dress to make a hi-vis statement about vulnerability in construction

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OCTOBER 2023 — Entrepreneur Kelly Cartwright wowed guests at the National Federation of Builders' Top 100 Influential Women in Construction (WIC) Awards last night, wearing a showstopping gown fashioned entirely from PPE to highlight the importance of authenticity and vulnerability in the sector.

The owner of Core Recruiter, a specialist construction recruitment company based in Norwich, was nominated for the Local Hero (Eastern Region) category. Her neon-orange dress was specially made for the event by dressmaker Hannah Wilde and was paired with her steel-toe-capped boots to complete the look.

"This dress is my armour," states 31-year-old Kelly. "I asked Hannah to make it because I wanted to feel strong and confident at this year's ceremony.

"I feel most comfortable out on a building site, wearing my PPE. I don't feel that way in a ballgown at an awards ceremony. You can only be comfortable when you wear something that truly resonates with who you are, so I've often joked about going to an event in my PPE!

"Women always power dress for confidence. For instance, wearing a blazer might make you feel powerful, or popping on your favourite heels might put an extra swing in your step. Clothes are a powerful way to express yourself, while shielding vulnerabilities, insecurities or buried emotions. Why should it be any different in construction?"

As the winner of last year's Ally award, Kelly is vocal about the importance of authenticity in the sector, living by her motto 'you can't be what you can't see'.

By making her own career path highly visible, she hopes to encourage more equality, diversity and inclusion into the industry, bringing unique skills and perspectives with them. And armour can help to quell anxiety about bucking industry stereotypes.

As a woman who has worked in the construction sector for more than a decade, she emphasises that you should be comfortable with who you are and not change your identity to suit your industry. You may sometimes feel that your differences make you vulnerable, but if you're driven and are good at what you do, your differences should be no limit to how far you can go.

It's important to note that Kelly has also allowed her vulnerability to be as visible as her success, demonstrating that everyone experiences moments of insecurity. She recently opened up about her struggles with anxiety, showing that social media doesn't paint an honest picture of success. Earlier this year, she published images of herself getting ready for an awards ceremony on LinkedIn, with an anxiety-induced rash visible on her chest.

She used the photograph to highlight that although she may seem confident on the outside, she often suffers from doubt, Imposter Syndrome and anxiety – particularly at awards ceremonies and public-speaking events. She wore armour at this year's WIC Awards to simultaneously shield and draw attention to her feelings of vulnerability.

The dress is also a nod towards the Chartered Institute of Building and Construction Management magazine's #PPEthatfits campaign, which highlights the lack of diversity in protective equipment, and how this is having an impact on safety on site, while also hampering the industry's ability to attract and retain a more diverse workforce.

Their research found that the majority of protective clothing isn't suitable for a diverse workforce, potentially leaving them at risk on building sites. By using 6 extra-large hi-vis vests to make a dress, Kelly hopes to reinforce the need for change in this area, to ensure everyone feels both confident, inclusive and safe on building sites.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

IMAGE: https://we.tl/t-cQ29yMjURk

IMAGE CAPTION: Kelly Cartwright wows attendees at the Women In Construction Awards 2023 in custom-made PPE dress

IMAGE CREDIT: Core Recruiter

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ABOUT CORE RECRUITER:

Founded in 2016, Core Recruiter is a specialist recruitment agency for the construction industry, serving businesses across the UK.

With more than 20 years of combined experience, the team can place temporary and permanent staff both on-site and off.

Learn more at www.corerecruiter.co.uk.

ABOUT HANNAH WILDE:

Hannah Wilde is an expert dressmaker based in Norwich, Norfolk. She specialises in making and adjusting bridal and evening wear, but also has expertise creating bespoke gowns and items for prestigious projects in London. Her business has consistently grown in recent years, which saw her expand into new premises on the outskirts of Norwich in January 2023.

Find out more at www.hannahwilde.co.uk

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