

Jared Jones

“Meet Maacah Davis: Editor-in-Chief of *BellaDonna* Magazine”

Maacah Davis is the girl that knows everyone at the party.

Talkative and engaging, Maacah is the Editor-in-Chief for *BellaDonna* magazine, a successful fashion quarterly based in Birmingham.

Statuesque at 5’10, hair dip-dyed blue at its ends, Maacah commands your attention — she prefers it that way. She’s the embodiment of her magazine: a publication aimed at giving creative individuals a voice. And she’s carrying a megaphone.

Maacah is a sophomore majoring in Biology and one of eight UAB iLab student entrepreneurs. Her magazine is stationed within the iLab and boasts readership in the US, Italy, China, UK, Palestine and Ghana, where Maacah, a native of Cameroon, attended school until moving to the US in 2007.

*BellaDonna* means “beautiful woman” in Italian. It’s also a genus of deadly nightshade plants. “Either is appropriate,” Maacah says with a laugh.

The magazine, which features fashion and beauty editorials ranging from *What’s Up with Vegan Makeup?* to *What I Learned from Jumping Off a Cliff*, a piece about an author facing her fears, entrusts young professionals with a chance to show their work — however it fits within the magazine — where there may not be that chance.

*BellaDonna* began in the summer of 2014 when Maacah applied to be a model at Birmingham Fashion Week, an annual week-long fashion event that showcases local and national fashion talent in Birmingham.

She met photographers, models, makeup artists and other creatives who were “really talented but didn’t have a way of showing that.” So she began a barter system. “So I’m a model and I need photos for my modeling portfolio. I go to a photographer and say, ‘I can model for you if I can have some of the shots for my book.’ And in the end, he gets photos for his photography portfolio and I get photos for my modeling portfolio,” she says.

And from that idea, a magazine was formed, giving art-minded individuals a chance to have real-world experience for future careers.

While the magazine is pushed online — such as the case for many magazine publications — there’s still pressure to sell physical copies. And for Maacah, business wasn’t her strong suit.

Establishing her magazine in the UAB iLab seemed right. The iLab, which houses other student-run businesses, is an incubator for entrepreneurial ideas. Maacah, who wasn’t savvy to the business end of publication production at the magazine’s inception, knew that the iLab was a place to connect with business professionals.

Particularly, she knew that business questions — like how to connect with investors or how to navigate media legality — would be answered. And if not, she would be directed to someone who knew.

UAB iLab Director Kathleen Hamrick serves as her mentor, walking her through the problems faced when launching a magazine and keeping it running. “I can go to [Kathleen] if I have problems and need answers,” Maacah says.

Maacah utilizes the iLab as a creative space. In fact, she’s scheduled photoshoots at the iLab, which features an open floor plan and lots of natural light. She brings her clients and team to the space in order to work on the magazine’s next steps. She’s taken a year off from academics to focus on magazine production, which has proven successful — *BellaDonna* exceeds 1,000+ reads per issue.

For its fourth issue *BellaDonna* will be retracing its history and looking forward. Maacah coined the issue *The Belle Jar*, a witty union of *BellaDonna* and “The Bell Jar” by renowned poet Sylvia Plath. Whether the issue parallels the poem, Maacah wouldn’t say.

Her magazine’s success, she says, is because she has connections with young, talented professionals and business mentors, many of whom she meets at events or mutually through her pre-established contacts. “Organic networking,” she calls it: a form of networking “where you express what you love and find others who are passionate about that, too.”

Copies of previous *BellaDonna* issues can be purchased at Harper Lane boutique in the Riverchase Galleria, Seasick Records in Crestwood, the Continental Bakery in Birmingham or at *BellaDonna* Magazine: <http://belladonnamag.org>.