

Entrepreneur Mpho Mohaswa builds a bright future in beverages

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

21 Jun 2022

An engineer by profession, Mpho Mohaswa left her corporate career in the oil and gas industry to pursue the life of an entrepreneur and founded beverage company Precious and Pearl Brands, which locally manufactures growing ginger beer brand Ghemere.



Mpho Mohaswa, founder of Precious and Pearl Brands. Source: Supplied

Ghemere is a non-alcoholic ginger beer, available both as concentrate and convenient ready-to-drink formulas. Mohaswa, who hails from the small town of Burgersfort in Limpopo, set out to recreate the flavour and nostalgia of traditional South African ginger beer and make it commonplace in the South African household.

From humble beginnings mixing ginger beer in a garage, Mohaswa has worked to secure listings for Ghemere at prominent supermarkets including Pick n Pay, Takealot, Food Lover's Market and Spar. Her entrepreneurial efforts have [secured her a spot](#) on *Mail & Guardian's* 2022 list of 200 Young South Africans.

The young business owner was also declared the winner of the inaugural [Firstwatch Entrepreneur's Challenge](#) in 2019, earning her prize money, business training and media exposure for her blossoming brand.



Source: Supplied

The Covid-19 pandemic led to a further boost for Mohaswa's 5-year-old beverage business, as consumers looked towards immune-boosting ingredients such as ginger to improve their health. Building on this promising momentum, Mohaswa is eyeing further retail expansion for Ghemere, with potential to grow the business beyond South African borders.

Here, she talks us through her business journey and plans for the brand.

■ ***What inspired you to take the leap from chemical engineering into beverage manufacturing. And why ginger beer in particular?***

My corporate job was demanding a lot of travelling and as I was trying to build a family life, that didn't work for me. I wanted something that will allow me family time and to work flexible hours, so starting a business just made sense.

I was inspired to impact communities in townships through financial, educational and social impact. With regards to financial impact, we have people who make profit selling our product and with Covid we found that this model has helped a lot of people who took pay cuts and lost jobs. For social and educational impact, we are involved with primary schools to spark creative thinking paired with education.

I saw a gap in the market. Ginger beer is a loved drink in South Africa, especially in townships where they serve it at every special occasion like weddings, funerals, etc. I realised that the knowledge has not been passed on from the older generation to the younger generation and many people are frustrated by the process of making it. We wanted to bring

convenience to the new age makoti, auntie and mom.

Keeping in mind the historical value and cultural relevance, the enormous task then becomes how to continue the legacy of this iconic beverage and package it in such a way that it appeals to today's consumers. Our long term vision is to make Ghemere a household brand that can be enjoyed any time. We want to be part of the grocery list.



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❑ ***Can you take us through the process you followed establishing your brand – from concept to launch?***

At first we wanted to see how people will receive the product, therefore pre-launch we conducted sample giveaways and received feedback to improve on taste until we eventually got the right formula that a lot of people liked. We then registered the company and started selling.

We used to operate in a garage, mixing in buckets until the business and demand grew and today we have a fully fledged facility which has food safety certificate that allows us to sell at retail spaces like Pick n Pay and Shoprite.

❑ ***What have been some of the key challenges you've faced and overcome when launching and scaling your business?***

Building credibility was a big challenge in the early stages but word of mouth helped us as we grew. When scaling the challenge was access to funding and actually moving from a one-man-show to hiring and managing staff.

I believe sharing your business vision with your staff helps them envision growing with the brand and in turn they give their all with the knowledge that they will grow within the company.

❑ ***Ghemere Ginger Beer is now available from retailers including Takealot and Food Lover's Market. How did you go about getting listed at retailers? Any advice for small brands trying to do the same?***

We had to knock on their doors and we were lucky they loved the product. We also have a food safety certification which is a must-have to list with retailers. We have now added a few Spars and Pick n Pays. My advice is to do your homework on the requirements in your industry but also make sure to produce quality products that are well branded.

❑ ***The Covid-19 lockdown proved to be beneficial for the growth of your business. What do you view as the reasons behind this?***

We benefitted from the fact that ginger was being celebrated for boosting the immune system and that led to people mixing our ginger beer with lemon, honey and cayenne pepper. Also, during lockdown a lot of people were baking and it turns out Ghemere goes well with scones. Events also changed to incorporate more ready-to-go products and we have a ready-to-drink Ghemere to cater for that.



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❑ ***What have been the highlights of your entrepreneurial journey so far?***

Impacting people's lives through my story and inspiring them. Winning awards, which for me is brand validation that I'm on

the right track. The business growing to where it is now.

■ ***How would you like to see Precious and Pearl Brands grow and evolve over the coming years?***

We recently got great news when our listing with Shoprite was approved, so our products will be available there too. We are also listing with Makro online. So we're working on listing with retailers nationwide and eventually exporting into neighboring countries like Botswana, Lesotho, etc. Then we plan to move abroad to give international consumers a different taste in their market.

■ ***In light of Youth Month in South Africa, what advice do you have for other young budding entrepreneurs who believe they're sitting on a good idea?***

Start where you are with what you have. Ask for help and remember life is never a straight line.

ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

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