

## FROM WHEELBARROW PUSHER TO TRUSTED CRAFTSMAN - MAKING WAVES IN CONSTRUCTION WORLD

**Concrete Shutterers specialise in building structures from concrete materials and in ensuring that concrete is poured correctly. They prepare the site by setting up the forms in which concrete is poured to create walls, structures, pillars, and walkways. Meet Petrus Munjengo, an experienced concrete shutterer, employed by construction company, CSV Construction, at its Walvis Bay-based operations. This is his story.**

### BOYHOOD CARPENTRY

Born at the Okawonde village in the Oshikoto region, Petrus Munjengo attended the Esheshete Combined School, where he developed an early fascination with woodwork.

“I was just another village boy. You go to school in the mornings, and in the afternoons, you help with chores before setting off to play with friends. And although as a family, we were not well-off and didn’t have much, those were carefree days, nonetheless”, Petrus recalls. “I was happiest when I could land a few nails and planks to do some woodwork. At first, I would carve out toys; and later, armed with a borrowed hammer, I ventured into making my very first furniture pieces”, he adds.

Although they were very basic and rudimentary beds and chairs, Petrus’ hand-made home furniture pieces served their purpose and his self-taught skill as a carpenter continued to grow. “Working with wood will always be my first love. Wood is such a wonderful material, so easy to manipulate. I still cannot walk past a scrap piece of wood without picking it up and seeing its potential to be turned into something useful. It’s difficult to explain. It’s just something that comes naturally”, Petrus shares.

### EARLY ADULTHOOD

Circumstances were difficult; and after completing Grade 10, Petrus left the village to stay with his uncle in the capital and find a job through which to supplement the family’s income. “I didn’t want to leave school so early, but I did not have much of a choice”, he notes.

At the time, the capital city experienced a construction boom and Petrus, at his very first attempt at job-hunting, landed an opportunity as a construction hand. “You have to start somewhere, I guess. They told me that I didn’t have any experience and that they could only take me in to push wheelbarrows. I had to wake up very early to get to the site and a friend helped me out with safety boots. Those years were tough, but a man’s got to do what a man’s got to do”, Petrus reminisces.



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**Petrus Munjengo**

Concrete Shutterer

Petrus was young and fit and excelled as a construction hand. “I enjoyed working in the industry. Seeing how artisans come together and building a home, or office from scratch, and knowing that you played a part in the process, warms the heart. Yes, it’s hard and low-paying work, but at the same time, so rewarding” he explains.

## INFORMAL APPRENTICESHIP

The low wages were discouraging, however, and Petrus realised that for his circumstances to improve, he had to master a higher level construction trade.

Traversing the capital’s construction scene, moving from one construction site to the next, he ended up at CSV Construction, where his dedication, energy and ability to execute instructions to the tee, soon made a strong impression on the company’s owners. It is also here where his innate woodwork talent was identified, which led to his employers agreeing to teach him the finer tricks of the carpentry trade, through an apprenticeship.

“My supervisor, Mr. Dan Groenewald saw my potential and I was given the opportunity to work as a carpenter. I think what also played a big part in them giving me this opportunity, were my dedication, energy and ability to execute instructions to the tee. I made a strong impression on the company’s owners and they also saw that I was a strong leader, who commanded the respect of my team members”, Petrus recalls.

“I grabbed the opportunity with both hands. Although I’ve always been a fast learner when it comes to working

with my hands, I still did everything I could to learn as much as I can. At was more or less at that point in time when I started seeing a future for myself in the construction industry”, he adds

## FORMAL TRAINING

Petrus’ growth and the strong onsite-leadership he displayed convinced the company’s owners to enroll him in a specialised construction course in South Africa’s Eastern Cape Province.

“Only when they called me into the office and shared the good news did I realise that I would need a passport, and on top of it, a study visum. Man, did I rush to get my passport and visum applications submitted? Luckily, everything just fell into place and I was ready to cross the Orange River”, Petrus shares.

Arriving at the Boland College in the Western Cape where he was enrolled for a Junior Construction Foreman course proved daunting. Petrus was the only Namibian enrolled and did not have any friends. “All my peers were South African students. So, I just had to adjust and make new friends”, he shares.

Passing the first level with flying colours, Petrus re-enrolled for the second level, which he also completed with ease. “My strong interest in the subject matter, and the fact that I already had proper practical work experience, which many of my classmates didn’t have, played a big role. Although challenging, the training courses were well structured and aligned to best industry practice”, recalls Petrus.

## TEAM LEADER

Working alongside other construction workers, shutterers erect and set forms for concrete structures, building and clamping wooden moulds, using appropriate hand tools. For strength and structural integrity, rebar or wire meshes are introduced for reinforcement.

“In as much as shuttering requires technical skill, at the end of the day, it is all about preparation. Have you done your site inspection? Have you determined and ordered the materials you will require? Have the materials been delivered? Is the steel rebar up to standard a d ready? When are the concrete trucks arriving? Are my fabrications ready? Have inspections been done? Often people think we just make wooden boxes in which we pour concrete. It’s not as simple as that”, he explains.

Now in full-time employment, Petrus has graduated to more complex work assignments, overseeing his own teams of construction workers and rendering key support to CFC Construction’s projects at the coast. “My team and I already wrapped up three pump stations projects at Swakopmund and another dam project at Walvis Bay.



Not only am I keep on gaining experience working on bigger projects; as a team leader, I'm also being exposed to other areas of the work such as managing people on-site. I am growing. I have two teams now - one for shuttering and one for concrete.

## HARDY WORK

Like most construction trades, concrete shuttering is strenuous work, involving frequent kneeling and stooping, and the lifting of heavy materials.

"You need physical strength and stamina. It's not an environment for pen pushers. Adhering to safety requirements is very important, as well, as we often work at high elevation or in deep trenches. You need to be on top of your game, throughout", Petrus stresses.

"However, it's not only about physical dexterity and attentiveness to safety. You also need to know your way around the tools and equipment we use in our line of work, as well. You need to have good problem-solving skills. You need to be industrious and observant", he adds.

Concrete shutterers often work nights and weekends to accommodate construction schedules. "That is why keeping fit is so important. In as much as no one plans for delays, they do occur, nonetheless. However, completion dates are seldom adjusted; and often you have no choice but to put in the extra hours and extended shifts", Petrus shares. "That's why looking after my body is so important. I keep fit. Exercise and jogging have become part of the daily regimen", he adds.

## JOB ASPIRATIONS

Petrus continues to impress. He doesn't mind the heavy lifting and irregular hours. His positive demeanor and dedication to quality workmanship and safety continue to stand him in good stead.

"I've learned a lot of things in this company. My future lies in construction and I am really privileged to be in a position now where I can just continue to learn about this exciting sector. I really want to repay my employer for the trust they keep on bestowing in me, and for the investments they continue to make in my growth", he notes.

The future looks bright for this passionate and zealous artisan. "My future plans are to just keep on growing, and ascending the career ladder. My next target is a promotion to full foreman level and I know that if I keep on doing what I'm doing, I'm going to land that promotion soon. I'm taking it step by step. Pushing wheelbarrows was just the first step in my journey", Petrus highlights.

"Here it is about open communication. My supervisors are clear about their plans to upskill me to a level where they can with confidence delegate me to take full charge of future sites with my teams", he adds.

## BALANCED LIFESTYLE

Away from the outdoor extremities that come with his job, Petrus enjoys spending time with friends and listening to music. "That's the name of the construction game. This line of work often takes you away from your family and loved ones. My fiancée stays up north and we video call each other at least once a week. I also keep in touch with my parents and uncle whom I look up to when I need advise", shares Petrus.

Joinery is another hobby. When the opportunity presents itself, Petrus offers his services to homeowners and other clients, as a joiner.

"I do both construction carpentry and joinery. I'm a very good joiner and I've made and installed kitchen and bedroom cupboards for many people, in my spare time. Not only does it supplement the income; it also keeps me grounded, because I'm reminded of my early days in the village, where it all started for me", he concludes.

Petrus Munjengo: Dexterous, skillful and competent. His story teaches us that often the best way to success is to quit talking and to start doing. Starting out as a construction hand, and now with a bright future in the construction industry, his journey imparts on us that there is simply no substitute for hard work; that it is about consistency and persistence in all we do, every day. He is working his dream. He is living his passion.

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