

# DISCARD

INDEPENDENT / TRANSPARENT / BALANCED



**THE BASIS  
OF OPTIMISM  
IS SHEER  
TERROR.**



ISSUE 04

01 / 2021



# WTF IS THIS?



## INDEPENDENT. TRANSPARENT. BALANCED.

"The basis of optimism is sheer terror" wrote Oscar Wilde a long time ago, with a glass of absinthe on his desk (probably). Some of the articles in this issue are loosely inspired by this quote. Others aren't. Whatever. We made it to number four! Who'd have thought it? Not us, to be honest. It's hard to stay optimistic about anything at the moment and we're not gonna tell you to do so. Do whatever you want - we're still mid dumpster fire and just getting out of bed is an achievement.

If you don't know, DISCARD is an independent, self-funded zine

created by people working in hospitality. That's us.

In this issue we're talking to people we look up to about things we don't normally see in trade publications in a balanced and transparent way. As ever, we are thankful to our contributors for their words, patience, and support. We're also surprised and hyped to have made it this far without killing each other - so that's cool too.

Drink the Kool-Aid, you'll like it.

Ps. If you find a typo - we're always on a tight deadline, don't be a dick.

**THERE ARE  
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# FAKE NEWS.



## #FOLLOWMYDOGGY

The Government has agreed to debate whether a minister should be appointed to oversee the UK hospitality trade, after over 150,000 people signed a petition seeking parliamentary representation for the fourth biggest workforce in the country. Plans are now afoot to follow this up with a petition tackling another huge hospitality issue; looking to make it illegal for bartenders to start insta accounts for their dogs.

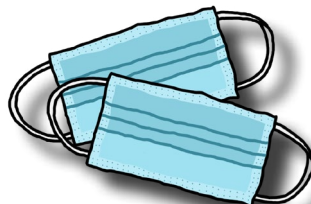
## JANUARY BLUES

A new type of Stockholm Syndrome has been diagnosed in major UK cities, as hospitality workers inexplicably missed the horrific clientele December usually brings with it. Said one out of work restaurant worker “I work in the City and I feel like this year no one is going to call me “sweetheart”, pat my bum and tell me they’re only having a laugh, or even be sick in the toilets then come back and breathe on me. Our managers are having to take

turns throwing each other out over Zoom to blow off steam, and I’ve heard the bartenders are forlornly making flaming quaran-borghinis. Somethings got to give”.

## CLICK + COLLECT

Police in East London underestimated the tenacity of alcohol seeking consumers when tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets completely failed to stop people congregating in Bethnal Green trying to get a pint from the hatch at The Sun Tavern. One anonymous woman told DISCARD “I mean yeah we got a bit wet, and there is the odd bout of incredible searing pain, but we quite fancied a drink, I’m trying to support local business and also fuck Boris over and over and over until he dies”. Fair enough really.





## DEALER DEMO

Another casualty of the repeated hospitality shutdowns pleaded for government assistance this month, as it emerged that the lockdown had almost halved the amount of shitty overpriced cocaine being bought at 1.30am by groups of pissed bartenders who were in at 10am the next day, but didn't want to go home just yet. DISCARD spoke to That Weird Guy Who Always Hangs About And Doesn't Pay For Drinks Cos He Sells To The Owner; "it's a shambles, this country was built on rat poison cocaine, and I can barely afford to keep up the payments on my BMW, or my other BMW. I obviously don't pay taxes, but if I did I wouldn't feel represented at all".

## 1-2-3! L-C-C!

LCC's JJ Goodman has confirmed rumors that his venues have been awarded a multi-million-pound government vaccination contract, based on the skills of their bartenders - the quickest arms in the west. Reportedly, GM Cressida

Lawlor has broken the vaccination speed record, with twenty-two jabs per minute. The new contract means London should be fully vaccinated within fourteen working days, topping the global polls, plus everyone gets 2-4-1 mojitos during vaccination hours.

## R.I.P. IMBIBE

U.S bartenders this month were shocked to learn that their beloved Imbibe was to shutter their doors, taking to social media to vociferously air their protests, before learning it was the U.K version and they didn't care, then swiftly going back to accusing each other of being socialists.



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# DAVE BROOM OBLIQUE STRATEGIES

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THE BIO DAVE SENT US IS SHORT AND TO THE POINT: "DAVE BROOM IS A GLASWEGIAN WHO GETS PAID TO WRITE ABOUT SPIRITS. HE'S BEEN GETTING AWAY WITH IT FOR THIRTY YEARS". SOME ADDITIONS FROM US - DAVE IS A MASTER OF THE QUAICH AND A KENTUCKY COLONEL, HE IS A LECTURER FOR THE WSET'S PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATE IN SPIRITS AND LITERALLY WROTE THE BOOK ON IT. HE IS A FREELANCE WRITER, WORLD RENOWNED SPIRITS EDUCATOR, HAS PUBLISHED MAYBE SEVENTEEN BOOKS (WE LOST COUNT), COLLABORATED ON DOZENS OF OTHERS AND NOW, HE'S WRITTEN FOR US.

\*BRAIN EXPLODES\*

## Honour thy error as a hidden intention

Emptiness. The cursor winks. The fingers twitch, then rest. A book is picked up. A record chosen. The snowfield remains. It seems strange writing about being unable to write. Maybe this is therapy.

It hasn't been so much that there wasn't anything to write about, rather that the act of writing has become difficult. Work had been significantly reduced, (no surprise there), but some morsels were being thrown my way. They remain unfinished, or to be more precise guiltily abandoned.

The cursor winks. The gap between the thought and action widens further. Make some tea. Change the record. Walk by the sea.

I've been busy enough on research. Made notes, shuffled the increasingly complex tessellations of the next book into place. It's meant to be about whisky, but is currently looking more like a mash up of Gaelic poetry and bromophenols. Yet the final words wouldn't come.

I hasten to add, dear reader, that this is not some cry for help. Nor am I wallowing in self-pity. One thing I have learned at the end of this year is that it's important to be honest. It's been a shit year. Good days outnumber the bad, but the latter exist.

A year of blankness. Pages, screens, streets, skies, bars, emotion. A blank generation. We exist in a limbo world, a state of stasis. I can't go on, I'll go on.

## TURN IT UPSIDE DOWN

My world is one of communication,

not bartending. Can't mix a drink to save my life. I do however like passing information on, finding ways to connect. That's changed.

Distillers were already moving away from the old models of advertising which kept things like magazines and websites going. They look at new ways of getting their message out there - and controlling it.

Why risk potentially tricky questions or a lukewarm response if an influencer posing with a bottle has a more immediate effect? Why spend money on an ad financing a wide range of articles which weren't about your brand? Why accept constructive criticism over blind adulation?

The platform has changed. Get on the next train, Dave.

### ARE THERE SECTIONS? CONSIDER TRANSITION

The chime tells me the next Zoom meeting is about to start. Apparently the moderator can see me. Get ready, you might be on-line at any point. Start to smile, get ready to project. I can't write, but I can talk. How I can talk.

At the end, get ready for the weird comedown. Have I just been speaking to my reflection for the past ninety minutes?

When you are unable to read the room, all you can do is fling things out there and hope they connect. I'm aware however that because of the limitations of tech we've reverted to the old 'pick up the glass, let me tell you what you are tasting' lecture just at the time when those old ways were being gently set to one side and the nature of engagement was changing.

Instead of engagement there is passivity. We talk, we listen, we switch off. We can all smile for an hour. It's the easiest pace to hide.

**The lack of touch, the masked faces, the inability to read faces/ body language/ the room creates a dehumanising effect. We are left with these looping, interminable monologues; wanting to care, trying to care, reaching out, but being unable to touch physically, or emotionally. We do it because there is no alternative.**

**It was already underway. We exist within a fractured world where a life in thrall to social media had replaced communities with individuals. The pandemic has metastasised this process.**

The return - which will happen - will be to a changed world, one where people's minds and habits have been altered. Brains rewired; neural pathways damaged.

### WHAT FRAME WOULD MAKE THIS LOOK RIGHT?

And yet, the word still needs to get out. If the scenario has changed, if the rules are different, then there is no point in moaning and sitting still. Instead, a new way has to be found. Where are the opportunities, how the narrative be changed?

**Maybe the silence is a chance for self-examination. Perhaps the lockdowns and isolation have forced on us a requirement to clarify things and concentrate on what aspects are the most important.**

A changed world needs new thinking, different modes of communication, and delivery.

At times like these I reach for the black box containing Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt's 'Oblique Strategies'. These cards were originally created to help musicians "when a dilemma occurs in a working situation".

They act as ways to unblock the flow of creativity, or maybe just divert it in a new direction. The Zen clack on the side of the head.

I even used them on an agave-seeking trip through Mexico where, by the end of the third week, every decision was taken by interpreting the, by now oracular, instructions. You can go too far.

### SIMPLE SUBTRACTION

Do we accept this, the pandemic-accelerated societal change or take this chance to change things around? Altering the linear thinking which has governed our old habits is important. Communication has to change.

**The world of Zoom (other platforms are available) is not going to disappear. So look to see how can it be used effectively and creatively? By understanding its limitations, its - untapped - possibilities start to reveal themselves.**

Why is everything like a radio lecture when it could be more like a TV magazine programme? If an hour is draining for presenter and viewer, then break it up. At the moment, the form and content ignore the medium.

Instead, the medium should dictate the form & content. The same process, I'd argue, will be required in the changed world of hospitality.

### GARDENING, NOT ARCHITECTURE

The question is how to take the enforced requirement of the stripping back and make something new (and compelling) out of it all. Simplification doesn't mean being retrogressive - as has been happening in communication - but radical and creative within that simplicity. Clarity is vital.

The important element is to try and offer an alternative to the increasing individualisation of society.

**The saddest irony of all of this is that, just at the time when community and communities need to be strengthened and reformed, the places where it could happen - bars - have been the ones most badly affected. Yet, when the end comes, hospitality can offer a radical alternative to the echo chambers of social media. We can't go back, because that world has ceased to exist.**

**The Great Pause we have been existing in might just be an opportunity.**

The cursor still blinks. But the page is now full.

*[all the crossheads are cards plucked at random from the Oblique Strategies box. They helped dictate the piece]*



**BY DAVE.**

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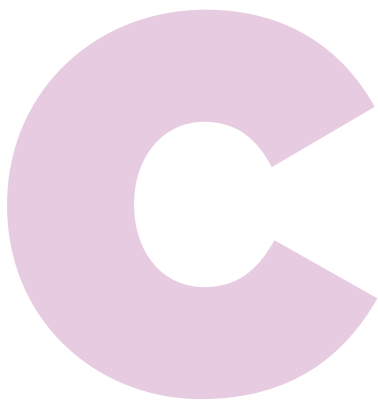
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# CHOCKIE TOM

THOUGHTFUL  
TROPICAL: THE  
NECESSARY EVOLUTION  
OF TIKI

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L.A BORN CHOCKIE IS A BARTENDER AND BRAND AMBASSADOR WHO RECENTLY RELOCATED TO LONDON WITH HER HUSBAND AND CAT – BACON. CONNECTING HER POMO AND PAIUTE HERITAGE WITH HER ADVOCACY WORK, SHE BRINGS A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE TO AN INDUSTRY LACKING IN INDIGENOUS PRESENCE. CHOCKIE IS BEST KNOWN FOR HER INNOVATIVE COCKTAIL BUILDING TECHNIQUES, EVENT ART AND HER WORK WITH DOOM TIKI, FUNDRAISING FOR COMMUNITIES DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF COLONIZATION. CHOCKIE IS WORKING ON A BOOK WHICH UPON PUBLICATION WILL MAKE HER THE FIRST INDIGENOUS AMERICAN COCKTAIL BOOK AUTHOR IN AMERICAN HISTORY. YEAH, MAKES US FEEL LAZY TOO.

**I grew up in Los Angeles, the birthplace of Tiki, and home to Hollywood, where we really have the market cornered on fantasy and escapism.**

As much as I've always appreciated some aspects of what Tiki is, and mid-century aesthetics, there has always been something that hasn't sat quite right with me, and I know I'm not alone in this. It has been a source of conversation and conflict that in the last year has really come to the forefront both within industry and wider consumer circles, getting the attention it deserves. These conversations are being led by the Pasifika community, and people are finally listening, and are embracing learning. I'm not here to rehash what is now a commonly known conversation, there are many articles online from sources ranging from PUNCH to the New York Times, but rather to discuss what's next.

**One of the fundamental differences that is important to note is that while in Europe Tiki is more or less a cocktail subculture, in America, it's an entire, all-encompassing lifestyle; people dress, decorate entire houses and socialise completely immersed in all aspects of what you would imagine this entails.**

In general, America has a sense of



**ARTWORK BY CHOCKIE TOM**

cultural nostalgia for a reality that never existed. Tiki was born out of escapism, fantasy, and a need for profit, the colonial nostalgia is just part of the package. Some of the socialite Tiki community - while embracing and molding their lives around a bartender's creation - are reluctant to embrace change, and have a perplexing distrust of modern bartenders. Inasmuch as people are willing to overlook the problems within the foundation on which they base much of their lives, there is a balance of cultural appropriation as well as there is cultural appreciation.

**Cultural appropriation refers to the use of objects or elements of a non-dominant culture in a way that doesn't respect their original meaning, give credit to their source, or reinforce stereotypes or contributes to oppression. Cultural appreciation involves a desire for knowledge and deeper understanding of a culture. People who truly want to appreciate a culture offer respect to members of that culture and their traditions by participating only when invited to do so.**

Cultural exchange implies a mutual and beneficial sharing of cultures and beliefs as well as a level power dynamic. I'm defining these clearly because exchange is one of the most important aspects

of what the future holds. Also, when discussing issues pertaining to culture, it's important to note that there isn't a one size fits all solution: no one person can tell you what to do. My general rule is: if you think it might be a problem, it probably is, and don't be an asshole. Another thing that is important to note is that cultures do not exist in a vacuum; individuals are not a monolithic representation of an entire culture and their opinions.

Those of you that are familiar with my work know that I created and then Austin Hartman and I co-founded Doom Tiki in 2019 as a different re-imagining of Tiki that substitutes satanic imagery and doom and stoner metal in place of sexually exploitative and other problematic elements, as well as having a fundraising aspect, to not only create awareness of some of the issues affecting the cultures that Tiki has stolen much of its aesthetic from, but to make people aware of how rich and interesting they are as well. We've fully embraced the absurdity and immersive elements and utilise familiar cocktail structures. We went with doom and stoner metal, because out of all the metal subgenres, they are the easiest to listen to when sitting in a bar for a few hours.

Many people from the Pasifika community find the use of a sacred word like Tiki problematic, and part of the reason we still use the name is to reach the right people and make them think. Due to the limitations of 'COVID world', we've created Zoom Tiki, which takes bartenders from multiple cultural backgrounds, and reimagines their traditional flavours and ingredients in the context of Tiki-style drinks, while also creating cultural exchange, and giving bartenders from cultures often misrepresented or reduced to stereotypes a platform to show off their culture in a way they want to.

Some of the guidelines that we provide our guest bartenders are pretty simple:

1. Be thoughtful, don't be an asshole.
2. No mugs with bastardised versions of Pasifika, Indigenous, or explicitly racist caricatures (note: Christian imagery is up for grabs due to its problematic history with missionaries, and its use tends to shock people to think and personalise what we're saying).
3. Avoid sexually exploitative mugs and Available Island Maiden tropes.
4. Learn about the people and the organisation that we're raising

money for.

5. Don't limit yourself to just rum, embrace diversity in spirits.

6. Listen to the music provided for naming inspiration, as to avoid co-opting language and shitty imagery for drink names (we work with some of the biggest names in the scene to create our event playlists).

Because Tiki is an abomination of a culture, taken from many places, the classic primary ingredients are very limited and trapped in the past as well. One of the cornerstones of our cocktail creation, and my personal cocktail building philosophy, is based on finding commonalities in flavour profiles, ingredients, and exploring the many different ways they're used across different cuisines. I think this can also be applied to the philosophy of tropical cocktails; if we're going to move forward in Tiki, embracing the use of diversity in spirits is key. Creating immersive bar experiences and the cocktails that go with it should also reflect the actual cultures, rather than a Hollywood version of them. Yaki-Tiki by Brian Evans in Brooklyn, as well as Jeepney in New York, are both great examples of this. Yaki-Tiki embraces Japanese spirits and ingredients along with well-known Tiki staples, while Jeepney

does something similar, but with Filipino ingredients and flavors. One of my favourite “Tiki” concepts was developed by Nickel Morris (owner of Expo in Louisville, Kentucky and guest bartender on Doom Tiki: War Party, our Indigenous edition of Zoom Tiki). While working at The Pontiac in Hong Kong, he came up with Pon-Tiki. His idea was, if you’re already in the South Pacific, what’s the point of doing another Tiki night? So rather than relying on the same expected tropes that wouldn’t make sense, he created Pon-Tiki, a pun, and reversal on Kon-Tiki. This was done embracing aspects of Americana and sharing that with the Hong Kong bar scene. Using the same tired concepts is boring. One of the best parts about being a bartender is being able to come up with, and create new drinks. I think we should be putting as much into the experience as we put into garnishing our drinks. As bartenders, if one were to create new and amazing cocktails, sticking to the same tired Tiki blueprint all around, interesting new concepts can get lost. Rather than worrying about creating an experience based on somewhere far away, embracing and sharing what you have and know is pretty fucking cool.

Some of the things that we found helpful are:

1. When I am consulting with bars and brands, use our Thoughtful Tropical approach: creating an immersive bar experience doesn’t have to mean taking from others, you have the tools and flavours already available, even if you haven’t thought about applying it to Tiki (we have done Scandinavian, Puerto Rican and Indigenous editions, using flavours and ingredients native to that part of the world).
2. Bars like Lost Lake, and Shore Leave have managed to create a cocktail-focused immersive bar while avoiding the typical problematic and tried trappings.
3. Bars such as the Inferno Room and Laki Kane have worked with various Pasifika communities to create a respectful, educational and authentic environment.
4. Embrace change, whether in your ingredients, or like how my favourite bar in London, Trailer Happiness has, by getting rid of Bianca, and working on a more thoughtful mug display.
5. If you like things about these cultures, learn about them! Reach out respectfully out to them; if you’re earning money from creating an experience based on them, understand that a lot of them might not be here in fifty

years due to climate issues, and give back.

Because this is not a black and white issue, we can hold on to many things: we can appreciate what has drawn us to Tiki, but we can understand what's not good about it, and move forward at least in the bar and cocktail sense.

**From an American perspective, a lot of people that I know and**

**am friends with in the socialite segment of Tiki have been having quite the reckoning with Fox News taking a very clear side on the issue, which brings me to my final point - at the end of the day, is it more important to hold onto what you like, or to create a more welcoming and thoughtful environment to everyone? As that is what hospitality is about.**



**BY CHOCKIE.**

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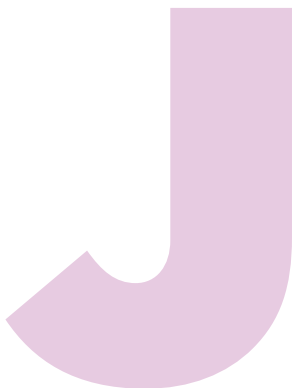
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**JOHN  
deBARY**

REFLECTIONS  
ON A  
DRY  
YEAR

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DRINKS WRITER JOHN DEBARY STARTED BARTENDING AT PDT IN 2008 BEFORE MAKING THE MOVE TO MOMOFUKU SSÄM BAR - BEGINNING AS A PART TIME BARTENDER, FINISHING FOUR YEARS LATER AS BAR DIRECTOR FOR THE GROUP. HE FOUNDED THE RESTAURANT WORKERS' COMMUNITY FOUNDATION IN 2017, LAUNCHED PROTEAU - A LINE OF ZERO-PROOF BOTANICAL DRINKS - IN 2019, AND PUBLISHED HIS FIRST BOOK - DRINK WHAT YOU WANT, IN 2020. 2021 - WORLD DOMINATION.

**didn't drink alcohol for 2020 and now I want to talk about it in a long Twitter thread that should probably just be a blog post (Editor's note - these words first appeared on John's social media) but here goes:**

(I get into topics like alcohol abuse, mental illness, homophobia, and parental death, just as a heads up.)

Some background first: every year I do some kind of restriction. Last year I only re-read books, another year I didn't buy any clothes. My dad is Catholic and even though I hate the religion, something about the 'fasting' elements of Lent and Advent stuck with me. I enjoy cutting myself off from things to create space in unexpected places, it's where innovation and creativity flourish. I did some of my best work for Momofuku Nishi, where David Chang told me I had to create an Italian cocktail program, but nothing could come from Italy.

My family loved wine, and used connoisseurship to cast consumption in a virtuous light. Opening that fourth bottle of Chateauneuf-de-Pape was \*educational\*. My mom once yelled at a wine steward for not letting my then-seventeen-year-old brother have a glass of wine with our dinner. Wine is great though! Beer, spirits, etc. They're all fascinating things to study on many levels (hello, I wrote a whole cocktail book). Plus, they're fun to

drink and usually taste delicious and have accompanied most major rituals in my life; birthdays, Christmas, weddings, funerals...

in 2008 I started at a fancy cocktail bar, and then a cool restaurant group. Neither of these places had hard partying cultures based on what I've seen - sure, we have shift drinks, regularly taste wines, but nothing out of control or unprofessional (again, from what I experienced). This is to say though, that working as a bartender acclimatises you to a different level of alcohol consumption. Three Daiquiris doesn't seem like a lot, when in reality it's a third of a bottle of rum. But even then, alcohol wasn't a huge issue for me, I loved going out and drinking excessively, but I also loved going to bed at 9pm and exercising the next morning.

**My drinking patterns started to change in 2013 when my mom was diagnosed with glioblastoma - a gruesomely incurable brain cancer that kills most people within eighteen months. We treated it aggressively, though; surgery, radiation, chemo - up until my wedding. She wanted to be as normal and present as she could for that. She stopped treatment after the wedding and died six months later.**

She deteriorated rapidly. I spent most weekends after that at my parents' and alcohol was a huge part of that experience. We weren't

even trying to gussy it up with wine arcana - we had three bottles of vodka in the freezer (Looking back, grief counseling for the family and individual therapy may have been a bit better use of our time than drinking to oblivion, but alas.). **This was the time I started to notice myself no longer being hungover in the morning after drinking, but simply still drunk. It almost felt like I had cheated the system: "You can't be hungover if you're still drunk!" but.... Searing anxiety would creep in as the day wore on, and it was countdown until I could drink again, or just power through the shattered psyche until I got back to normal.** But for the most part I was "fine" drinking heavily on weekends and being normal and productive during the week, but still working in an environment where alcohol was never not present. A big turning point was the 2016 election. My mom bears an uncanny resemblance to HRC and was a proxy for her. I canvassed and campaigned, in part to support an extremely qualified candidate against an autocratic monster, but also as a way to keep my mother alive—to save her. We all know how that election turned out. I ended up frozen - literally - in my bed for weeks after the results were called. The times I could move, I would reach into a drawer under my bed and take a swig of whatever cognac or rye I had stashed there the night before.

It got to the point where I had

to type out texts to my husband in order to communicate basic needs. Needless to say, this was not an awesome experience for him, but we found a psychiatrist, and I started going. It took about two years, but we found the right combination of diagnoses (anxiety, insomnia, and OCD) and medication. As I was recovering from this “episode” I would experience stretches of amazing health; complete avoidance of alcohol, strenuous exercise for 7 hours per week, kale salads, kombucha, the works. But. Every three to four months I would slip into what my husband and I lovingly (“lovingly”) call a “J-Hole”. My anxiety would build to a point where I would just break.

They felt like manic episodes; everything would become bright and possible, and I would do impulsive things like chug a half a bottle of gin on a Tuesday afternoon or buy five hundred ladybugs online. Then I would crash and be out of commission for a few days. The last J-Hole was almost two years ago. They cleared up after I sought cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (I cannot recommend this enough), and also when I finally got on the right amount of medication for my body size. My internalised ableism shamed me into thinking “less” medication was better, even if it meant I was not fixing the issue the medication was supposed to fix. It took me YEARS to finally get

up to the right dosage so that my anxiety disorder and OCD were actually managed effectively. Once these J-hole episodes cleared up, it was so easy to see how much of a destabilising force alcohol was for me, especially during the excruciating experience of watching your mom’s brain rot from the inside, and seeing your country slide into fascism and autocracy.

(I had never experienced homophobic street harassment until after the 2016 election, just FYI. In Summer 2017 my husband was attacked on the subway for touching someone with his “f-gg-t purse”).

**I read a bunch of books to prepare for this year. One of the best was *This Naked Mind* by Annie Grace. It’s a quick read and I highly recommend you checking it out, even if you have no desire to change your drinking. Their podcasts are great too. I chose to do a dry 2020 before the pandemic hit and my industry crumbled around me, but I don’t think I could have picked a better year to cut out something that had the potential to be so dangerous. (Like, if you’re on dirt road, maybe skip the rollerblades and walk instead.)**

This year has been huge for me. The foundation that I started in 2018, Restaurant Workers’ Community Foundation raised over \$7.6 million for COVID relief;

I published my first cocktail book in June, and I launched my non-alcoholic drink brand (Proteau) in July. I can only imagine how much more difficult this would have been if I had even been drinking a few nights per month. I don't think I would have been able to pull this off. **Alcohol has been humanity's companion since pre-history. Yes, it is harmful, but so are a lot of things we enjoy. We can't try to live a risk-free life, it's about the choices you make and the risks you accept.**

Taking an entire year off alcohol taught me that I could walk away from it if I needed to, but that there were times when drinking

is nice, but not obligatory. Are the sloppily-batched cocktails at that event going to make it any less awkward? Is cracking open a bottle of wine on a Friday night to watch TV worth it if it means I'm dragging the next day? Maybe! But also maybe not. Taking the year off has given me that perspective. As I write this on New Year's Eve Eve I'm wondering what to take from this year. I don't think I'm going to become a forever teetotaler, but I'm also not counting the seconds until the clock strikes midnight so that I can get wasted again. Maybe I'll cap it off with a Dry January?

Oh, and my thing for 2021?

I'm going vegan.



**BY JOHN.**

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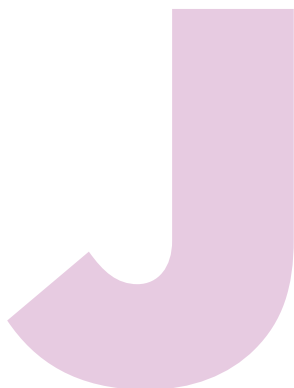
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# JAKE O'BRIEN MURPHY

## SCOTCH EGG

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A TOP THREE CONTESTANT FOR EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE NORTHERNER, JAKE'S IMPRESSIVE CV LISTS CALLOOH CALLAY, THREE SHEETS, LIVERPOOL'S PRESENT COMPANY AND AMERICAN BAR AT THE SAVOY AS HIS FORMER EMPLOYERS. NEWLY ENGAGED, AND CURRENTLY MORE WRITER THAN BARTENDER, JAKE LIVES IN EAST LONDON WITH HIS FIANCÉ FLORA AND THEIR DOG BABY MILHOUSE. IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A FUNNY, INFORMATIVE, AND ENTRANCING BED TIME STORY, CHECK OUT HIS PODCAST 'OVER THE BAR'.

**“Ministers have since confirmed Scotch Eggs do qualify as an appropriately sized meal”. You’ll have to excuse me - I know from where you’re reading, in the very near future, that this is hardly a sizzling observation but I think it’s crucial to fully appreciate that as I write this in December, at the high water mark of the hospitality industry’s continued economic vulnerability, the legislative conversation moved away from sanity and into the muddy waters of bar snack categorisation (admittedly a topic close to my own heart).**

You would have thought that those in Government might hold an inter-departmental meeting to allow themselves a chance to properly align with whichever committee-manufactured deceit they are peddling this week. Or to wipe the dangling pig saliva from their genitals. Instead, the question of what constitutes a substantial meal was passed back and forth between our elected representatives like a game of hot potato - incidentally not a substantial meal - all the while remaining unanswered. **In eye-watering live television scenes, we stared at Michael Gove for whole uninterrupted minutes, only to watch on as he gurned awkwardly in an attempt to quantify a Scotch Egg with the kind of scientific rigour that would be applied if he tried to calculate the legal drinking**

**age in dog years.** All of this led me to the conclusion that he isn't human at all. He seems to exist singularly to make whatever room he inhabits uglier, so to my mind, he's really more of a disagreeable texture. Like shit in velcro.

For our international readers, a Scotch Egg is a gastropub staple consisting of a cooked egg, swaddled in sausage meat of indeterminate origin which is then breaded and subsequently deep fried. An unholy middle finger to the sovereignty of Mother Nature herself, it is the culinary equivalent of the universal television remote, inasmuch as it does everything you'd expect of its composite elements but does them all horribly. Also for reasons unbeknownst to contemporary science the dividing layer smells like an aged fart. I'm similarly unclear on the history of the dish but I assume it could only have been created by a bored chef with a passing interest in eugenics. I actually quite like them with a dollop of brown sauce, they're nostalgic if a bit dry.

**Snack taxonomy dealt with, it is difficult to watch something you love struggle and as our industry limps into 2021, it's clear that in very crucial ways the future will be nothing like the past, even the very recent past of a month or two ago.** We're in a state of perpetual flux and our economy, priorities, and perceptions have shifted. The particulars of which

bring into startling focus just how inadequately things have been managed. There's a whole load of quite disheartening numbers, stats and charts that illustrate just how prolific and terrible COVID is. The fact remains, however, that there is no hard evidence to suggest that hospitality venues are a significant vector of disease. Which makes understanding the decision of enforced closures, while schools and shops remain open [at time of writing], all the more mindbending. It's almost as if the big decisions are being made by someone in Whitehall with the epidemiological qualifications of the man on the Weetos box.

**I read something Monica Berg wrote recently and it stuck in my mind like the catchiest of ABBA choruses. "What many politicians seem to not understand is that myself and others do not stay in this industry because we lack options - we stay here because we want to". I felt a flutter of pride reading that. Berg manages to articulate quite an extraordinary amount of subtext without mincing words. All at once, I was reminded why I love my job, even if I haven't been behind a bar in the best part of a year.** At the same time, something about what she said struck me as a declaration of defiant optimism. I've long made my peace with the general public not fully understanding my job. The only time I would really allow myself to get annoyed was when,

at house parties, friends and family would cajole me into making drinks for them. It's all in good spirits of course, but what that means is in a kitchen full of loved ones, canapés and small talk, on my night off, I'm relegated to the corner trying to pull magic out of my arse with a bottle of Mickey Finns and an expired can of evaporated milk.

**Sometimes my career is belittled as unskilled, lowest common denominator labour and other times it is fetishised in that tasteless twinkling, art-deco way people like to reminisce about made-up bits of history. Almost always though, in a wider context, it is regarded as transitional, something to fill the gaps between improper and proper.** Sometimes a job in hospitality is exactly that: a transitional thing, a person between two points, and what a wonderful industry to dip your toe into as you find your way in the world. It is because of that inherent flexibility that it is utilitarian; there is a space for everyone and anyone, even if the job only serves as a stepping stone on the path to external ambitions. **For posterity's sake, my transitional job was in the fleeting world of Christmas retail, which I loathed and to my delight was quickly fired from. Officially my dismissal had something to do with "misleading" customers about the availability of stock. Unofficially, I outright lied - only because the storeroom was up five flights of stairs and staffed by a manager**

**with the kind of murderous temper that pretty much guaranteed that one day he'd taste prison food.**

It should be plainly obvious though that the hospitality sector, which is the third-largest employer in the UK, cannot exist solely on a transient workforce. It is founded on a commitment to others by others and that in of itself is spectacular. **That means that by its very nature, hospitality is congenial and generous which is what often puts us in a unique position to have our choices misunderstood and diminished, which is occurring right now in the highest forms of Government.** For so many a life in service is a passion, one that incidentally pays for the lights to stay on. It is likewise utilitarian because it encompasses people from around the professional, social and economic spectrum, who ultimately found purpose in honest work. I know doctors, architects, Grandmothers, gardeners, singers, reformed convicts and artists who've all sidestepped into hospitality because, counterintuitive to the current prevailing narrative, their dreams found root and even flourished in bars and restaurants.

**There is an insidious fallacy at work then when we are told we need to rethink, reskill and reboot. It suggests that our jobs have less societal value than those in protected industries like bankers and politicians. I find that shortsighted for so many reasons**

**but the most salient one, which doesn't revolve around further fruity language or calling bankers out as self-serving vampiric ubertwats, is that the economic and cultural capital that these jobs bring is objectively positive.**

All one has to do is look at the direct effects that the hospitality sector has on employment, tax revenue, and services offered to better understand its inherent value, or the indirect effect it has on the wider economy as part of the larger supply chain. As well as this, the remunerative impact on the economy from the individual purchase of goods and services that employment in F&B allows to so many. All of that means our jobs, where the economy is concerned, have staggering societal value. **A career in hospitality also serves to help strengthen communities by creating spaces with a social imperative. Restaurants, bars, and the people working in them offer a uniquely human way to engage with and understand the specific elements of a given place, people or idea through food, drink, and bonhomie. In doing so they are a functionally important aspect of a diverse society. Most astoundingly, they can take on an entirely individual civic importance all of their own; sometimes because of their historical notability such as Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese, Gordon's Wine Bar, Ronnie Scott's, Negril, Bagel Bake, or the Savoy, and sometimes because they provide a**

**sense of belonging to those often marginalised by wider society, such as Dalston Superstore or The Glory. These are just the particular examples that sprung to mind but if you ask anyone the same questions, to name the places important to them, you'll find just how wide the sweep of influence that this industry has on real peoples lives. They help to inform, discuss and expand the kind of ideas that contribute to an open-minded, inclusive society. Which means our jobs, where cultural significance is concerned have a foundational, necessary and indispensable societal value. All in all, the hospitality industry matters and your part in it matters too.**

Under the circumstances remaining optimistic may seem like trying to light a match during a gale-force wind but I think it is better to remain resolutely hopeful over the alternative of accepting, out of hand, that things are innately terrible. **Allowing ourselves to be optimistic in the face of such insurmountable awfulness is a powerfully defiant thing - that's why Monica Berg's words stayed with me, because despite everything that is going on right now, I think it is courageous to want to believe things will get better. The infrastructure of hospitality may shake and even buckle, but as long as there are people who find purpose in serving others it is fundamentally undiminishable.** This year we have

seen that what was previously thought impossible is possible, that what was thought unchangeable has changed. In very crucial ways the future will be nothing like the past but that doesn't mean it can't be better. I am committed to the defiantly optimistic idea that the hospitality industry of the future will be a more balanced and representative one, that out of this global disaster and the manhandling of our mutual fates we can find a collective voice that explains patiently but uncompromisingly why our jobs are important.

I saw an older couple walking in my local park a few weeks before I sat down to write this. It was an

unseasonably warm day and the sky was a powdery, cloudless blue that made it feel twice as big. Steadily the couple ambled happily towards where I stood. As they got close I noticed that they were dressed for an occasion. The man was dressed in a suit that was big enough to fit them both in with room left for furniture. The lady wore a gossamer neck scarf that floated on the wind. As they peeked at me over their masks, what I could see of their ancient faces wrinkled in the telltale sign of a smile. "Going anywhere nice?" I asked, as my dog relieved herself on the leg of a bench. "Oh, nowhere really. Just gotta make the most of the sunshine".



**BY JAKE.**

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# DISCARD INTERVIEW

## MINAKSHI SINGH



CO-FOUNDER OF INDIA'S AWARD WINNING COCKTAILS & DREAMS SPEAKEASY (HARYANA) AND SIDECAR (DELHI), MINAKSHI BEGAN BARTENDING OVER FIFTEEN YEARS AGO BEFORE MAKING THE MOVE TO MARKETING AND BRAND MANAGEMENT WITH DIAGEO, BACARDI AND LATER, PERNOD RICARD. ALONGSIDE MULTIPLE NATIONAL AWARDS, SIDECAR WAS NAMED INDIA'S BEST BAR BY ASIA'S 50 BEST BARS IN 2020 - A HIGHLIGHT OF AN OTHERWISE DISMAL YEAR. HAPPIER BEHIND THE SCENES THAN IN THE SPOTLIGHT, MINAKSHI IS A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH AND IF YOU'RE ASKING, SHE'LL HAVE A MARGARITA EVERY TIME.

**DISCARD:** Hi Minakshi! First things first, how did you first start in the bar industry?

**M:** I was pursuing hotel management, and like most college kids I was taking up odd jobs to make extra pocket money and I stumbled upon bartending for private events. In fact, working the bar was paying more than double and that itself was my reason to go for it! Once I started bartending at private events though, I realised that I truly enjoyed it. There was so much energy and excitement - the thrill of it and the adrenaline rush was massive. I went on to work fourteen hours without complaining, with few breaks, and

used to look forward to these gigs. As I was inching towards graduating, I was more and more sure, that this is truly something I was passionate about. I wanted to learn more, see more and experience more of this side of the industry, which was fairly nascent at the time. Mind you this was seventeen years ago!

**D:** What made you choose to make hospitality your career?

**M:** Oh, I was instantaneously attracted to it! I was lucky to find my passion so early on. Right from the brands, to their stories, to production and mixology, it all intrigued me!

**The fact was that at that time bartending was illegal for women in India (believe it or not!), so I didn't have an option to carry on, and hence chose to work for companies that worked closely with liquor brands - sales as well as marketing. I so badly wanted to be a part of it, that I chose to still be a part of it no matter what.**

**D:** Is it right to say that, particularly as a woman, choosing a career in hospitality is not the norm in India? What challenges did this present?

**M:** Well, not really. We are very much part of the industry, but then there are male dominated roles and then there are others. For example, until a few years back, you wouldn't see too many women chefs. Similarly, bars and bartending were (and are) firmly male dominated. It is also an industry with late night shifts and erratic hours, which doesn't help. The safety and security of women is a huge issue in India, and the liability of it mostly falls on the employers,

the small independent owners have a tough time managing that given the costs of transportation and strict rules.

**D: Who inspired you - or was there anyone you looked up to when you started your career?**

**M:** My biggest inspiration in the industry has been my current business partner, Yangdup Lama. He is a very well known mixologist and industry veteran, in fact it was him who first employed me to bartend at private events, and while working together over a period of time, we planned to open our own bar. This was back in 2005! I can proudly say that I learnt from the best. I also learnt a lot from my first employer at the time - Tulleeho - which was an online bar review and bar consultancy start-up. Being their first employee, I learnt a lot about building a team, entrepreneurship, but also organisation, and delegation. I can easily say that a lot of my work ethics were shaped in those early years!

**D: How did you progress from bartender to bar owner?**

**M:** For me bartending never could become a profession as such (as mentioned above!), and hence I moved to the sales and marketing of alcoholic beverages and joined an online start-up (if anyone remembers Y2K!!!). Tulleeho, which was a founded as a consultancy, bar review, and training website, was working closely with liquor brands. I was most excited to be working on that side of the job, as it was something entirely new to me! The

job profile was fun, and at the time I got to travel a lot. That also gave me a unique perspective on how India was drinking, and what we could do to shape it. Working with giants like Diageo and Bacardi also gave me international exposure. From there, I moved to working with Pernod Ricard, in their trade marketing department, where the job involved me working directly with hotels, restaurants, and bars. Whilst I always had the dream to open my own bar someday, I think in retrospect those were my founding stones. I am an instinctive marketeer, with my ear firmly to the ground, and in some ways that has worked in our favour, with how I operate and function our bars. Now, since we were talking on and off for years about starting our own bar, I finally took the plunge, quit my job, put in all my savings, and started my first bar with Yangdup. This was 2012. Naive as we were, we had no clue how crazy tough it would be.

**D: What's the concept behind Cocktails and Dreams Speakeasy?**

**M:** This is fun. So, we couldn't afford the high street rental (obviously), and hence were looking for locations that still fitted our requirements (read budget), even if they were a bit away from our dream location. In doing so we ended up in a suburban town (Gurgaon, where we are located is twenty kilometres away from the main South Delhi action). Since we detest malls, we could only find the location where we are, and it was a ground and basement site, which was way way below the expected rent, (and had

free parking!). We were most chuffed with how we cracked the deal, until a few months later when we realised that the location that we had chosen had NOTHING around it, we were the only bar or restaurant in a radius of three kilometres. We always wanted to make a cozy neighbourhood bar known for its cocktails and bartenders, so since we were in a basement, and a (tad) bit difficult to locate, we created it as a speakeasy. The name “Cocktails & Dreams” was my business partner’s company name, and we chose to keep that. We know its a mouthful, but soon I started calling it “Speaks” and that stuck! The bar has been created with images of gangsters, rumrunners, and bootleggers, and we have kept a very casual vibe. In fact we are still exactly the same as when we opened, and that is something we take a lot of pride in. We have a lot of regulars who have become close friends and are like family!

**D: What’s the concept behind Sidecar? How is it different to your first bar?**

**M:** Sidecar is a total dream bar. We did everything that we had ever dreamt of. Yangdip got a MASSIVE bar, with a big liquor inventory and all the fancy equipment to go with it, and I got my bookstore, curated tea and coffee and food menu, and a beautiful location in our initial dream location of South Delhi! It was the classic cocktail Sidecar that we used as our muse. In our brief we chose really classic and a tad European look and feel, and have kept it really timeless and elegant. Just like the classic Sidecar.

It is different and yet very similar to our first bar. While the scale of the bars is different, in both the venues the BAR is our central and focal point. That is where all the action is, and the bartenders and service are our key deliverables. We have also kept the programming of events the same; we do weekly and seasonal special menus, along with live bands, quizzes, book readings, tastings, trivia nights, and many other fun events. In fact, that is something I enjoy most about running our bars - we meet so many like-minded people who are looking to get away from the mundane and routine.

**D: Do you still bartend, or are you more behind the scenes?**

**M:** Not really! I have been really busy doing everything else I guess (accounting to manpower management), and I am happy about that. I have always enjoyed being behind the scenes.

**D: How has the bar industry in India changed over the past decade?**

**M:** It has changed massively! We started Speaks eight years ago, and at that time it was tough to get guests to try an Old Fashioned or a Whisky Sour. It has taken us all good four or five years to get to now, where restaurants and bars are focusing on their beverage menu, bartenders, and training. It has been a very gratifying change as well - we have seen chefs become celebrities and now it’s time for bartenders to get the same adulation. While we have been lucky to see such great growth, we still need lots of support to make a difference. Indian liquor

laws and policies are archaic, and are tough to manoeuvre. We are left busy managing the paperwork and bureaucratic issues, and have no time left to be creative! It also takes very deep pockets to run businesses in India, and hence hospitality folk rarely own bars and restaurants, and they are mostly run by investors who are chasing numbers. We need to break that, and get more hospitality folks involved in running the show. It is gradually happening, and I see a very bright future for us all!

**D: How has COVID affected your businesses? Are things improving with the vaccination plans?**

**M: Big time. We were shut for six months from mid-March through September, and post re-opening we have been operating with many restrictions. Also, since we run bars, we have never really ventured into home delivery or food innovation, so the pandemic hit us hard. For most of the time we have been trying to innovate and make money (#pivoting) to keep our heads above water. I am still very happy that we could pay our salaries and rent along with the excise fees and other dues, and that we are still here. We are hoping (and praying) that the worst is behind us, and that finally we can breathe easy.** It has been mentally challenging like hell, which I am sure you know.

While we are positive about the vaccine, we still have a few months (hopefully) before we can breathe easy!

**D: Where do you look for inspiration, what are your favourite bars in India and around the world?**

**M:** I love to travel, and have been lucky to have experienced some great bars in India as well internationally. In Delhi I love going to Home, (especially their terrace), Hoots, in Perch for their awesome barkeeps. Just before the pandemic I visited Bombay and quite enjoyed the drinks at O Pedro, and Arbor Brewing company in Bangalore are doing some great stuff with their brews overall. Around the world there are some amazing bars that we have been inspired by, but Milk & Honey (the OG), The Dead Rabbit, The Artesian: these have been our icons. They have shaped the new age of cocktails for all of us. Closer to Asia, I am dying to visit Manhattan, Native, Coa, The Pontiac, Wise King, and many many others!

**D: What are your ambitions for the future?**

**M:** You mean my global domination plans? Well, run very many bars, make my own spirit, go international, write a book - the list is endless! Most of all though, I want to make a difference in the industry for the better.



**BY MINAKSHI.**

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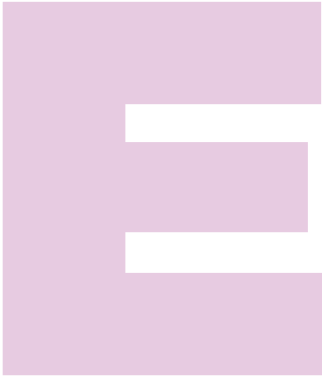
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**EMMA  
MURPHY**

**REDUNDANT;  
NOT OR NO  
LONGER  
NEEDED**

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A LONDON INDUSTRY STALWART, EMMA IS WIDELY KNOWN FOR HER FORMER ROLE AS A FESTIVAL DIRECTOR ON THE FOUNDING TEAM OF DRINKUP.LONDON - RESPONSIBLE FOR LONDON COCKTAIL WEEK, LONDON WINE WEEK, AND NUMEROUS OTHER LONDON DRINKS FESTIVALS. SHE HAS HELD MANAGEMENT ROLES AT MILK & HONEY, QUO VADIS AND GORDON RAMSAY GROUP, AND LAST YEAR OPENED HER FIRST BAR WITH PARTNER DEANO MONCRIEFFE, DALSTON'S HACHA: HOME OF THE MIRROR MARGARITA AND PURVEYORS OF TASTY AF MEXICAN FOOD.

**R**edundant; adjective. Not or no longer needed. Superfluous.

Let's face it, nobody ever wants to be labelled as superfluous. In itself a word that strips you of any self worth. To be told that despite giving it your all there is no longer a seat at the table for you. You didn't make the cut. However, here we are in the tragic scenario where a huge percentage of our brilliant hospitality industry have experienced just that - fallen by the wayside as more and more venues close and businesses scale down. And inevitably there's more to come over the coming months. That calls for a pause for thought; a moment of clarity for those fortunate enough to have dodged the bullet and a reassuring hug for those that didn't.

With almost one million people in the UK having been made redundant this year it's something that's touched all industries and walks of life but the feelings and reactions are often common; denial, anger, worry and sadness. A rollercoaster of emotions that are not dissimilar to the stages of grief, which although surprised me to realise I suppose makes sense... when you passionately love what you do it can be a crushing blow

to have that taken away from you unexpectedly.

**Recently I've seen my partner go through it - a ten year career abruptly come to an end as an indirect result of COVID - and it momentarily turned our lives upside down. We'd just had a baby, our own business was indefinitely closed while we desperately tried to reinvent it and in the space of a few days and a number of tense phone calls it was all over. Locked out of emails, company car collected, thanks for giving us a decade of your time and goodbye. You don't even get a leaving party in lockdown. Having dealt with it myself in 2019, and now being an employer who lies awake at night thinking of ways to keep a team in work, the worries of redundancy - from both sides of the coin - seem to have taken up unwelcome residence in our lives for the last eighteen months.** Us and many of you reading this I'm sure.

Apart from the obvious financial implications there's an overwhelming feeling of uncertainty that makes redundancy so tough. Us humans need a sense of purpose, without it we feel like we're just flailing around in the abyss and failing

to achieve. **If you wake up in the morning without a job to do it can leave you feeling somewhat like a spare part (unless it's a holiday, in which case... HOORAY!). Much like with lockdown there's a cooling off period where you need to adjust to a completely new routine, or lack thereof, and it can be a strange experience when you're used to working the majority of your waking hours. Whether it's boredom or anxiety, when external factors leave you without control of your own life it's debilitating and undoubtedly bad for your mental health. But there are ways to navigate it, to anchor and find a 'glass half full' outlook and this is where the hope lies.**

For want of a less preachy twist sometimes it actually can be a blessing in disguise, a chance to regroup, refocus, and move on to the next challenge with a full tank and determination. An opportunity to reconnect with people and passions that have been neglected when the sixty hour upwards week has had you firmly in its grip. Eighteen months on from my own personal trip to the bin and I'm a co-founder of an award winning business and have a beautiful baby boy who would

never have been on the cards if I was still busting my butt for the man. So if you're reading this and are currently moving through the aforementioned stages of grief then know that it will pass and if you keep on walking there will always be light at the end of the tunnel.

**To close, and this is the important bit, if you know someone who's lost their job recently - it's highly likely with numbers as great as**

**there are - then be a good pal and show support; buy them a beer, tell them all the reasons they are really great at what they do and encourage them to take the bull by the horns and see what's next. It's easy to feel bitter, uncertain and hard done by when the rug is pulled out from under your feet but sometimes a massive kick far out of our comfort zone is the best way to find what's waiting around the corner.**

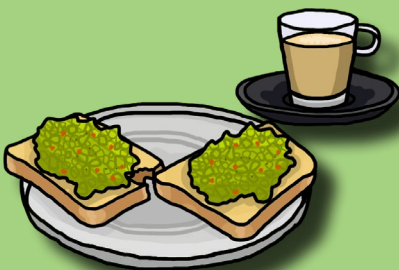


**BY EMMA.**

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# PAUL MANT A BALL TEARER



**“Fuck me, I’ve just had what the Australians refer to as a ball tearer.”**

P

PAUL HAS WORKED IN THE BAR INDUSTRY FOR NEARLY A QUARTER CENTURY, DURING WHICH TIME HE HAS BECOME AN EXPERT IN BOTH DRINKING AND SWEARING. KNOWN AS MUCH FOR HIS VARIOUS SIDE HUSTLES (REMATCH, THE ALTERNATIVE BAR AWARDS, DIBBY DIBBY SOUNDSYSTEM), AS HIS ACTUAL CAREER, PAUL NOW LIVES AN ENVIOUS LIFESTYLE IN SUNNY SYDNEY, A FACT WHICH HE WILL HAPPILY REMIND ANYONE IN A WHATSAPP GROUP CHAT WITH HIM. IF ANYTHING, AUSTRALIA HAS ONLY IMPROVED HIS SWEARING, BUT TRAGICALLY HE NOW THINKS TIM TAMS ARE BETTER THAN PENGUINS, WHICH IS VERY, VERY WRONG.

DISCARD asked Paul Mant, Group Beverage Manager for Sydney mega-operator Merivale, and sometime founder to talk to us about the sometime unseen, often unsung part of the bar industry – those working behind the scenes, operating bars ‘at scale’; maintaining standards, guest experience, and quality control across multiple outlets and enormous volumes. After his initial explanation about the ball-tearer (it means to have a bad day apparently), he sets the scene for the conversation - he can give “radio friendly” answers, or he can “let go and then red pen it”; just chat away untethered, and then can have the final edit on the spicier elements of the conversation. We choose the latter.

“I started working in bars in I think 1997. I wasn’t allowed to go to sixth form [after leaving secondary school aged sixteen] because I was a very naughty boy, so I went to the local golf club, lied about my age and got a job collecting glasses. I spent some time watching the guys behind the bar, and worked out pretty quickly that all you had to do was give the people the thing they asked for, and be nice, and you’re all of a sudden seen

as really good at it? I thought, I'm up for this, no problem." The golf club was in Ascot, explains Paul - an affluent leafy London satellite, full of footballers and new money financiers, and as such the club attracted a fairly wealthy and famous clientele. "The whole France '98 squad came in for a golf day once." We enquire whether they were well behaved. "I was told Gazza was enjoying himself careering about on a golf cart with a hipflask of brandy".

A regular at the bar owned a nightclub in Windsor and offered Paul the job as assistant manager. After a happy year working two nights a week, the owner wanted to raise service standards, telling him to find somewhere in London to train. "I was sort of self-taught, and while I'd managed to get myself to a decent standard and got relatively fast the drinks were all sour mix and spindle mixers. I used Yahoo - yeah it was those days - and found this one bar where both 'Theme' and 'Flava' bartenders of the year [Dre Masso and Jamie Terrell] were working. My boss paid a grand for me to go for a two-week course at LAB." The daytime courses were useful, but it was the end of the day Paul enjoyed more when the staff took him out to visit other bars. "My eyes were opened, and I was completely intoxicated by it". Back in Windsor a sudden change

of ownership: "a load of gangsters, basically" at the nightclub meant a change, and following a short stint in Antigua, Paul returned to the UK to work at a bar in Hertford, while also doing event work with Soulshakers. "I was meeting and working next to all these people off the front of CLASS and Flava. I was shitting myself."

Fast forward to 2007 and while on a holiday, Paul received a call from Soulshakers' Giles Looker, asking him if he was interested in working at a new rum bar opening in Mayfair, which would turn out to be the now infamous Mahiki. Summarising himself at the time as "just acting like Billy Big Balls, I did not have the chops" he interviewed for head bartender. The interview was successful but could have been very different, "after we shook hands on the job, I saw Rich Hunt walking down the stairs. Sliding Doors moment - If I'd have been twenty minutes later, I'm pretty sure they'd have hired him instead".

Mahiki upon its opening was wildly popular - "an absolute juggernaut" - helped in no small part by an opening night visit of Royal princes William and Harry, who were pictured in the national tabloids drinking their signature sharing cocktail; a champagne-soaked punch served in a huge treasure chest. "Next day it was on the front

of the papers and everything went mad. We just couldn't keep up. Imagine the bar version of Fawlty Towers. But with sillier walks." Paul remained at Mahiki as head bartender for eighteen months, which Paul described as "a long year and a half but looking back some of the best times in my life. It's where I made my bones; in terms of profile, for sure."

It was whilst working at Mahiki Paul co-founded the anarchic, winner-takes-all cocktail competition It's A Rematch, Beeyatch, with the simple aim of ending the grumbling about unseen conspiracies, and strategic pouring deal based faux-victories. **For Rematch you paid your due, everyone made the same drinks, and the fastest took home the pot. At its peak Rematch was a polarising phenomenon; it had a huge following, was contested in twelve cities across the world, and offered the winners serious money and cult status, but it was still lambasted by certain corners of the industry. Paul is philosophical when looking back on his Rematch legacy, stating that its innate popularity turned it into something unrecognisable, "it was great, and there's no denying it helped me get lots of free holidays, but it became a bit of a disaster by the end. It was time to kill it."**

2009, and Paul turned down a role

with Mahiki sister venue Whisky Mist in favour of joining new Soho member's club Quo Vadis. **"Whisky Mist told me they wanted to make a classic cocktail bar, but said they wanted classics 'y'know, like the Lychee Martini'. The same day I went to Soho to talk to the Quo Vadis owners and they happened to be looking at glassware. One of them picked up this delicate glass and remarked about how it would be good for a Sazerac. I thought, this is it. These people care about the right stuff."** Paul thinks for a second, then continues - **"quite funny really, since nowadays Lychee Martinis pay a significant part of my wages"**. Paul started as bar manager and soon took on responsibility for the club as well, and had some big names around him; Charles Vexenat, Marcis Dzelzainis, Gianfranco Spada, and Ali Burgess all worked behind the bar; "the team was a belter, and we had - even though I hate to say this term - what I think was the UK's first proper ice program".

Quo Vadis was critically successful, winning Best New Bar from CLASS, and being nominated for a Spirited Award, attracting a more eclectic, but no less famous clientele than those sipping drinks out of pineapples at Mahiki, "I remember one time I was in the bar, and Lucien Freud, Damien Hirst, and Banksy were sitting at

the bar, having a cup of tea. Three generations of British art just sitting there chatting about the football”.

**Despite the success of Quo Vadis, after three and half years Paul was eventually was made redundant, which in retrospect he admits was wasn't totally surprising. "I'd successfully managed myself out of a job. My final eighteen months I probably wasn't really giving it my best – we still had a good team and the bar was running well – but I was basically coming in three or four days a week and drinking with guests. I fucking loved it, but Quo was full of lunatics. You can get yourself into bad habits in the West End of London with company like that. Looking back, I don't know how I operated mentally for as long as I did. Guests were having a great time for sure, but I probably could have been a better leader, a better manager, a better boss”.**

Managing to leave on good terms, and using his redundancy package to purchase events equipment, Paul started Heads, Hearts & Tails alongside Joe Stokoe, running events, working with liquor brands, and consulting on projects such as the table tennis chain Bounce. Although a successful company now, building the business from scratch proved tough. “It was fucking hard, really hard, we worked as hard as we could to get the work

we could, you know? We did well eventually, but there were ups and downs and we were broke most of the time. Actually, Joe is better with money than I am, I was broke most of the time”.

A trip to give a talk at the Sydney Bar Show during Mahiki's opening year had led to an extended month long stay in Australia, and since that time Paul had returned several times and made and maintained friendships there. One of these friends was leaving his job in the hospitality group Merivale and asked Paul if he'd be interested in taking over in his place. Eight weeks later he was starting his job as group bars manager on the other side of the world. The learning curve was very steep, and Paul admits he struggled to adapt: “I had no idea what I was doing, then my old man passed away which was really challenging, and I didn't take it well. Fortunately, the people that work there believed in me and gave me the ‘eight-week chat’ which is basically an ultimatum; here are the problems, here is where you can get better, you have eight weeks to get it right. Fucking terrifying, but one of my strengths is certainly fortitude, so I decided to get my head down and sort it out. One of the good things about this company is if there are ever things you need to do differently; they address it very clearly. Not in a

mean way, in a constructive and fair way that just makes you think, OK I'll get on that".

**Merivale is a gigantic operation, currently operating ninety outlets across twenty-five venues, with a diverse portfolio ranging from simple pubs, through all sizes of restaurants, various bar concepts, wine bars, nightclubs, and even hotels. Paul has to think for a second when asked about how many venues he's opened in his seven years with the company, "I think about twenty, but each has completely different challenges. Justin [Merivale owner] states that the point of the diversity of the portfolio is that's there's something for everyone, so some pubs we might just take over, they need a quick rebrand and then we open, some might have a \$20m refurbishment program".**

Paul is realistic about the hard work expected: "We've had people who are - quite frankly, superstars - from the UK, Aussies, whatever, come along with very, very good reputations and they haven't made it. It's not for everyone, it's all about how you respond to the demands of the job I guess. It's not like Google where they give you snacks and let you take naps. We work fucking hard, we're incredibly successful, we're the market leader. Get on the bus".

**The scale of the operation is frightening. Fully staffed the company has three thousand employees, including a thousand-strong bar team, who collectively in the twelve months pre-COVID poured out three million litres of beer across the company's bars, and close to the same number of serves of Absolut.** The numbers sometimes even surprise him: "we are certainly the biggest consumer of Don Julio 1942 in the Southern Hemisphere, maybe the world, but that's without pushing it. It's just what people order". The challenge of operating at this sort of scale of course is to maintain that consistency and quality control of a single bar across all the different concepts; finding a way for a simple drink to be served in a way that is consistent with the company standards, put together fast enough to match the - sometimes overwhelming - demand, and of course profitable, no matter which venue you order it in. This is not to say that money is the primary goal however. "The fact is, we talk about money and volumes and all the rest of it, but every decision is made with the guest in mind. Every decision". Consistency is the keyword in the approach to staff training as well. A strong leadership structure, ideally promoted from within, helps to maintain the company standards across

venues. New recruits are sent to a bartender 'bootcamp' to learn the basics of bartending, service, and a recently added module on batching cocktails. "The idea is to take away the scary shit for these kids, and make sure they know how to make everything the way we want them to make it no matter the venue. Spirit, ice, mixer, there's definitely a 'Merivale way' to make that now. I really think our consistency and quality has never been better than it is now".

**"I think that sometimes - and I'm mentioning zero names - you visit certain bars with someone that is in the industry, in 'that world', and your customer experience can be very different than if you go in on your own. It's not really fair to treat some guests differently, basically because they know less about distilled liquor than you. Getting a bar in the top fifty I imagine is very difficult - I've never purposefully set out to do it, but I'll admit for a time it was all I wanted - however, I would argue that putting together a batching operation churning out seven thousand litres of Negroni a week, or even getting a thousand eighteen year olds to serve a vodka soda the same way is just as challenging, if not more so.** I do think we have a few bars that are right up there in terms of standards for sure, and we definitely have the right talent amongst the guys

delivering the actual product, those putting the actual drinks on the bars".

On Sydney nightlife, Paul talks up the service standards of Australian hospitality staff, "everyone talks about the guest-centric approach in Australia, but I think it is something that exists. You just see less dickhead bartenders." He also extols the virtues of bars such as Baxter Inn ("pretty fucking good time, every time"), and Old Mate's Place ("just a great place to sit and crush liquor"), but is quick to proudly single out some of his places. "Charlie Parker's and Will's do not get the credit they deserve in my opinion. The work that goes in there, and the effort the goes into what's in the glass, as well as the guest experience, it's...well, it's fucking sick. I would stand behind the consistency in those places, I think their drinks are as good as anywhere".

We touch on the pandemic and how it's affected Sydney's hospitality trade. "We're short about four hundred staff at the moment, we usually have a lot of casual staff who now aren't available because there's no one travelling, there's no transient workforce". Batched cocktails have become a big focus for the company, "We've become a tenant of what used to be Qantas' meal fulfilment venue, so now that's

where we batch now”. Recently a change in the restrictions allowed outdoor vertical drinking again, which affected one of Merivale’s larger venues rather dramatically. “We have a venue called The Newport with the biggest beer garden in the Southern hemisphere. The change was announced on a Friday, and overnight the capacity went from four hundred to three thousand. So yeah, we have some work to do”.

**It’s fair to say that Paul’s professional motivations have changed since his switch Down Under. He states that one of the more rewarding parts of his job nowadays is developing a positive and rewarding place to work for the younger staff, “I’m definitely in it for different things now. I’m in it to make sure these kids get developed the right way; they have a working environment where they’re not feeling pressured by modern life, that they have that balance. That’s what I’m interested in now”.**

Seven years into the job, what advice would he give for those looking to go into a similar field? **“Looking back at what I think of as the golden years of the London bar scene - all of us drinking in LAB and the Player and places like that, I think with all the great people working at the time, with the training and standards - the book was written then for sure. Back then Soho House was looked at as somewhere that wasn’t cool at all, probably because someone influential said it was shit or something. But look what they’re doing now. Would you want to be on that bus? Fuck yeah you would! Tom Kerr’s got to have the best job around! My advice would be to not blindly follow the opinions of people you see in the magazines, and do your own thing, you might find something you’re really good at. Learning a different skill is fucking hard, you might have to do something that the coolest people might not think is cool to develop yourself beyond what you might have thought was possible”.**



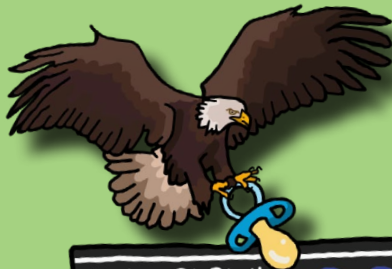
**BY PAUL.**

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# SACHA BELL

A BOLT FROM  
THE BLUE



Union St Station  
Manhattan & Queens

I J B



SACHA IS A PUBLICIST AT NEW YORK-BASED PR FIRM, RACHEL HARRISON COMMUNICATIONS. ORIGINALLY FROM THE LAKE DISTRICT, SACHA STUDIED IN LONDON, LANDING A JOB AT LONDON COCKTAIL CLUB IN THEIR EARLY DAYS OF HUGE GROWTH (NOT THAT THEY'VE SLOWED DOWN SINCE). IN 2015 SACHA MOVED TO THE BIG APPLE, WORKING WITH CLIENTS ACROSS THE LIFESTYLE AND HOSPITALITY SECTORS AND LIVING WITH SOME REALLY COOL FLATMATES, ONE OF WHOM DEFINITELY ISN'T WRITING THIS. SHE NOW SPENDS HER TIME BETWEEN THE UK AND USA.

**I chickened out the first time I was asked to write this - my account of getting pregnant, single and alone, an expat in New York City, without health insurance, without a plan.**

Going back to the start is like reliving it; all-consuming and dark. But it's time to get it out, these words have been drumming at the inside of my skull for months.

Moving to New York felt like free-falling, brave and bold - I have been told - and I guess it is. I had a single suitcase, an internship, a friend I hadn't seen in years, her sofa to sleep on, and enough money to last a few months without pay. I leapt into the city and hit the ground running. Living in the States had become a dream of distracting intensity - impossible to ignore. So, I researched and reached out to friends who had contacts there, and I was soon connected with Phil Duff who - with his generous and selfless spirit - sent me a screenshot of a Facebook post: "Intern wanted at new hospitality PR firm in NYC." I immediately emailed the contact, Rachel Harrison.

I had my interview for the position over Skype while helping LCC's JJ Goodman host the world's biggest cocktail masterclass in a circus tent at Wilderness Festival, naturally. It was probably the hottest day of the year and I was wearing a swimming

costume. I had scrambled to find the WiFi and tried not to look like I was taking the interview in a makeshift dressing room, but nonetheless Rachel offered me the internship shortly after pointing out the semi naked aerialists rehearsing in the background. "Come to New York," she said with nonchalance, the magical air of possibility from the land of opportunity travelled on these words and reached me, like star dust. I was buzzed... the masterclass finished with Espresso Martinis, and just like that, I was moving to America! I landed in the city on September 12th 2015, and after a couple of months interning, the agency sponsored my visa and took me on.

**Living in New York was gritty and gruelling, heartbreaking, enchanting, and eye-opening. The first year was one of the toughest of my life, but I gradually fell in love with the city - its sense of community, its pace, and the calibre...of everything. I felt free. I was laser-focused on work and life revolved around that. My job was tough, but I was learning from the best, in the most exhilarating industry, at the centre of the universe.** The months flew by, the agency was skyrocketing, and life was a rotation of client events, tastings, meetings, and boozy brunches on weekends. It was hard and crazy and fun. It was life in the

fast lane.

**On May 17th 2017, I emergency-stopped. I was pregnant. Shit.**

**I felt sheer terror seeing the positive result on that plastic stick. Sheer terror mixed with panic, shock, confusion... "Fuck". It was a while before I could speak... "I can't possibly do this, can I? Is it my decision to make?" I actually said those words out loud to my housemate. She held my face and said "Yes, yes it is, and yes you can". Her certainty gripped me. When I eventually calmed down, I thought about it. I lived paycheck to paycheck, I had opted out of company health insurance, I was single, I had no family nearby, I lived in a tiny shared apartment. I had a job some people would kill for. I didn't want to give that up, should I have to? There were so many questions, but really there was just one to answer: can I do a fucking good job of this on my own? The answer was yes. I didn't know how, but I just knew I could.**

It was never really a decision; it was never an option to terminate the pregnancy. It was just a question of how I was going to pull it off brilliantly when the only person I could depend on was myself. I was told that I was irresponsible, stupid, reckless, incapable. I was told it would ruin my life and that it was never, ever, going to be ok. I was

scared, and most of the time, the belief that I could give this child a good life was so fragile and faint, I could barely grasp onto it, but it never went away completely. The protection I felt towards my growing baby was fearless and fierce. I shut the negative statements out, I went inwards, I built a fort, and I focused on moving forward.

I was apprehensive about work because I didn't know if my role would be doable in the future if I wasn't able to be there to host events and attend media meetings. I wasn't able to provide a plan or even confirm which country I was going to be in once the baby arrived. I told Rachel the news a few weeks before Tales of the Cocktail that July and her reaction was wonderful. We agreed we would keep going, I would keep her updated, and we would take things as they come.

The relentless continuity of public relations was a calming anchor when everything else felt uncertain. I still attended tastings and events, I still went to Tales, I just didn't drink. I started to adapt, and my colleagues were literally by my side every day. They felt the baby kick, they asked me about appointments, and they helped me brainstorm names. That November, they threw me a baby shower with presents

and a beautiful blue cake (I was having a boy). They showed me I was allowed to celebrate, and for the first time, I did.

**One of my main struggles was accepting that you can't speed up time and know what is going to happen in a future that isn't here yet. At times I was paralysed by the uncertainty of it all, but to move forward I had to let go and accept that I couldn't figure it all out at once - I would have to take the necessary steps and wait. I was free-falling again, but I embraced it, and as the weeks passed, the plan did come together.**

Healthcare was a pragmatic hurdle to assess. My status as a single, pregnant "alien" meant I was eligible for Medicare (America's government-funded healthcare service). This meant longer wait times for appointments, a variety of obstetricians (instead of a designated one), and a limited choice of hospitals, but no additional fees. I researched and found that the training given to Medicare's doctors is no different to those working in privately funded hospitals. Plus, my baby would be protected under Medicare's plan for up to a year after his birth if there were any complications. I opted for Medicare, knowing I could switch to my company's plan at any time. I saved the money to spend on the

things my baby would need.

As my bump grew, the logistics of my circumstances became a reality. Once the baby arrived, I would need to focus on being a new parent. The most sensible place I could imagine doing this was in my hometown - the Lake District in the UK with my family close by. But I didn't want to leave work prematurely to fly back to the UK and give birth there. I wanted to work up until my due date, and I wanted to give my son the option of dual citizenship. I asked Rachel if I could potentially work remotely, and she was open to it. So, a long-term plan started to form. I would give birth in New York then retreat, find my feet, and trial a working model of remote publicity.

My baby boy was born safely at Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan at 1:19am on January 22nd 2018. We flew back to the UK a few weeks later.

I spent the next three months watching my little boy grow and adapting to parenthood. I was incredibly lucky to find a local childminder named Dawn - a real-life fairy Godmother to whom I owe so much of my success as a working parent. Dawn had cared for children all of her life, she lived nearby and was flexible and understanding of my circumstances. Over the following months, the peace of mind she provided was

crucial for my ability to thrive. I started working fifteen hours a week initially and this gradually increased at a comfortable pace. That October I hosted a press trip in London during Cocktail Week, and I was able to focus on work knowing my son was safe and happy at home with his grandparents and Dawn. By the time he was one year old, I was working thirty hours a week. For trips back to New York, I enrolled him into a great daycare in Manhattan so he could come with me. The flexibility of my job and the support networks I had created made it possible for me to attend work trips in London and the US and travel regularly while maintaining the secure attachment a baby needs. The fact I breastfed him for two and a half years is testament to this.

In 2019 we made a big step towards our future and moved to Manchester in the UK. I am writing this from our home in Altrincham, a leafy green suburb full of other families. Here, we are half-way between London and the Lake District, close to friends, and minutes from the airport. I now work full time and my son attends nursery at one of the country's best schools. He is full of personality, always smiling and receives progress reports that make me cry with pride. We live with my one of my oldest girlfriends - another

career-driven young woman. Acquaintances are perplexed by this unusual arrangement, but I am proud to be raising my son in a stable and happy environment with two ambitious, independent people as his immediate role models.

**Until recently I felt ashamed by my status as a single parent, and how this status came about; the hurtful statements stuck, and there is a stigma. But now the term “single parent” doesn’t resonate with me in the same way anymore. I view myself as a parenting body - with the resources available to me, and the people I am surrounded by, I can provide everything my child needs and more. I didn’t plan the way I became a parent, but I have been able to turn it into a success and not a failure. As my son turns three, I am so grateful that I trusted myself. I am grateful I believed in the magical possibilities that danced across the airwaves from the States that defining day.**

The people who told me I couldn’t do this referred to the way a family should look, and the way things should be done. They didn’t think outside the box. **It saddens me that our lives as parents can be limited and dictated to by conventions that needlessly suppress our potential. I was told by many people that I would have to sacrifice my career for bringing a child into the world singlehandedly, but I refused to accept that. My job, and my role as a publicist in this industry has been a guiding light through the chaos, and also my saving grace.** It has flowered beautifully in parallel with my growth as a parent. I owe so much of that to Rachel, who gave me the room to figure it all out without pressure, and the flexibility and trust to adapt the job in tandem with being a solo parent. I hope this story demonstrates the possibilities of what can be done, and inspires other families who, too, boldly choose to go against the norm.



**BY SACHA.**

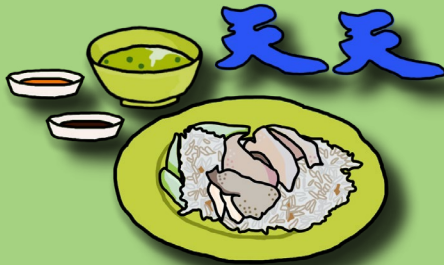
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# VIJAY MUDALIAR

24  
HOURS  
IN SINGAPORE

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MULTI AWARD-WINNING VIJAY SHAPED HIS CREATIVE APPROACH TO BARTENDING IN HIS HOMETOWN OF SINGAPORE, WITH LONG STINTS AT THE LIBRARY AND OPERATION DAGGER AMONGST OTHERS. ALONGSIDE HIS PERSONAL ACCOLADES, VIJAY IS NOW THE CO-OWNER OF NATIVE - FEATURED ON WORLD'S 50 BEST BARS SINCE ITS OPENING, AND LAST YEAR AWARDED THE TOP SPOT IN ASIA'S 50 BEST BARS. HE HAS DRAWN WORLDWIDE ACCLAIM FOR HIS FOCUS ON LOCAL AND SEASONAL INGREDIENTS, USE OF ASIAN SPIRITS, AND HIS PUSH TOWARD A MORE SUSTAINABLE BAR.

## DISCARD: Early rise or lie in?

**VIJAY:** 7am-9.30am depending on your preference. I'm not an early riser but if you're into some nature, head over to MacRitchie reservoir to do the treetop walk to work up an appetite.

## D: Best place to go for breakfast?

**V:** Variety is key. You'd probably want to go to a hawker – Singapore's version of a food court. Singapore being so diverse culturally – you can get a variety of flavours in one place. Try Tiong Bahru hawker for a good central option. Try Kaya toast; toasted coffee bread with a thick coconut Pandan jam, butter and two half-boiled eggs on the side. Wash it down with a hot cup of coffee. Other great breakfast options are roti-prata (South Indian flatbread), Nasi Lemak (Malaysian rice cooked in coconut milk and pandan leaf with spicy sambal), or fishball noodles.

## D: Where should we eat lunch?

**V:** Chicken Rice is what you're looking for; Singapore's national dish. Steamed or roasted Chicken with fragrant rice cooked in stock, accompanied by chilli. So simple yet perfect. My favourite is a Hainanese delicacy. Best places to go to get it are Boon tong Kee which is a little bit more upscale, but the most popular is Tian Tian in Maxwell hawker next to Chinatown.

### **D: Any sightseeing we should do?**

**V:** I love the more cultural elements and Little India is a little less gentrified compared to the other districts. Walk around and explore the streets and sights. Check out the temples and walk into any restaurant and have an amazing Indian meal. I recommend Komala Villas or MTR. Vegetarian, hearty options.

### **D: Hotel recommendations?**

**V:** Upscale - Marina Bay Sands, Fullerton Bay. The view from the top is crazy. Ann Siang hotel is a good choice if you want to be close to the cocktail circuit. Try the Lavender area for hotels still close to the city yet affordable.

### **D: Good place for an early drink?**

**V:** Platform. A cosy all-day bar serving filter coffee in the day and low abv drinks at night. It's got a good minimal design but still with a homely feel.

### **D: Best spots for dinner?**

**V:** Samy's is the place to head for fish head curry. Keng Eng Kee is good for fried salted egg crabs. Gandhi's is worth a visit for an

authentic, no fluff South Indian meal.

### **D: What about a nightcap?**

**V:** R.P.M- a shochu based cocktail bar with lots of vinyl.

### **D: Where should we finish the night? (apart from Native of course)**

**V:** 28 Hong Kong Street is legendary, The Other Room in the Marriott on Orchard Road does amazing drinks, but if you're after beers and shots - Skinny's is the late night industry dive.

### **D: Anything else we shouldn't miss?**

**V:** Check out Nylon or Apartment if you love your coffee. Coffee is huge in Singapore. Tea Chapter is a traditional tea house and the atmosphere is serene and relaxing in the middle of the business district. If you like movies, The Projector is the coolest cinema in town. An old refurbished cinema that shows indie flicks balanced with blockbusters. Don't forget about supper! Food goes real late here, and it's good too! Try Swee Choon for the dim sum and atmosphere served 24/7.

**END**

**BY VIJAY.**

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# GEORGIE BELL

ON  
WOMEN  
+ WHISKY





GEORGIE IS THE GLOBAL HEAD OF ADVOCACY FOR THE INCUBATION BRANDS AT BACARDI. PREVIOUS TO THIS, SHE WAS THE GLOBAL MALTS AMBASSADOR FOR FOUR YEARS, AND HAS SPENT A DECADE DEEPLY ROOTED WITHIN THE SCOTCH WHISKY INDUSTRY. WITH A BSC IN DISTILLATION AND AS A LIVERYMAN OF THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF DISTILLERS, GEORGIE HAS MADE IT HER LIFE MISSION TO GET UNDER THE SKIN OF WHISKY - STANDING UP TO MISCONCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGING ITS SO-CALLED 'IMAGE' ALONG WITH ALL THE STEREOTYPES THAT GO ALONGSIDE. HAVING STARTED HER CAREER AS A BARTENDER, SHE'S EQUALLY AS COMFORTABLE BEHIND A BAR AS SHE IS SITTING AT ONE, USUALLY ENJOYING AN OXLEY GIMLET OR CRAIGELLACHIE 13 HALF'N'HALF.

**I've heard it all over the years, from "she's just a marketing campaign" or "a stunt", to "I was expecting a George". All said behind my back and to my face or written in open blogs and social chains. Even confused looks of "is she lost?" when I've walked into rooms to host tastings.**

Heck, I even had one company (not my current) hire a stylist (hired by my male boss) to dress me and cut my hair shorter so that I fitted their image of what a woman in whisky should look like - I don't think I've ever felt more uncomfortable. I remember standing up explaining a complicated distillation process with huge fake eyelashes and so much makeup applied by hired makeup artists that I hardly recognised myself. Yet, under all that I had a first-class diploma in distillation and a scholarship to the Worshipful Company of Distillers. Apparently not enough. Not to speculate, but I HIGHLY doubt that a man would've faced the same predicament.

The reason I'm telling you all this is not to lament, for lamenting will get us nowhere and it really isn't all doom and gloom. Rather, it's to offer perspective of what it can be like for a woman working in whisky, and to tell you that - positively - public and industry perception on who a whisky drinker is HAS taken enormous strides and changed over the last ten years. That being said, it's still not perfect; we have quite a way to go so that

future generations don't have to experience this typecasting, and all of us need to be part of this change. So, this is why I'm writing this - to explain the situation and offer some (hopefully) practical solutions as to how we all can be allies to the shift in mindset for future generations.

### **"WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A WOMAN IN WHISKY?"**

**The first time I heard this question from a journalist it was novel - however, I was ten years younger. I answered politely with a sweet smile on my face. Then, still with a smile, it became more and more irritating. But still... a polite answer, joking "Well I've never been a man so I wouldn't know the difference", really wanting to ask them in an ironic tone, "would you ask a man the same question?"**

In 2016 someone at work told me that the reason it's still being asked is that it still has to be. Why? Because we've not yet normalised the fact women make and enjoy whisky. Thus, my job and the job of every woman out there is to continue answering this until we have to no more. And men - you're not off the hook either, for this responsibility also rests on your shoulders to support in these situations. Every moment is an opportunity for re-education, so if you notice any sideways or 'off the cuff' comments when we're not there, please step in and say something. It really will take the

concerted effort from everyone to undo the gendered messaging of the past that's engrained in our minds and informs our unconscious bias. That includes not just those directly involved in the whisky industry but anyone pouring or selling it.

I believe we're doing our category, in fact any category, a disservice if we try to make it only for some and not for all. This is a big problem for whisky, especially Scotch, as my own experience shows - but it is not limited to this.

### **CHANGE ISN'T GOING TO HAPPEN OVERNIGHT**

Changing our cultural perceptions of what a whisky drinker looks like will take time. Whisky's reputation as 'a man's drink' was created in the Sixties through advertising (if you don't know what I'm referring to, Google "sexist whisky advertising"); even as recently as fifteen years ago we've seen two polarising campaign themes within some whisky advertising: pin-up models, and "drink this and you'll be successful".

Even with all the work done to date, and the good intentions of our industry in general, we have yet to reach a point of normalisation within the wider consumer audience. And with whisky's stereotyped history and how it's been embedded into modern culture, change won't happen overnight. **As recent as last year,**

**sitting at a very well-known bar in London I ordered a cocktail and the bartender responded with, “are you sure, it’s got whisky in it?” Is it the bartender’s fault that he asked this? No, I don’t think so, but situations like this can hopefully be remedied in the future, and one the ways I’m trying to partake in this change is through OurWhisky.**

## OURWHISKY

In 2018 Becky Paskin and I started up OurWhisky because we felt we had a responsibility to do more, shine the spotlight on the truth when others have ignored it. It’s something we both feel incredibly passionate about: the dated image has affected our past, less so our present, and hopefully not at all our future. But for others - the new generation - wouldn’t it be great if it didn’t affect them at all? What if they didn’t have to jump over obstacles like a performing show pony like we did? What if they didn’t have to sit in the back of tastings while someone made lurid jokes about ‘virgins’ in reference to virgin casks, or questions about them being hired because of their sex, rather than on a basis of their knowledge, passion and accolades?

Our belief is that “you can’t be what you can’t see” - we’re not only here to celebrate successes in the face of adversity, but also show that through diversity we can achieve great things as an industry.

## WHAT WE CAN ALL DO

These are some steps that we can take to make whisky more inclusive, but also could be applicable to other spirit categories:

1. Never assuming knowledge based on someone’s appearance
2. Avoiding gendered drinks marketing on menus
3. Bar managers organising unconscious bias training
4. Brands including non-gendered messaging in their training and advertising campaigns
5. Opening up your whisky tastings to a wider audience
6. Featuring whisky events and promos for both Mother’s and Father’s Day

**I like to joke that a whisky show is the only place in the world where the queue for the women’s loo is shorter than the men’s. As much as I love this, I look forward to the day that changes.**



**BY GEORGIE.**





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