

Blending In: Squeeze the last few weeks out of summer by serving up some splendid blender drinks.

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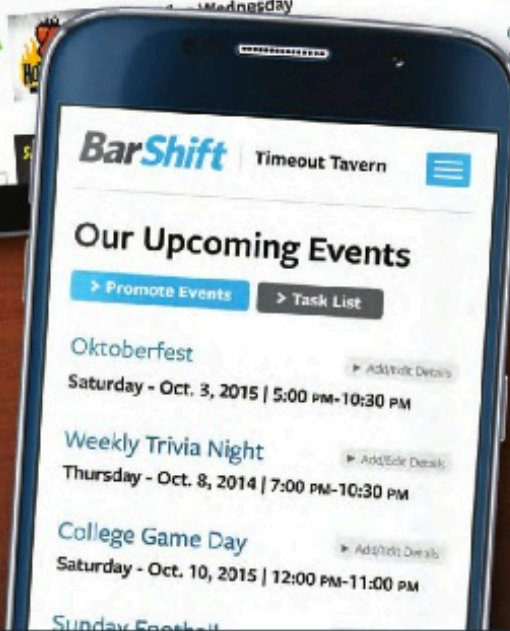
MAGAZINE

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A Big Shift

No more posting notes: Better ways to plan promotions on-premise



TO DO

PLAN NEW PROMOTIONS

LIVE MUSIC?


SOCIAL MEDIA

POSTERS

HAPPY HOUR?

DJ?

W BAR
GAME
TRIVIA

A close-up portrait of Chanel Turner, founder of FOU-DRE Vodka. She is a Black woman with short, dark hair pulled back, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. She is wearing a dark blazer over a dark shirt. The background is dark and out of focus. The entire image is framed by a decorative border of small, repeating yellow and black squares.

Chanel Turner, founder
of FOU-DRE Vodka.

RISING SPIRITS

By Elyse Glickman

INDEPENDENT AFRICAN-AMERICAN OWNED BEVERAGE COMPANIES BRING COLOR, PRIDE AND INGENUITY TO BARS AND RESTAURANTS ACROSS THE U.S.

It may be hard to believe, but it has been almost eight years since Barack Obama's "Yes, We Can" mindset carried him to the White House. While many regard his election as a shining moment in American history, the years since have been marked with events that shed light on how far we need to go as a country before true equality is achieved for all citizens.

On a quieter level, the beverage and hospitality industries are going through their own evolution into a more lively, diverse and innovative period. Like many industries in America, racial and gender bias are still a factor, but entrepreneurs like Chanel Turner, founder of FOU-DRE Vodka, are ultimately not taking "no" for an answer.



Dee Tuft created her Savile Rum Tea spirit based on a homemade recipe.



Heritage Link Brands markets Seven Sisters wines from South Africa.



Harlem Blue founder Julian Riley rests on kegs of beer he brewed.

"I sat down with a big number of distributors where, when we were chatting on the phone, everything looked fine," recalls Turner. "When we sat down to talk, in a matter of speaking, things kind of fell by the wayside. While one issue was that I was not as experienced in the beverage industry as they may have expected me to be, I am sure there were some cases that some doors closed because I was a woman of color. As some of the big boys did not want to play with me, I had to go after smaller, more forward-thinking distributors. This worked out better in the end, because they gave us the attention we needed to succeed."

A "CHANEL" ORIGINAL

It may seem like a stretch to career-switch from an IT job at the Pentagon to the founder of FOU-DRE (www.fou-dre.com), a gluten-free, soon-to-be Kosher-certified vodka made from non-GMO corn. However, Chanel Turner has succeeded precisely because of her inquisitiveness, focus, and ability to adapt to new situations — all skills required to excel in both fields.

"When most people consider drinking a vodka, the first thing that comes to mind is what they are going to mix it with," observes Turner. "I wanted to create a vodka (in tandem with a reputable distillery) that would taste great on its own, neat or over ice, without all the additives put into it to make it taste good. And as far as the bottle goes, I did not want my packaging blending in with all the others, compelling me to do something very edgy with my bottle right out of the gate, so we went for a different color and shape."

Then there was the issue of branding. Turner knew she wanted a powerful symbol, and lightening came to mind. As she did not like the English word "lightening," she looked into the word in different languages and

came across the French word for lightening, *foudre* (pronounced like "food"). After playing around with voice recognition software, she found FOU-DRE the perfect fit.

"In our first year on the market, we managed to attain sales in 32 off-premise retailers, and made our first international distribution deal in Singapore," details Turner. "During our second year, we wanted to pinpoint on-premise accounts that fit who we are as a brand."

Turner remains selective with on-premise accounts. Rather than get a reputation as a 'nightclub' type of beverage, she's going for corporate accounts in boutique hotels, hotel groups, and upscale restaurant groups. "The fact that the product speaks for itself has helped us reach our customers and get attention from media like Fox 5 and NBC because they heard about us through word-of-mouth," she says.

While Turner hopes her strategies will help FOU-DRE reach a wide audience, she credits the support of the African-American community in markets where it is carried.

"They have seen people like Sean Combs be the face of a brand (like Ciroc), but many of them have not seen an African-American own a company like this," Turner assesses. "While African-Americans have done all kinds of great things in a variety of industries, it's a new thing to see somebody like me be a presence in an industry where (the presence of) women and of African-Americans is almost microscopic. In taking on a venture like this, a strong support system is necessary. As far as advice goes, keep up that strong support system, never give up — and yes, a lot of people thought we would never make it to market. Just keep pushing and you'll do it."

“ we created HARLEM BLUE as a BRAND THAT appeals to ANYBODY WHO CONSIDERS THEMSELF a WORLD EXPLORER. IT'S LESS a BLACK-AND-WHITE THING and more of a 'LET'S TRY SOMETHING NEW' THING. ”

A “HARLEM” RENAISSANCE

While Harlem enjoyed a golden era of art and culture in the early 20th century, Julian Riley, Founder & President of Harlem Blue (www.harlembblue.com), started siring in a new golden age for the area in 2014. His beer line includes the inaugural 1658 Ale and will grow to include City Ale, Pale Ale, Nutty Brown Ale, Blue Breakfast Stout, Ginger Sent Me, and Black Lager. It will ultimately parallel the customer base of Harlem, which has become increasingly cosmopolitan.

“When hearing the word ‘Harlem,’ many outside New York will think, ‘black,’ and that’s fine,” muses Riley. “However, Harlem Blue will appeal to all urban demographics, ages (over 21) and backgrounds. We created Harlem Blue as a brand that appeals to anybody who considers themselves a world explorer, who actively seeks new social and cultural opportunities, who travels outside his or her neighborhoods to try new restaurants, museums and so on. It’s less a black-or-white thing and more of a ‘Let’s try something new’ thing.”

Although Riley has long been a craft beer fan, the project, launched in early 2011, evolved from his desire to create a craft consumer product that would generate a community conversation, drive the local economy and offer a distinctive Harlem voice. He also wanted to shed light on Harlem’s pre-Prohibition brewing history, and make Harlem as prominent a neighborhood for its food and drink as Brooklyn.

“Craft beers are trendy, and that contributed to my way of thinking for this project,” Riley continues. “My challenge was to find the perfect unity between craft and community, and beer was the perfect fit.”

Riley took some of his inspiration and entrepreneurial spirit from his family, who has owned a jazz club in Boston since 1946, as well as his bartending through five years of college. A grass-roots, hands-on approach to on-premise marketing is fueling the company, which Riley explains is still at the start-up level, with limited capital and an excellent local distributor that can help advance the brand up to a certain point.

“Since we’re only in New York City right now, it is easy for me to visit our accounts and use social media

and emails to get friends and neighbors to come in to an account, where I will order up several bottles of Harlem Blue,” says Riley. “I will talk to the waitstaff and give them the pitch for Harlem Blue and tell them the story behind it. We will also do table menus and posters, and get involved in synergistic New York City events where we may be able to start relationships that may lead to potential partners or consumers while they are getting the opportunity to taste the beer.”



SAVILE GETTING READY TO RUM-BA

Chicago-based Dee Tutt had a successful two-decade run as a hair stylist. However, she made her biggest style statement with a concoction she served to family and friends. With their encouragement to take the product public, her special creation would evolve into her Savile (“Sa-Vee-Lay”) Rum Tea spirit, which can be served straight, over ice or transformed into other cocktails (www.drinksavile.com).

Three years ago, Tutt took her first step toward her entrepreneurial dream by sending her kitchen recipe out to a flavor house to recreate it in a commercial recipe. The next was her decision to launch Savile in California in December 2014, and from that point, get word-of-mouth going through exposure during the celebrity-fueled “Awards Show Season.”

“We started with California because it fits in with the climate and the lifestyle, down to its ‘Take Me Away’ tag line,” Tutt says with pride of her self-financed enterprise. “I started [promoting Savile] with The Black Film Institute’s post-Oscar Party, which ended up being our coming-out party. The response was so strong we received more invitations to serve at other celebrity events. This is how we’re getting traction in the market, along with social media.”

The process of turning a crowd-pleasing drink into a viable business venture has become a family affair, with her cousin serving as her business partner and college-aged children pitching in to keep the momentum going. At press time, Tutt and her “support system” were off to a strong start. Dave & Buster’s “test market” store in Arcadia, CA was serving Savile, with Tutt negotiating placements at other locations. They also staged tastings at Philippe Chow and Chakra in



A FOU-DRE Vodka
cocktail and
Harlem Blue Beer



Original
BREWED IN HARLEM NYC, U.S.A.

Beverly Hills, which prompted their customers to buy cocktails with the spirit. Once Savile penetrates the California market, Tutt estimates it will take about two years for Savile to be available from coast to coast.

"Savile has a universal appeal, so we're not targeting any one market segment; we have promoted ourselves at rap concerts, the MTV Movie Awards, and Hollywood premieres," says Tutt. "However, we've observed Savile is particularly successful with women because it is a ready-to-drink product, and all you have to do is shake it and pour over ice."

Tutt has found that when introducing Savile to beverage directors and bartenders, their top priority is making sure that anything they add to their beverage program will draw different kinds of customers and expand their options (and their customers') in terms of cocktail creativity.

"While Savile can stand on its own, bartenders on-premise can use it as a liqueur or accent with other spirits and mixers," Tutt says. "One of the most popular drinks made with it is called a Cyclone, mixed with tequila. There is another with peach vodka. However, the quality has to be there no matter how it is served."

Tutt cites that Savile's black bottle is another strong selling point for both consumers and commercial clients. While the bottle is sleek, chic and made in Europe, it has functionality protecting the spirit from light that may affect its freshness and flavor.

In keeping her spirits up during this process, Tutt has adhered to her favorite spiritual teaching: "You can do what you set your mind to do." However, the mindset needs to be accompanied by careful planning and a strong commitment to see the product through. "Before you give up your job or anything else, make sure this project is something you really and truly want to do, because it is hard work," she advises. "I always liked to entertain and have people over. It's in my blood to create a drink that brings people together. Don't do this to make a quick dollar, as that's the wrong reason to do anything."

SEVEN SISTERS: WE ARE FAMILY

Selena S. Cuffe, President & CEO of Heritage Link Brands (www.heritagelinkbrands.com), along with her co-founder husband Khary, has scripted something that would be an American success story by anybody's estimation. The company occupies the distinct niche of being the largest U.S. marketer of black-produced wine from Africa and the African Diaspora. While their off-premise list has an impressive roster that runs the gamut from Walmart to Whole Foods, Cuffe points out that Heritage Link Brands has enjoyed considerable success with on-premise accounts.

"We show gratitude towards every account," Cuffe says. "There is so much competition out there and so little education on South Africa and many of its wines that we are grateful when we get Seven Sisters into a new account. They can count on frequent training of their staff, while existing accounts will get [support in] hosting happy hours, and for various things they do in their community, such as local food festivals, restaurant weeks and other promotions. We show it through our education efforts on our products, which is continuous and flows right through to the guest."

The real-life "Seven Sisters" are the Brutus sisters, who grew up a two-hour drive from Stellenbosch, a wine production region outside Cape Town. Each wine in the Seven Sisters portfolio is named after each biological sibling. And while the packaging has undergone a few redesigns, the current iteration reflects the way the "Sisters'" stories have been told, with the sisters dancing in celebration and the varietal "Sister's" individual story printed on the bottle's back label.

"This resonates with customers in the on-premise space, on a label placing in a wine list menu, or during happy hour," reflects Cuffe. "The fact we keep the sisters dancing in celebration connects people in a way that crosses all categories of consumer and accounts. This is really about changing the trajectory of a country and its people." ■