



The new **SUPERWOMAN**

Polina Montano is fearless. A self-confessed technophobe, originally unfamiliar with venture capitalist firms, she is now the Co-founder of Job Today, an app that has changed the landscape of hiring. Don't underestimate her; she is the new breed of businesswoman, says **Charley Larcombe.**

Photography by Kostas Deko

Polina Montano is both expected, and wholly surprising.

On the one hand, she heads up a company that uses technology to streamline the process of casual job hiring; on the other, she readily explains that she knows very little about the nuts and bolts technology of what she has co-created.

She is effortlessly pulled together and polished with a bouncy blow dry and a flash of red lipstick as you would expect of a successful woman from St. Petersburg, living in Luxembourg. Super-high stilettos and a designer handbag tick the boxes of material items that go with the Co-founder of a company that has attracted millions of dollars in investment. Yet when I ask her for her Luxembourg recommendations, she tells me that a walk through Petrusse Park is the true hidden gem of the city, and that having her daughters are the greatest decision she has ever made. Both very conscious responses, illustrating her belief in the importance of the simple, family life.

She is softly spoken, yet is a powerful force. She exudes confidence, but confesses that one of her regrets is to do with being too scared to become a defence lawyer. Too scared? Polina?

We meet at the offices of Job Today, mere weeks before they move to shiny new premises. Polina has a packed schedule of meetings, is preparing for a work trip to Spain and the UK, and she needs to get home to have dinner with her girls, Julia and Taia. We're discussing being brave and the prospect of diving into new projects; after all she has signed up to be the first cover star of LUX WMN.

"Fear stops us pursuing so many dreams and ideas. It's so sad," she says. "Can you imagine what we would all achieve if we weren't so afraid?"

With her current success as evidence, it's easy to prove Polina is courageous – or rather she has faced her challenges and carried on despite struggles and doubt. Her success as an entrepreneur is not a surprise though; she is not new to being a businesswoman. Post university she was in retail, running her own franchised store, before she moved on to managing several gas stations.


While heading up the latter, she realised that she was feeling a little stagnant, that she had a thirst to learn and go back to school. She enrolled in a technology and entrepreneurial course in Luxembourg where she was instantly enveloped into a world of start-ups, technology solutions, and new ventures. Lectures and discussions were focussed on the work forces of tomorrow and tech ideas to streamline processes and make life easier. "I was just so excited and inspired by all of these ideas," she says.

At around the same time, she met Eugene Mizin, who had previously worked for eBay in San Francisco and Skype in London, but was then employed by Mangrove Capital Partners. The venture capital firm helped innovative entrepreneurs start disruptive tech companies and Polina couldn't hear enough about it.

"I thought it was the most exciting job. Getting to discover these new companies and be a part of the journey," she explains. "Eugene and I were in the same social circle and I was often having people over to dinner. Every time I saw him, I would pitch him my ideas which I had dreamed up in between running the garages and

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going to my lessons. In less than a minute, he would give me five solid reasons why my latest plan would not work. I was constantly torturing him with questions and my ideas of the week; I must be a very good cook to explain why he kept coming back for dinner!"



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QUICK FIRE ROUND

A LUX WMN is... confident, life-loving, creative.

What's your secret weapon?

Bright red lipstick; it's my war paint. And Christian Louboutin heels.

Best decision you ever made:

Having my children, Julia and Taia.

Favourite restaurant in Luxembourg:

Giallo on Rue du Cure.

Hidden gem?

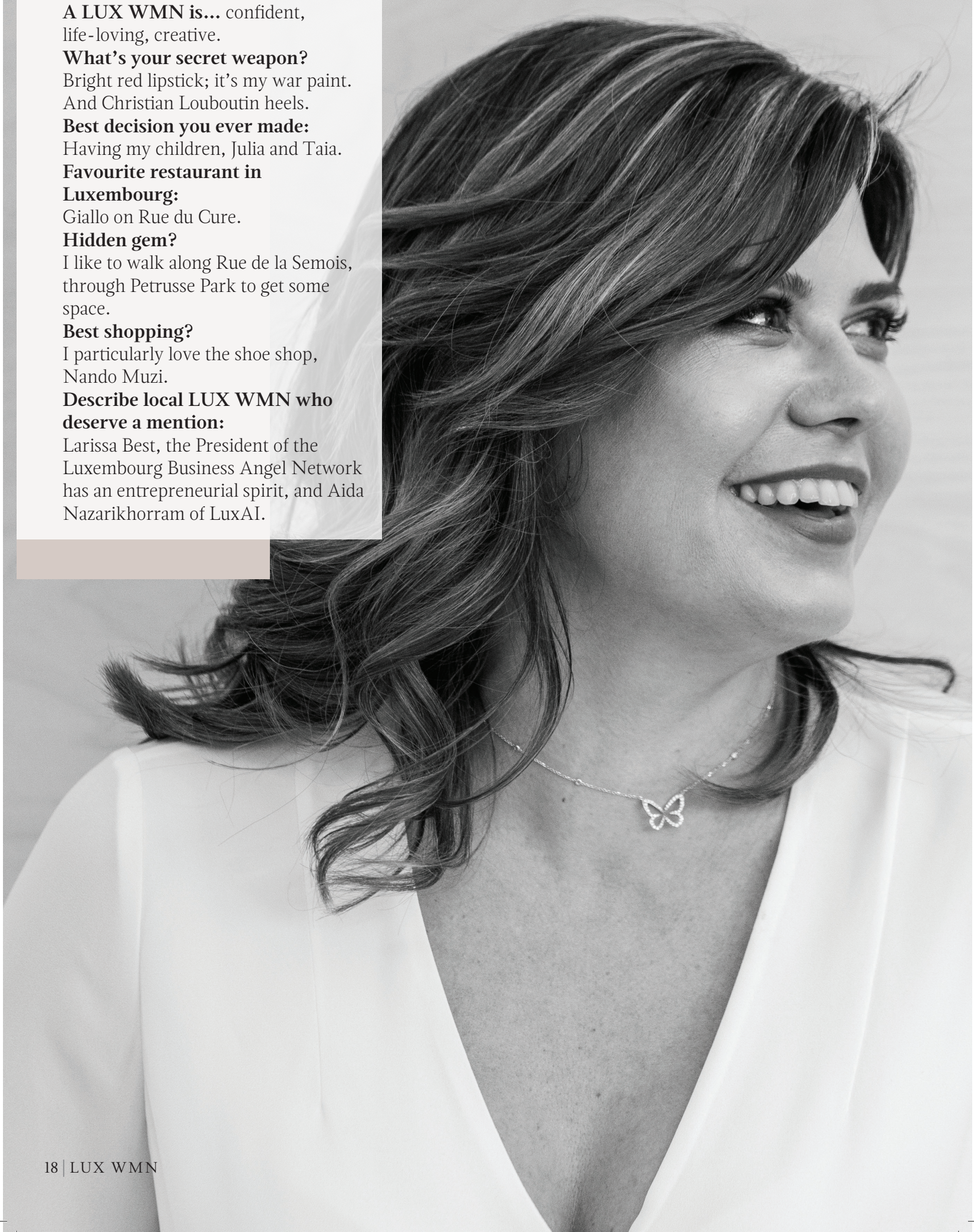
I like to walk along Rue de la Semois, through Petrusse Park to get some space.

Best shopping?

I particularly love the shoe shop, Nando Muzi.

Describe local LUX WMN who deserve a mention:

Larissa Best, the President of the Luxembourg Business Angel Network has an entrepreneurial spirit, and Aida Nazarikhorram of LuxAI.



It was during one such evening that Polina took a call from an employee which left her desperately looking for a replacement petrol station manager in 24 hours. She needed a platform where she could urgently find part-time or temporary staff for roles that were more service based. It was this moment that was the catalyst for Job Today.

“It was this moment that I looked at Eugene and said that there needed to be something that would enable small business owners to get in direct touch with available candidates quickly and easily. It was the first time Eugene didn’t have an objection. I blamed it on the red wine at first, but...

“Within mere months we had become obsessed with this idea, and after research and validating some points and basically sleepless nights, we decided to go for it. Our main concern was not about the concept; it was how we were going to tell our families and business partners that we were leaving to set up this venture. We never doubted our idea. It was about making the job search easy, and human and fast. That concept hasn’t changed much from that first moment to our focus today.”

Job Today was built to reduce friction in the hiring process. It needed to be 100% mobile and focus on jobs in the hospitality, retail, and services industries where employers and prospective employees could connect and start up a conversation within a minute. In the early days, the team was just Eugene and Polina plus two developers, and they launched the app in 2015 initially in Barcelona, before moving onto London. They went through investment rounds early on and raised \$10million (they later raised even more) and quickly grew.

As well as more standard investment, they also undertook media investment which gave them ample platforms for promotion across digital and TV spaces, but also exposure on billboards and buses – essentially creating the buzz and visibility needed in what has become a highly competitive market. Within four years, the job-finding app has over 5 million registered users and over 500,000 businesses calling on the company for their hiring needs, as well as over 50 multilingual employees.

“Polina is a remarkable entrepreneur who inspires people around her,” says Eugene of his colleague.

“Building a company with a global ambition requires bringing a good number of capable and passionate people on board; Polina has been instrumental in building the team that launched our first city, Barcelona, and then applied the launch playbook to more cities including Madrid and London. Everything Polina does, she does with passion and conviction. I think our partnership has worked extremely well because we know when to put egos aside and ask for help and advice. We are both very confident individuals, but at the same time we've always placed a lot of trust in each other's opinion.”

The facts and figures for Job Today are clearly on a continued trajectory and her strengths are recognized by her work partner, but what have been the personal successes for Polina?

“I've had quite a few of those; some small and some bigger. As a Co-founder of the business and having found this solution to an industry problem, I still get this incredible feeling when I'm in a café in London or Luxembourg and see someone using the app. You have no idea how good it feels. I cannot sit still, I have to go over and ask if I can buy them a coffee; I cannot resist!

"Another occasion which springs to mind is from the early days, in our very first weeks launching in Spain. We had so much stress and uncertainty and punishing,

long days in the office — and then this email comes in."

It was our first thank you email from a customer telling us that they had found a job within a couple of days – and both Eugene and I still remember their name. Thankfully, we have received many more since then, but that first was so special to receive, a little light in our search in the dark.”

She also describes another early day story preparing the final pitch to the

“We never doubted our idea.”

partners of a venture capital firm. She describes meeting these “super humans, sat in dark suits around a long table seeming like they knew all of my secrets” and the nerves bubbling under the surface. The pressure of having spent yet more sleepless nights perfecting the pitch had been intense and now they were here ready to deliver.

She explains that she started off shakily, but as soon as she was talking about their greater vision and their plans for the Job Today app to provide a service and to make lives easier, she lost all nerves and spoke freely. “When I finished my part of the pitch and sat down, there was just silence. I could just feel all of the eyes on me, and just by their faces I could tell that they had been on the journey with me.

“Of course, it was incredible to receive the congratulations and the funding, but for me it was the feeling that I had overcome something that I hadn't thought I could do. It wasn't even about what we had just accomplished; it was because I had overcome my own fears. No victory is as precious as the victory over yourself.”

And those are words to live by; the words of the new superwoman. ■

