

THE VISIONARY ISSUE · NO. 01 · MMXXVI

FOUNDRESS

THE WOMEN WHO BUILD THE WORLD

THE POWER LIST

Twelve Women, Twelve Empires



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Mira Murati & May Habib — the women rewriting artificial intelligence

Sara Blakely's \$5,000 bet that built Spanx — and the art of the founder-led exit

Solar roofs to bean-free coffee: meet climate's new vanguard

Plus: The Female Founders Fund launches — capital with conviction

THE CLASS OF MMXXVI

Melanie Perkins

CANVA

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SPANX

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WRITER

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CLASSPASS

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BUMBLE

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STITCH FIX

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FOUNDRESS

THE VISIONARY ISSUE

This issue celebrates twelve women founders reshaping technology, AI, beauty, fashion, fintech, climate & food across the world.

From a quarter-billion-user design empire to the labs rewriting artificial intelligence, from bean-free coffee to rooftop solar — they turned conviction into culture, and proved the next great company can begin anywhere.

EDITORIAL

Editor-in-Chief

AK

Founders are profiled for their vision, charm & craft. Figures reflect the most recent public reporting, MMXXVI.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Twelve women. Twelve *empires*.

They were told it couldn't be done — by investors, by industries, by the quiet arithmetic of expectation. They did it anyway. From a living room in Perth to a kitchen table in London, from a Mumbai trading floor to a Beverly Hills brow studio, these founders turned conviction into culture. What unites them isn't a sector or a city. It's charm with steel underneath — the rare gift of making the world want what they imagined.

With admiration,

The Editors of Foundress

Melanie Perkins

CO-FOUNDER & CEO · CANVA

The schoolteacher's daughter who turned "too hard" into a design empire used by a quarter-billion people.

Anyone, anywhere, can design anything.

— MELANIE PERKINS

Melanie Perkins was nineteen, teaching design software in Perth, when she decided it shouldn't be so hard. Fusion Books, run from her mother's living room, became Canva in 2013 — after more than a hundred investors said no. Today the platform serves 265 million people a month and has made her one of Australia's wealthiest self-made women, most of which she has pledged to give away.

WHAT'S NEXT · THE FOUNDRRESS TAKE

An AI art director, not just an assistant

Canva's edge is taste at scale; the prize is an agent that briefs, designs and ships a brand's entire identity from a single line. Perkins could turn 'anyone can design' into 'anyone can run a creative studio.'



FOUNDED

2013

HEADQUARTERS

Sydney, AU

SECTOR

Technology

VALUATION

US\$42 B

OFF THE RECORD

Learned to kitesurf to win over Silicon Valley's investors — many of whom only took meetings on the water.

SIGNATURE LOOK

Sneakers, easy tailoring and a refusal of corporate pomp.

Sara Blakely

FOUNDER · SPANX

The fax-machine saleswoman who cut the feet off her pantyhose and built a billion-dollar house with no investors.

Failure was never trying.

— SARA BLAKELY

With five thousand dollars in savings and a pair of scissors, Sara Blakely cut the feet off her control-top pantyhose and invented modern shapewear. She built Spanx with no outside funding and relentless cold calls, becoming the youngest self-made female billionaire in 2012. When she sold a majority stake to Blackstone in 2021, she gave every employee two first-class tickets and ten thousand dollars.

WHAT'S NEXT · THE FOUNDESS TAKE

Shapewear that scans and personalises

Pair Spanx with AI body-scanning and every piece becomes effectively made-to-measure at scale — fit as a data problem, finally solved. The brand stops selling garments and starts selling a personalisation platform.



FOUNDED

2000

HEADQUARTERS

Atlanta, USA

SECTOR

Consumer &
Fashion

VALUATION

US\$1.2 B

OFF THE RECORD

Trained as a stand-up comic, keeps her ideas in spiral notebooks, and wrote her first patent herself to save the legal fee.

SIGNATURE LOOK

A swipe of signature red lip and crisp tailored white.



May Habib

CO-FOUNDER & CEO · WRITER

The immigrant founder building full-stack AI that enterprises actually trust — and one of the few women running an AI unicorn.

AI should work for the enterprise, not just impress it.

— MAY HABIB

Born in Lebanon and raised in Canada, May Habib co-founded Writer to bring generative AI into the heart of the enterprise — not as a chatbot, but as a full-stack platform of models and agents companies can trust with their brand and data. A Harvard graduate and serial founder, she has built Writer into a multibillion-dollar business and become one of the most prominent women leading an AI company.

WHAT'S NEXT · THE FOUNDRESS TAKE

From copilots to autonomous agents

The next leap is AI co-workers that run whole workflows end-to-end — research, drafting, approvals — inside a company's own guardrails. Whoever makes that trustworthy at enterprise scale owns the category, and Habib has the head start.



FOUNDED
2020

HEADQUARTERS
San Francisco,
USA

SECTOR
Artificial
Intelligence

VALUATION
≈ US\$1.9 B

OFF THE RECORD

Speaks Arabic, French and English, and has become one of enterprise AI's clearest voices — minus the hype.

SIGNATURE LOOK

Polished, precise and quietly commanding.

Payal Kadakia

FOUNDER & EXEC. CHAIR · CLASSPASS

The MIT-trained dancer who turned a search for the perfect ballet class into a global fitness empire.

Movement is my first language.

— PAYAL KADAKIA

Payal Kadakia couldn't book a single dance class one frustrating afternoon — so she built the platform that would fix it. ClassPass, launched in 2013, grew into a global subscription network linking millions to studios across the world's cities and reached a billion-dollar valuation before its 2021 acquisition. A lifelong dancer of Gujarati heritage, she still directs her own troupe — proof that art and algorithms can share a stage.

WHAT'S NEXT · THE FOUNDRRESS TAKE

From class booking to a wellbeing OS

An AI movement coach could design each member's week across studios, recovery, sleep and goals. ClassPass becomes the operating system for a healthier life, not just a reservation engine.



FOUNDED

2013

HEADQUARTERS

New York, USA

SECTOR

Technology

VALUATION

≈ US\$1 B

OFF THE RECORD

Runs a dance company on the side — she choreographs as fluently as she models a growth curve.

SIGNATURE LOOK

A dancer's poise in rich jewel tones.



Whitney Wolfe Herd

FOUNDER & CEO · BUMBLE

The founder who handed women the first word — and became the youngest self-made female billionaire doing it.

Make the first move.

— WHITNEY WOLFE HERD

After co-founding Tinder and leaving it, Whitney Wolfe Herd built Bumble on a single radical premise: women message first. In 2021 she rang the Nasdaq bell with her toddler on her hip and became, at thirty-one, the youngest woman to take a US company public. In 2025 she returned as chief executive to write the next chapter.

WHAT'S NEXT · THE FOUNDRESS TAKE

Matchmakers, not endless swiping

AI that coaches members and curates a handful of genuinely compatible introductions would move dating from volume to intention. Bumble's women-first DNA is the right place to make connection feel human again.



— FOUNDRESS —

FOUNDED
2014

HEADQUARTERS
Austin, USA

SECTOR
Technology

VALUATION
NASDAQ: BMBL

OFF THE RECORD

Rang the Nasdaq opening bell with her eighteen-month-old son balanced on her hip.

SIGNATURE LOOK

Honey-blond waves and power pastels — often in Bumble yellow.

Mira Murati

FOUNDER & CEO · THINKING MACHINES LAB

The engineer behind ChatGPT who walked away from the world's hottest lab to build her own.

The frontier belongs to the curious.

— MIRA MURATI

Born in Vlorë, Albania, Mira Murati helped shape the modern AI era as OpenAI's chief technology officer, steering ChatGPT, DALL-E and GPT-4 into the world — and briefly running the company itself. In 2025 she struck out alone, founding Thinking Machines Lab and raising one of the largest seed rounds in history. Her bet: that the next chapter of artificial intelligence should be built thoughtfully, and on her own terms.

WHAT'S NEXT · THE FOUNDESS TAKE

Models teams can shape, not rent

Her bet is customisable frontier AI — systems an organisation can mould to its own values and data rather than accept off the shelf. If she delivers, 'bring your own model' becomes the enterprise default.



FOUNDED

2025

HEADQUARTERS

San Francisco,
USA

SECTOR

Technology

VALUATION

≈ US\$12 B

OFF THE RECORD

Speaks three languages and keeps her cool in a crisis — she once took the helm of the world's most-watched AI lab on a few days' notice.

SIGNATURE LOOK

Understated, sleek minimalism — substance over sparkle.



Cristina Junqueira

CO-FOUNDER & U.S. CEO · NUBANK

The engineer who took on Brazil's banking giants and built the world's largest digital bank.

I seek impact. I've been called crazy for much less.

— CRISTINA JUNQUEIRA

Frustrated by the fees and bureaucracy of Brazil's banking giants, Cristina Junqueira left a senior post to co-found Nubank in 2013. It is now the world's largest digital bank, serving some 130 million customers across Latin America. Her stake made her one of the world's youngest self-made female billionaires; today she's in Miami, building its US arm.

WHAT'S NEXT · THE FOUNDRESS TAKE

An AI co-pilot for every wallet

Proactive credit, savings and planning, delivered conversationally, could close Latin America's advice gap for 100 million customers. Nubank's data depth makes it the bank best placed to build it.



FOUNDED

2013

HEADQUARTERS

São Paulo · Miami

SECTOR

Fintech

VALUATION

US\$80 B · NYSE:
NU

OFF THE RECORD

Built a bank and a family of four at once — and says dolphins now swim past her Miami window.

SIGNATURE LOOK

Sharp Brazilian tailoring with effortless, off-duty cool.

Emily Weiss

FOUNDER & EXEC. CHAIR · GLOSSIER

The Vogue intern who turned a beauty blog into millennial-pink scripture.

Beauty is a conversation.

— EMILY WEISS

Emily Weiss was the Vogue intern turned blogger behind Into The Gloss. In 2014 she translated its readers' obsessions into Glossier, a direct-to-consumer brand that made "skin first, makeup second" a generational creed and millennial pink a colour you could trademark in spirit. By 2021 the company was valued at 1.8 billion dollars.

WHAT'S NEXT · THE FOUNDRRESS TAKE

Skincare that diagnoses, then recommends

AI skin diagnostics plus a community-trained engine would make Glossier a personal advisor, not just a brand. The cult following becomes a feedback loop no legacy house can match.

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FOUNDED

2014

HEADQUARTERS

New York, USA

SECTOR

Beauty

VALUATION

US\$1.8 B

OFF THE RECORD

Was the scene-stealing "Super Intern" on reality TV before she was a beauty mogul.

SIGNATURE LOOK

Dewy "no-makeup" makeup and head-to-toe millennial pink.



Katrina Lake

FOUNDER & CEO · STITCH FIX

The stylist-meets-statistician who took her data-driven fashion company public at thirty-four — the youngest woman ever to lead an IPO.

Data has a sense of style.

— KATRINA LAKE

Katrina Lake founded Stitch Fix in 2011 from a Cambridge apartment, pairing machine learning with human stylists to mail shoppers clothes they didn't know they wanted. In 2017 she became, at thirty-four, the youngest woman ever to take a US company public. After stepping back, she returned to lead the company she built — proof that founders rarely stay away from their life's work.

WHAT'S NEXT · THE FOUNDRRESS TAKE

Styling that anticipates, not reacts

Generative design could preview and even create looks before they're made, tuned to each customer's life and calendar. Stitch Fix shifts from filling a box to predicting a wardrobe.

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FOUNDRRESS

FOUNDED

2011

HEADQUARTERS

San Francisco,
USA

SECTOR

Technology

VALUATION

NASDAQ: SFIX

OFF THE RECORD

Pitched investors while pregnant and ran board meetings around a newborn — then built one of retail's smartest algorithms.

SIGNATURE LOOK

Approachable California polish — effortless tailoring, no fuss.



Lynn Jurich

CO-FOUNDER · SUNRUN

The co-founder who made rooftop solar a household idea — and took clean energy public.

The cheapest power plant is the one on your roof.

— LYNN JURICH

Lynn Jurich co-founded Sunrun in 2007 on a then-radical idea: that homeowners shouldn't have to buy panels to go solar. By pioneering solar-as-a-service she helped make clean energy affordable for ordinary households, and in 2015 took Sunrun public — a rare female-founded IPO. Today it is one of America's largest residential solar companies.

WHAT'S NEXT · THE FOUNDESS TAKE

Every home a virtual power plant

An AI energy brain that orchestrates panels, batteries and EVs would let millions of roofs trade power as one smarter grid. Sunrun's installed base is the network effect waiting to be switched on.

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FOUNDESS

FOUNDED

2007

HEADQUARTERS

San Francisco,
USA

SECTOR

Climate Tech

VALUATION

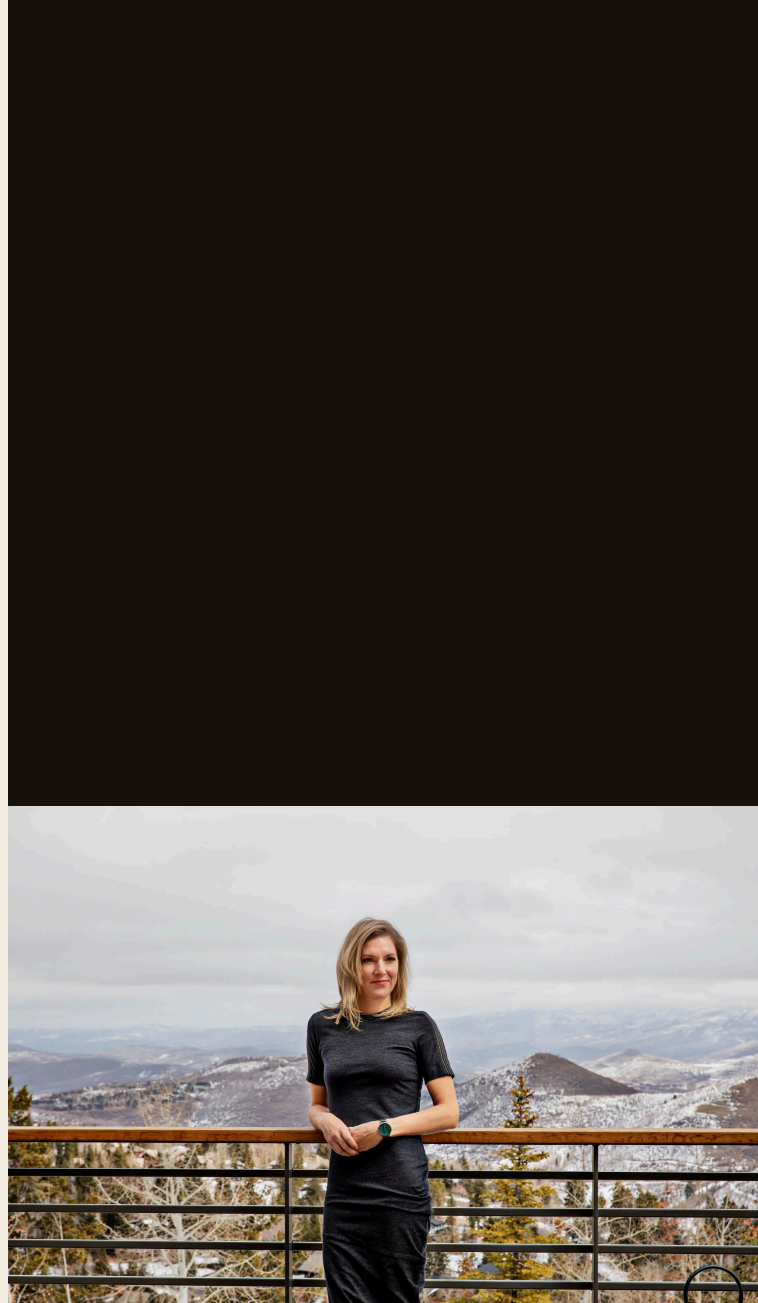
NASDAQ: RUN

OFF THE RECORD

Bet her career on rooftops when solar was still a fringe idea — and turned sunshine into a subscription.

SIGNATURE LOOK

California ease with a boardroom edge.



Jessica Holzbach

FOUNDER & CEO · PILE

The serial fintech founder championing women in finance — from neobanking for businesses to a smarter home for company cash.

Finance wasn't built for outsiders. So build your own.

— JESSICA HOLZBACH

One of European fintech's most visible women, Jessica Holzbach co-founded Penta, a digital bank for small businesses, before striking out to launch Pile — a platform helping companies put their idle cash to work. A Forbes 30 Under 30 honoree and outspoken advocate for women in finance, she has spent her career prising open an industry famously slow to let them in.

WHAT'S NEXT · THE FOUNDRRESS TAKE

An autonomous treasury — an AI CFO

Pile could allocate idle company cash in real time, balancing yield, runway and risk automatically for the long tail of businesses. Finance-grade autonomy is the unlock most small companies never had.

FOUNDED

2021

HEADQUARTERS

Berlin, DE

SECTOR

Fintech

VALUATION

Private

OFF THE RECORD

Has become a one-woman lobby for women in fintech — mentoring, investing and calling out the boys' club by name.

SIGNATURE LOOK

Sharp Berlin minimalism with a fearless streak.

Maricel Saenz

FOUNDER & CEO · COMPOUND FOODS

The Costa Rican founder brewing real coffee without a single bean — saving the cup from a warming climate.

We can reinvent coffee before the climate ends it.

— MARICEL SAENZ

Maricel Saenz grew up in Costa Rica, coffee country — then set out to save the drink from the very climate threatening it. Her company, Compound Foods, uses fermentation and synthetic biology to brew coffee without beans, slashing the water, land and carbon a traditional cup demands. A Forbes 30 Under 30 founder, she is betting that the future of our most beloved ritual is grown in a lab, not only on a hillside.

WHAT'S NEXT · THE FOUNDESS TAKE

Designing flavour, molecule by molecule

AI can model novel flavour compounds to brew bean-free coffee tuned to any palate — then scale the method to chocolate and tea. Saenz turns climate-proof indulgence into a platform, not a single product.



FOUNDED

2020

HEADQUARTERS

San Francisco,
USA

SECTOR

Food Tech

VALUATION

Venture-backed

OFF THE RECORD

Comes from a Costa Rican coffee family — and is now reinventing the very thing she grew up with.

SIGNATURE LOOK

Warm, effortless and sunlit — founder-next-door charm.



A FOUNDRESS INITIATIVE · INTRODUCING

FFF

The Female Founders Fund

————— CAPITAL WITH CONVICTION —————

For every founder on these pages, a thousand more are waiting for a single, decisive *yes*. We are building the fund that says it — backing visionary women from first cheque to global stage, across technology, beauty, fashion & finance.

NOW ASSEMBLING OUR FOUNDING COHORT · MMXXVI

A new model for backing the women who *build*.

Venture has long mispriced women — and the cultural brands they create. FFF is our answer: a fund engineered around how visionary founders actually win, pairing patient capital with the taste, network and technology to scale a company into an icon.

01 · CAPITAL

Founder-first terms

Patient capital and clean, founder-friendly terms — written for builders, not for spreadsheets. We move at the speed of conviction, not committee.

02 · NETWORK

Beyond the cheque

Every investment opens a circle of operators, creative directors and editors who have built iconic houses — the unfair advantage money alone can't buy.

03 · REACH

Global by design

We source across continents and categories — a Lagos lab, a São Paulo fintech, a Seoul studio — because the next empire rarely begins where everyone is looking.

04 · INNOVATION

Brand as moat, AI as edge

We treat taste as a defensible asset and pair it with AI-assisted sourcing — finding tomorrow's founders before the rest of the market has heard their names.

FOCUS

Tech · Beauty ·
Fashion · Consumer

STAGE

Pre-seed to Series
A

FIRST CHEQUE

\$250K – \$3M

ETHOS

Conviction over
consensus

Bring us the company they said couldn't be built.

Fin.

*"The most courageous act is still to think for
yourself. Out loud."
— and to build what you think.*

FOUNDRESS

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