

# Pitch



ISSUE 025



COOL







# PITCH

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# COOL

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

It was a combination of things that made me decide to launch Pitch Cool.

It has changed over the years and now showcases fifteen Black brands.

They come with enthusiasm, passion and are all looking to change the world by using their brands for good.

Joana Yeboah-Acheampong, Founder of Aftrad Village Kitchen

Siána Scott, Founder of BEAU Beauty Ltd

Errol Hewitt & Yvonne McKenley-Hewitt, Co-founders of Begoña Cliff Hotel

Abi Lawrence-Adesida & Jacqueline Kusamotu, Co-founders of Candour Beauty

Anthony & Helena Adedipe, Co-founders of Eko Brewery

Dave Meikle, Founder of FarmBwoy

Tolani Agoro, Founder of LUX B Flowers

Natasha Miller Founder of Miller Libertine

Ashley Broderick, Founder of Nandi Nicole

Shirley White, Founder of OTC Beverages

Jonathon Barnes & Justine Gray, Founders of Rose Chocolates

Ayo Salau, Founder of South London Kitchen

Dalla Niakhaté, Founder of Thés Lac Rose

Jacqueline Shaw, Founder of Wax and Wraps

Heidi Hanna, Founder of Where Next Heidi?

Read their stories.

Best wishes, Sherry Collins



# Joana Yeboah-Acheampong

FOUNDER OF AFTRAD VILLAGE KITCHEN

Growing up, food always took centre stage for Joana Yeboah-Acheampong and her siblings, who all pitched in to cook for various gatherings, with recipes borrowed from street vendors on her mother's request. After taking a career break from Civil Engineering, her childhood dream of starting her own business became a reality and, inspired by her love of food and her Ghanaian heritage, Aftrad Village Kitchen was born.

What inspired you?

I started Aftrad Village Kitchen so that Africans in the diaspora could connect with their identity through food. Migrating to the UK in 2004, I craved the rich and flavourful Ghanaian foods I grew up on. I wanted to recreate the recipes to enjoy the nostalgia of 'home food.'

However, I soon realised that: a) it was difficult to get hold of well-written recipes and b) access and availability of some ingredients was problematic. A chat with friends and family revealed that this was a common problem.

Also, starting a young family in the UK, I wanted my children to connect with their African traditions and identity. I thought the surest way to start the conversation was through the food being eaten at home and shared in the community.

Food is so intrinsically tied to memories. What memories does Aftrad Village Kitchen conjure up for you?

My most cherished memories are those round the family dining table - both food and stories shared. My desire is to recreate such memories for my family. That's where Aftrad Village Kitchen comes in. It gives me the

opportunity to recreate food with flavours from my heritage. Flavours that give a 'home food' experience and brings Africa to our dining table.

As well as a range of ingredients, you've also launched a recipe book, tell me more about that.

My 101 Ghanaian Cuisine talks about the usual ingredients and utensils found in a Ghanaian home. It also provides detailed recipes for some well-loved dishes such as jollof rice, waakye, kebabs, tuo zaafi, coconut candy, chin chin and others. There are over 30 recipes ranging from starters, mains, desserts, drinks and snacks, providing a great introduction to Ghanaian cooking.

At a time when travel has been restricted, how important is it to be able to travel via your tastebuds?

Being able to relive food nostalgia remotely is everything. It gives you a sense of identity and belonging. For those new to a culture, food is a great introduction and builds excitement before actually experiencing the culture in its entirety.

The world is a global village now, we are able to see and experience other cultures through camera lenses. We really don't need to travel miles anymore for an experience. The pandemic has also highlighted the need to be able to create memories remotely - food memories, especially.

If you could cook for anyone and bring them a taste of Ghana, who would it be and what would you cook?

I would love to cook for Oprah Winfrey and I would serve her some delicious jollof rice with suya chicken kebabs, a side of Ghanaian salad and kelewele, plus shito for some extra kick.





# Siána Scott

FOUNDER OF BEAU BEAUTY LTD

A product developer by day, founder of BEAU Beauty Ltd Siána Scott is also a qualified nail technician, violinist, and nail varnish manufacturer. She believes that colour can be a true expression of ourselves and would love to see everyone shine as brightly as they possibly can through the colours they choose to wear.

What inspired you to launch BEAU?

I was tired of not being able to find the bright colours I was looking for. I wanted to offer colours that you couldn't find on the high street, colours that give confidence, take you out of your comfort zone and really show your personality without needing to say a word.

You're a qualified nail technician and worked as a mobile technician, how has this experience benefitted your brand?

It puts me in a position where I can offer good advice to people who want to understand how their nail polish can last longer. It has allowed me to understand the issues that people face so I can create better products and content.

How are your products different? What's your USP?

The difference is that my main focus is bolder brighter colours. I also offer custom colour requests that they cannot do in small quantities and I have a nerdy gifting range that appeals to tabletop gamers. My brand also stands for equality and I don't use gendered language when addressing my audience.

You mentioned that your products are 'handmade with love' and I read that your family is involved in getting your products ready for shipping. How important is it to bring them along with you on your journey?

My family is my foundation. I'm lucky to have such a supportive family that believes in me and my vision, and who are willing to do as much as they can to help me get there. I don't just do this for me, I do this for them and all the people I can help with my business.

How do you decide on your polish colours and how often do you launch these?

I look at my current range to find gaps and I also do market research. I aim to launch new colours every season and this is usually three new additions to each range.

How do you use colour for self-expression?

I always liken nail polish to clothes. Every decision you make about your appearance is your expression of self to the world, your body is a canvas! Why stop at clothes, why not add your nails in and throw in some nail art too?

You currently sell your products through your site, other platforms and at local markets, how do you find these different customer experiences affect your brand?

Markets are the best. I get to talk to the customer and get real-time feedback. They also are the core of my business; it is important to meet them and connect. I make business decisions about what to introduce next because of these conversations.

Where do you see your brand in the future?

I want BEAU to be known as the brand that really cares about the consumer and the community. We are in a world where big brands can become so out of touch with people, I don't want to be that brand. I want people to be at the core of what I do and the decisions I make.

INTERVIEW BY: SHERRY COLLINS WITH INTERN WRITER FIONA OKEKE  
/ PHOTOGRAPHY BY: BROADWAY STUDIOS







# Errol Hewitt & Yvonne McKenley-Hewitt

CO-FOUNDERS OF BEGOÑA CLIFF HOTEL

Named after the vessel that carried the co-founder's father from Jamaica to Southampton in the 1950s, the Begoña Cliff Hotel is an independent boutique venue, nestled in the cliffs of Negril's West End, looking out to the Caribbean Sea. It's owners, husband-and-wife duo Errol Hewitt and Yvonne McKenley-Hewitt, share their journey to the recent launch.

How did you both transition to becoming hoteliers?

"It isn't so much a transition as an ongoing evolution," explains Errol, a TV news cameraman by trade. "We were in Negril looking for a venue for our wedding reception in 2018 and my cousin told me about a distant cousin who was selling her property. We went to look at it late one evening but we couldn't see much. We returned the following day. It was a phenomenal sight: an existing guest house, on the cliff edge, overlooking the Caribbean Sea. It was a no brainer. We agreed to buy it immediately."

How has the pandemic affected your business plans?

"I went to Jamaica for a funeral and the day after I arrived, Jamaica closed its borders to the UK. There were no flights for six months, so I took on the project management of the hotel," says Errol.

Yvonne continues: "I started working life in PR, but prior to the pandemic I had 'old-school' marketing skills. In May 2020, I enrolled on an online course and learned new social media skills to help me start our Instagram account. I then went to Jamaica for six weeks to see Errol

and visit the project and ended up there for six months, helping on the operational side of the hotel."

You've centred the brand around guests who want to experience Jamaican culture, rather than a mega resort. Why is this important to you?

"We want our hotel to serve as a gateway to local culture. We've both stayed in large resorts where it's easy to spend your whole time by the beach and not venture outside the hotel doors and think that experience represents the island. Staying with family and friends gave us the opportunity to see the sights that even we never knew existed."

What are the key lessons you've learned?

"It helps to be in close proximity to your project. Whatever your budget is - double it. Find a local contractor/architect that you trust, and keep talking to them throughout the build. Get a mentor. Join the local chamber of commerce. Trust your gut. Be prepared to work hard."

Yvonne adds: "Be VERY organised! Delegate the tasks that you can. Follow through on everything you say you will do and be prepared to change if things are not working."

What's next?

From now till early December 2021 we are beta testing our services and so we will be offering up to half-price stays at the hotel. In the longer term, our aim is to create a charitable foundation to support the local community.





# Abi Lawrence-Adesida & Jacqueline Kusamotu

CO-FOUNDERS OF CANDOUR BEAUTY

When Covid forced the world into lockdown last year, the overall feeling was one of doom and gloom – hardly an opportune time to start a business, you'd think. But for Abi Lawrence-Adesida and Jacqueline Kusamotu, it was actually the perfect moment to launch their new e-commerce platform, Candour Beauty. "There was a real need for access to beauty products, good customer service and information on how to use the products," explains Jacqueline. "Black women are typically not served by mainstream retailers. The local stores where we would go for hair and beauty products don't have online platforms, and those that do have very bad customer service. So that was already a huge gap, and Covid magnified those issues."

The pair hatched their plan for Candour Beauty while working in management at a telecoms company. Naturally drawn together by a passion for beauty, they'd both experienced how Black women are often overlooked, misunderstood and ignored by the beauty industry, so decided to draw on their digital experience and their "shared qualities of grit, proactiveness, focus and perseverance," to create an authentic platform offering quality, tried-and-tested beauty and personal care products specifically for women of colour.

A virtual Aladdin's cave of beauty, the site stocks a carefully curated range of brands ranging from small Black-owned businesses such as The Afro Hair & Skin Company, to global beauty behemoths like Dr Barbara Sturm. "Our first question is always: does this product address the needs of our customers?" says Abi. Hyperpigmentation, for example, is one of the biggest

bugbears for Black skin, so the duo actively seek out specialist products such as the bestselling Nuhanciam Anti Dark Spot serum. As conscious consumers themselves, they also look closely at a brand's back story and values. "We prioritize Black-owned brands as we understand the generational impact of what it means to support a Black-owned company, but at the same time we want to stock the best product for our customer," explains Jacqueline.

With Candour Beauty's retention rate increasing month on month, it's clear the clientele is happy, but the journey hasn't been without its challenges. Aside from the logistical issues of fulfilling orders from home during lockdown, they've struggled with funding: "As Black founders, we're definitely over-mentored and under-funded," says Jacqueline ruefully. As relative newbies to the beauty business, they've also had to forge connections with larger established brands from scratch. But the rewards far outweigh the negatives, says Abi: "We were able to solve our own problems by coming up with this business. We've built something from nothing, which is inspiring not just for us, but our children and the next generation."

Looking to the future, the plan is to expand their unisex offerings and move into male grooming and colour cosmetics, as well as launching their own range of merchandise, such as hair styling tools. "We want to grow in terms of our demographic, but also our market," says Abi. "At the moment we're based primarily in the UK, but we want to become a true global brand."





# Anthony & Helena Adedipe

CO-FOUNDERS OF EKO BREWERY

Once the preserve of purist hopheads and home brewers, the global craft beer industry has exploded in popularity in recent years. From sriracha-infused stouts to coffee-brewed porters, brewers need a strong USP to stand out on increasingly crowded shelves – and with its range of beers inspired by traditional African brewing techniques and recipes, Eko Brewery is certainly on a mission to offer punters something unique.

Co-founders and husband-and-wife team Anthony and Helena Adedipe were inspired to start their brewing journey after visiting Sapporo, Japan and exploring the US micro-brewery scene. Wanting to introduce people to a new taste experience, while drawing on Anthony's Nigerian roots (Eko was the original name for Lagos), they started investigating Africa's rich brewing heritage. "People still brew in villages, or for traditional functions: the difference is that people consume the beer fresh," explains Helena.

Their initial batch of homebrew, served up to friends and family at barbecues, was so well received that the pair decided to learn how to make beer properly, and soon began brewing commercially at Bermondsey's now-defunct uBrew, launching with Eko Black, a smooth, smoky porter. Although traditional African brews don't contain hops (which gives beer its distinctive bitter flavour and makes it longer-lasting) it was important, says Helena, that Eko beer tasted "modern," so they added smaller quantities of hops for a slightly sweeter but still recognisable taste.

With each subsequent beer, Eko Brewery has continued

to experiment with classic African ingredients, adding coconut palm sugar to the palm wine-inspired Eko Gold, their "lager with a twist," cassava, an African root vegetable, to a limited-edition West Coast IPA; and South African hops to a new range of African pale ales. "We have a lot of ideas about what new ingredients to include, that reflect our culture – but the big question is can we get it, or get enough of it, consistently?" says Helena.

Craft beer is experimental by nature, but the pair are careful to balance risk-taking with the reality of contract brewing. Eko Brewery currently produces 25 hectolitre (around 5,000 cans) from two sites in Sheffield and Manchester, which requires a somewhat scientific approach: "If you brew the beer on two different sets of equipment on different sites, you're going to get two different tastes. Even the water makes a difference. So we're constantly working out how to tweak the recipe with the head brewers," explains Anthony.

Alongside these challenges comes the juggling of day jobs – Helena is a financial crime consultant, Anthony an engineer – and family life with two young children. "It's definitely a labour of love," laughs Anthony. "But hopefully by doing this we can inspire people from minority backgrounds to start businesses and do something they're passionate about."

Looking to the future, Helena concludes: "We're definitely going to keep doing this. We want to keep growing and have our own site eventually." We can't wait to see what they brew up next.





# Dave Meikle

FOUNDER OF FARMBWOY

When you think of farming, you probably imagine a weather-beaten son of the soil, tilling the land. A rustic and romantic vision, but hardly an aspirational career for young people today. Jamaican entrepreneur Dave Meikle is on a mission to change that perception and make farming cool, relevant and inspiring, through his pioneering FarmBwoy brand. “You have to think about farming as a business. It’s not just about clearing a piece of land and planting a few yams and banana trees. There’s been a lot of technological advancement – it’s not as simple as it was,” he says.

The son of two teachers, Dave’s own path into farming was meandering. After running a jewellery business in high school and his own clothing brand, Guh Places, while studying at the University of Technology, he turned his entrepreneurial streak to his late grandfather’s farm, a run-down eight-acre plot in Clarendon. There, he began raising livestock – chickens, goats and pigs – and crops, and FarmBwoy was born.

It wasn’t long before Dave stumbled upon his next venture. “There were lots of castor trees growing wild on my grandad’s land which we were constantly cutting down. Then someone told me that they could make a lot of money – especially overseas, where there’s a high demand for castor oil. After doing some research, I started planting them instead,” he explains.

A wonder product since 4000 BC, when it was used as fuel for lamps in ancient Egypt, castor oil has a multitude

of medicinal and cosmetic applications: it can stimulate hair growth, relieve joint pain, soothe eczema and insect bites, act as a laxative and even induce labour. The only drawback, says Dave, is that huge amounts of seeds yield only a tiny quantity of oil, and the crop is incredibly labour-intensive to harvest. Seedpods are hand-picked and dried in the sun, “then the hard part is picking out the seeds from the trash [the pod], which is a very tedious process,” before cold pressing.

Only three months in, business is booming locally in Jamaica and overseas, helped by a strong presence on social media. Traditionally seen as a product for Black hair and skin, Dave is keen to promote castor oil as something “any person of any race can use.” That’s just the start: a range of natural oils including coconut and flaxseed is planned, along with honey from his two apiaries. There’s even a FarmBwoy clothing line in the works, giving traditional farmer’s apparel, like overalls, a trendy twist.

As important as personal commercial success is, Dave is equally committed to supporting the next generation. “Youths are the future of any country, so we want to motivate them to be productive and let them know crime is not the only way to make a living,” he says. As well as giving motivational sessions in the community, he’s in talks with a mining company, the Jamaica Bauxite Institute, about turning unused land into mini castor farms to provide jobs for young people.





# Tolani Agoro

FOUNDER OF LUX B FLOWERS

Floral designer and founder of LUX B Flowers, Tolani Agoro was inspired by her own wedding to start her floral business. Creating her brand on the side while working full-time, Tolani prioritise her projects on how they will get her to where she wants to be. She shares her journey and future plans.

What inspired you to launch Lux B Flowers?

Actually my own wedding. I had a large bridal team and couldn't afford a florist, so I took the plunge and did the bridesmaids' bouquets myself. I was surprised that I was good at it, but thought it was a fluke. Shortly after I volunteered to do flower arranging for my church and again seemed to be naturally good at it, so I started to think of it as a sign and to look into this further. I also wanted to provide a slightly different experience based on what I felt was missing when I was going through my wedding journey. After doing a trial run for my friend's wedding (that went really well), I took the plunge to officially start my own business. I launched the bouquet delivery division during lockdown when there was a large demand to send gifts and not every florist was able to meet that need.

What do you love most about what you do?

I love being able to bring a smile to someone's face with flowers. You tend to forget how people use flowers to express their love, gratitude and other emotions, so being part of that is humbling. I think this has become even more important with the pandemic, where we've been apart from our loved ones and had to find ways to express love through gifts.

You create flowers for wedding days as well as personal bouquets. How do you go about selecting your blooms? I go with what I feel is striking and unique. I'm fortunate to live close to New Covent Garden Market which has

one of the biggest selections of seasonal flowers and foliage in the county. Being able to walk around and look at what catches my eye, then go home to make an arrangement is really the process. There are also practical elements, such as how long a flower lasts, the scent, how it blooms and how delicate the stems are. There's some environmental factors such as what's in season - it's an art with some science to it!

Your brand is currently your side-hustle, how do you juggle both a full-time job and growing the brand?

I think it's all about being intentional with your time and planning ahead. I tend to work better when I have more things on the go as it makes me more disciplined. For example, if I know I have to go to the market very early before work, I'll get to bed earlier to make sure I have the energy. Also prioritising what projects I want to work on and how they will get me to where I want to be. I've realised I can't take on everything and that's OK.

What makes things easier?

The florist community on social media has been so helpful. I've made some really good friends who I've been able to bounce ideas off, get advice and collaborate on projects. Also, the use of technology to find sub-contractors for deliveries and other tasks that are quite last minute.

Where do you see the brand in the next few years?

I see it not only as a household brand for floral design, but as a lifestyle brand that integrates with technology. The lockdown has shown us we need to be more innovative on how we deliver our services and I have some cool ideas how to make this seamless, but that is in the long term. I would also love the brand to grow to allow an increase in employment for Black youths and to teach entrepreneurship.





# Natasha Miller

FOUNDER OF MILLER LIBERTINE

A firm believer in the synergy that's created when you put food and people together, Natasha Miller of Miller Libertine sees food as an incredible sensory tool to amplify experiences. Describing herself as an artist and food designer, her award-winning business strives to deliver moments that last long after the dishes have been cleared away.

"Thinking back, I can't remember a time when I wasn't in the kitchen," she says. Even the act of buying food has always been an experience, something immersive and tactile. She describes trips to Ridley Road Market in her formative years, watching her grandmother selecting the best feeling, smelling - and as a result - best-tasting produce.

Though her earliest memories are centred around the kitchen table, it wasn't until 2010 that the notion of food as a career even crossed her mind. After taking a career break, she poured her energy into baking, spurred on by positive reactions from family and friends.

"It all changed when I did a stall at Spitalfields Market. One customer, who was the director of Eat Natural, expressed an interest in selling my cakes, and that's when I started to think maybe this could be more than a passion project."

During a project for Postcard Teas, Natasha began to join up the dots between food and storytelling. She describes this as a "voyage of flavours, where each patisserie was paired with a tea and represented a different part of the world."

There were so many elements that came together to create the narrative, "what feelings food textures might

convey, and how the tea pairing could elevate taste." Seeing people interact with flavour - the joy it brings them, and the emotions it might elicit is as important as creating the experiences themselves. Her ultimate goal is to create taste experiences that stay with people, even maybe changing their relationship with taste and flavour altogether, so they begin "making connections that they might not have made. I hope I'm giving people something extremely meaningful," she adds.

For the National Trust, she told the story of the historic Fenton House and Garden in Hampstead and its silk merchant, slave trader and Quaker, Joshua Gee, through Georgian confectionery, using ingredients that echoed Gee's interests, travels and investments.

In another, she worked on a multi-sensory bespoke taste experience for Liberty and the LDNY Foundation, celebrating the creative talent of young people from underprivileged backgrounds. Her menu of sumptuous patisserie was featured alongside, and complemented, cocktails devised by Cointreau.

Whilst something currently in the making is more of "an audio storytelling project about food and nostalgia, how food can connect us to our deepest memories." She continues: "It's a really rich experience and shows food in a completely different light. I'm really into audio storytelling, I think it has such an intimacy to it."

When we start to look at food through the same eyes, it becomes something much more than sustenance. Her work reveals a transportive quality to flavour - it can take you anywhere in the world and even back in time! And when combined with tech, as she intends to do next, who knows, it might even give a taste of the future too.





# Ashley Broderick

FOUNDER OF NANDI NICOLE

When Covid and its subsequent lockdowns arrived in the UK in 2020, Ashley Broderick found herself at a fork in the road. After studying design and architecture in the US, where she was born, Ashley had spent six years working in luxury property development, overseeing everything from sourcing vendors, to managing budgets as well as hiring and briefing the marketing and sales team.

Covid unfortunately left her out of work, but gave her an idea of how to fulfil a long-held dream of becoming an entrepreneur.

"Everyone was experiencing the whole essential vs non-essential debate of what gets to stay open," she says. "A large topic in the beauty industry was that women are expected to have Zoom meetings and be presentable at all times, yet it was particularly women of colour that were struggling with much of this, and experiencing anxiety because many of our products are not on the high street. It really put into perspective how much our beauty needs are procured in the shadows. Why is that?"

Hair and skin care is something Ashley says she's grappled with all of her life. Despite growing up in New York, and now living in London, she says even major cities (such as these) offer Black women limited options. Shops that sell products for textured hair are often "sketchy" places, with products scattered about in stores that are poorly lit, poorly taken care of, and totally lacking in specialist advice. Women run the risk of buying something that contains harmful chemicals, and are often prey to shop owners with little interest in their wellbeing.

"It's sort of a point of trauma for me," explains Ashley. "This is something I've experienced my whole life, even growing up in the US. Hair and beauty are a taboo topic especially in Afro-Caribbean culture where we've gone through a history of our natural hair texture, as it grows out of our scalp, being rejected. It's always been

a challenge to see ourselves in the commercial beauty space."

In response, Ashley founded online stockist Nandi Nicole – a name that symbolizes the bridging of the modern-day multicultural woman with her African roots (Nandi is derived from the notable African Queen and mother of Shaka, King of the Zulus).

The business provides an ethical retail space for people of colour to shop for their hair and beauty needs with confidence, and is described by her as a "place where we take out the mystery and questions about whether these products are good for you or not, or whether the ingredients are beneficial to your particular texture or hair concern."

Nandi Nicole stocks only clean beauty brands, free of toxic components, and with a range of items to suit different kinds of textured hair. "We're really focusing on a part of the beauty community that has been really overlooked and thought of as unsophisticated," adds Ashley, pointing out that the niche market in the UK alone is worth a huge amount, with Black women spending a collective £88m each year on their hair alone, despite the lack of access and hurdles involved in doing so.

As a graduate of the Barclays Black Founder Accelerator, Ashley is focused on building Nandi Nicole's presence - and plans to develop it as a global resource for women seeking the best products for textured hair and melanin-rich skin. It's also an opportunity to support and sustain brands that cater to this audience as, according to Ashley, many large stores or supermarkets only offer these products room for a very limited range of goods.

Ultimately, Ashley says she wants to create a place where "people feel they are celebrated and that there's advocacy behind the retailer welcoming their custom. I see an opportunity as a retailer and a stockist to do more for our community," she adds.





# Shirley White

FOUNDER OF OTC BEVERAGES

Three years ago at her dad's 80th birthday party, Shirley White had the spark of an idea for a new business. "I looked around and realised that in our community we do a lot of homemade food and people bring their drinks in plastic reusable water bottles," she says. "I thought, surely there's a better way of presenting this? My and my children's generation, are not going to do what my father's generation and the generation before did, which is making the drinks at home."

Shirley's background was miles away from the drinks industry. After spending time working for local government, she spied an ad in the Evening Standard that caught her eye and went along to a wine and cheese evening - which landed her a customer services role in the world of Market Data and investment banking. After 30 years working in the City for companies including Telerate, Deutsche Bank and HSBC, she was ready for her next challenge - so OTC Beverages was born. OTC offers sorrel and non-alcoholic ginger beer in bottles and cans (a third flavour coming soon) that are stocked in take-aways and corner shops across London.

Although it's a new industry for her, Shirley says there have been plenty of transferable skills from her former life in finance. "It's the skills you get from project management and juggling a number of programs within large organisations," she explains. "It's also speaking to a lot of people, asking questions and ultimately doing your research. I used all those skills to look for the right people to work with, networking, and looking at how the packaging and bottle design was going to look. In the end it's all about people, and how you get on with them."

From the start, Shirley knew she didn't want to be brewing up drinks in her own kitchen, but says it took some time to perfect the recipes in the factory. She adopted a less-is-more philosophy to their formulation - keeping the various components to a minimum and using only identifiable quality ingredients such as organic cane sugar instead of artificial sweetener. She emphasises the natural health benefits of ginger and sorrel, as well as their potential in an ever-growing market for no- and low-alcohol drinks. And her flavours are already proving popular, with OTC Beverages shortlisted for a number of accolades including the Great British Food Awards.

Shirley is now working to bring her products to more locations in London, and has plans for the rest of the world as well. There's a few logistical wrinkles to iron out, but she's hoping to bring her sorrel and ginger beer to other markets including America and Africa. "It's at the age where you're growing the brand, you want to take on momentum, and you want it to be an identifiable brand of choice when people go to a shop to buy a cold drink," she says.



# Jonathon Barnes & Justine Gray

FOUNDERS OF ROSE CHOCOLATES

When two talents in the fields of baking and healthcare come together, with a passion for food and indulgence, what could be more fitting than to establish a luxury chocolate brand with self-care attributes?

Jonathon, you're an acclaimed pastry chef and Justine, the content creator of Rose Chocolates as well as a paediatric nurse, what made you decide to create this brand?

Both of us are on a journey of eating more mindfully, chocolate can boost your mood and we use art on our chocolate to enhance feelings in our customers' experience. With Justine taking further studies in mental health, her love for art, and Jonathon training as a chocolatier, we combined all our interests to create Rose Chocolates with the aim of making handmade and beautifully crafted treats.

Customers can personalise orders (design and shape, to theme and flavours) this must be a popular feature, but what inspired you to offer this?

Everyone has their own preferences, unique taste buds and desire of experience. A taste of luxury is our slogan because we believe it's measured by asking: 'What is luxury to you?' As self-care and self-treating are solely about oneself, we want our customers to be able to choose which chocolates they enjoy indulging in or gifting someone.

The decorations on your products are beautiful, how do you balance keeping the designs aesthetically pleasing and making mouths water?

This is all about using distinct colours, designs and

techniques, to make them shine; hopefully enhancing their desirability. The process for creating our chocolate art is another form of communication and expression; such as the African collection with animal prints and a sunset to represent the beauty of Black culture.

What motivated you to branch out into offering an events service, and how do you find those orders differ from the regular consumer?

Our customers. Although we always wanted to provide bespoke designs to suit any occasion. Our larger orders, for 250+ chocolates, tend to be personalised for a specific event. Whereas our regular orders may want to try a bit of everything and order a range in two boxes.

What would you say your ultimate goal is and where do you see yourselves in five years?

Our goals are to sell in shops and at events, gain a bigger customer audience, have our own cacao farm abroad with Black workers and sustainably give back to Black communities abroad in schools, healthcare, homes and with food. Our five-year goal is to have our own shop or pop-up, showcasing our range.

Finally do you have hopes or ideas of change for the luxury chocolate industry?

Yes we do. There is a massive increase in people using chocolate - not just for eating but also in cosmetics, drinks and more. Workers are not being paid well, children are being deprived of basic needs and families from a safe home environment. We hope changes are made in the industry and we want to be a part of that change.







# Ayo Salau

FOUNDER OF SOUTH LONDON KITCHEN

South London Kitchen's supper clubs take place beneath an unassuming railway arch in Deptford, which is where founder Ayo Salau serves up his hands-on (literally, diners are encouraged to eat with their hands) meals, and also brews up SLK's range of hot sauces, bbq rubs and flavour kits.

Rewind a few years, to when Ayo was still at university, and he admits he wasn't much of a cook. But in a bid to impress the ladies, "I'll be honest, I had to sharpen the weapons I had," he says. He started trying out recipes, buying random ingredients at the market and seeing what he could make back at home. Over time, and through lots of trial and error, he developed a natural flair for flavour. "I can't stand recipes, if I'm perfectly honest," he says of his self-taught cooking skills. "I get recipes and do completely different stuff. I think it's because I've messed up so many flavours that I know what works."

"I'm completely and utterly undisciplined in the way I cook," he continues. "And it depends on what's inspired me that week, but a lot of the time it's inspired by travel or friends."

After graduating, and while working as an accountant, Ayo appeared on BBC series Best Home Cook, which he says prompted him to set up the business. He started running supper clubs, and serving people food that brings together a huge diversity of flavours and cultures - with miso, fattoush and adobo all appearing alongside one another on menus. "The supper clubs are for anyone who wants to enjoy some fantastic food, and wants to be filled up to the brim," says Ayo. "I try to be authentic and respectful to whatever ingredients I'm using. I like to expose people to different flavours they haven't had before, different smells and different textures."

Making SLK sauces was also a natural step for Ayo, who comes from a big Nigerian family that gets together every year for a huge bbq. "Sixty or seventy people would come," he says. "So we're used to feeding that amount of people, and it's always about how you get flavour into food." His scotch bonnet hot sauce, berbere spice rubs and citrus salt blend all proved popular with his relatives, who encouraged him to start selling them. SLK products are now stocked in various south London shops, says Ayo, who has ambitions to manufacture them for the supermarket shelves one day. For now though, he's happiest when he's serving people at his supper clubs.

"You know someone that little bit more when you've seen them put their face into a massive chicken wing, with bbq sauce on their chin and bits in their teeth," he jokes. "That's when you really know someone, and it definitely helps to break down barriers."





# Dalla Niakhaté

FOUNDER OF THÉS LAC ROSE

Tea is a pastime that transmutes cultures and allows for a moment's reflection, so for Dalla Niakhaté, an avid brew drinker and founder of Thés Lac Rose, it made sense to launch a luxury aromatic loose leaf tea brand. Her love of a hearty cuppa was the main reason she decided to start the business: "It bothers me when I go to restaurants, cafés or to people's houses and they have this vast array of caffeinated flavours but lack quality tea. I don't understand why tea is so underrated. There are so many different types; it really is as rich and complex as wine. I want to share my knowledge and tell the story of tea."

"I've always been into tea," says Dalla, hailing from a family where a herbal homemade infusion would be used remedially to cure ailments. But entering the tea industry wasn't an obvious choice for Dalla, who considered becoming an entrepreneur after business school and decided to follow her passion for tea. From then, it was a bit of a whirlwind putting the steps into place. She went to China for a six-month research trip in 2016, visiting the tea plantations, sourcing contacts and suppliers and understanding what processes were required to create these infusions.

"Going there and asking questions gave me a reality check on the industry," she explains. "I realized the amount of manual work that's required to produce a single cup of tea; it's a painstaking process."

The business officially launched two years later and Dalla now has suppliers based in Sri Lanka, Kenya, India and China – all of whom are part of the ethical tea partnership, which ensures that the processes used at each plantation are sustainably certified.

Dalla has personalised the brand, incorporating aspects

of her upbringing and identity into its concept. She honours her Senegalese roots through the brand's name, which recognises her nation's lagoon, Le Lac Rose, and each collection is inspired by her family or female icons that she wants to remember. "The Paris-London-Dakar herbal collection is an homage to my family and my time spent in each of these locations. Whereas the And God Made Woman green tea collection names teas after empowering historical women, using blends inspired by their personalities."

Imparting character into the business is vital for Dalla as it brings to life the journey she herself has been on. "I run Thés Lac Rose because I love it. It's not easy and of course, there are days when I question what I'm doing, but then I remember why I do it. I really love my product; I believe in it and know that it's well-made - I just want to share that with people."

She says she's still learning to make suitable content for her audience and match the brand's design to its flavours, but she accepts that it's all part of the process. "I'm trying to let go of what I like and be more open to learning about my audience."

For true tea enthusiast Dalla, it is about creating a line of teas that fits what tea lovers feel is lacking in the current tea market: tea that has heart and flavour. While she's keen to scale up, she also wants to remain independent so that she can grow organically and keep enjoying the venture and maintain her hands-on approach. "I really like blending the teas; it's so therapeutic. Smelling and touching the loose leaf gives you an entirely different relationship to bagged tea. It's much more special."



# Jacqueline Shaw

FOUNDER OF WAX AND WRAPS

Jacqueline Shaw is the brains behind Wax and Wraps, a monthly sewing-kit subscription service that connects independent African designers with crafters around the world, to create iconic African-print wardrobes. She reflects on launching a business during the pandemic, how her previous entrepreneurial experience helped her with this venture, and the importance of operating sustainably.

What prompted you to launch Wax and Wraps during the pandemic?

During the first lockdown, I wondered how I could better serve my existing clients and grow my client base. I run a few other fashion subscription-based businesses, but I wanted to launch one with an African focus. I pre-launched Wax and Wraps to one of my student groups, where I teach African fashion entrepreneurs how to start businesses that encourage trade back to the continent. The idea came to me after seeing how much the craft market boomed during the pandemic. I also wanted to invest in the craft community as a way to deter consumers against fast fashion; I believe in the power of making something yourself.

You're a self-professed serial-entrepreneur; how did your previous experiences and skill sets lend themselves to this venture?

I have 20 years' experience as a fashion designer, with a master's degree in ethical fashion. These experiences contributed to my understanding of the industry and its needs, where it lacks and its challenges. I previously worked with a bespoke bridal sewing business, which drew me to the craft and sewing sector. It was an area that I eventually wanted to include in my portfolio.

You work with a number of different African suppliers to introduce African artisans and new talent overseas. How do you source these designers and what do you look for in the partners you want to work with?

I've run my production consultancy business, Africa

Fashion Guide, for ten years (which sources and promotes African fashion clients and brands), so I find a lot of suppliers and partners to work with through that. I mainly look for skilled artisans who can deliver with interesting patterns and designs, ideally with experience in exporting these overseas – though I do test drive the process with them first to ensure it's seamless.

The business encourages people to shop with African artisans and retailers as a way of strengthening trade with African countries. How does this work as a more sustainable practice and why is this so important to you? The textile industry is complex. I want to encourage more growth through business in Africa, because it helps boost the local economy. Despite cotton growing in Africa, 97 per cent of African cotton is exported globally, so native manufacturers tend to import cotton fabric as it's cheaper and more available than what is processed regionally.

I aim to find handmade artisan fabrics that use locally-sourced cotton and traditional waxprint cloth, so Wax and Wraps can introduce new African fabrics to surrounding communities and educate them about the preservation of traditional textiles.

What's next for the business?

I'm keen to grow further and get more of our orange boxes through people's letterboxes and expand the UK's sewing community. I'd love for more people to find and enjoy sewing and the craft process in general; we're not a typical subscription-box service, we create great impact with each of our boxes. We purchase fabric in quantity per month plus we buy craft-made gifts, like jewellery, as gifts for subscribers that are also made in the country of the month.

INTERVIEW BY: OLIVIA ATKINS / PHOTOGRAPHY BY: ABI OSHODI OF A-O PHOTOGRAPHY







# Heidi Hanna

FOUNDER OF WHERE NEXT HEIDI?

Having travelled around the globe and visited over thirty countries, adventure seeker Heidi Hanna, founder of Where Next Heidi? is passionate about exploring and sharing the places she visits. Since Covid she's been exploring in her backyard on the island of Jamaica.

What inspired you to launch your brand?

I love to travel, but it's so much more than reaching a destination and checking it off a list. I really love the entire journey, from researching, planning to documenting my experiences and sharing them with others. But the ultimate inspiration, the part that gives me goosebumps is the conversations that my travels enable with others. From shared experiences to those that are just looking for inspiration.

You were born in Jamaica, lived in Canada and moved to Florida. What was it like living in these different places and how have you drawn on your experiences during your travels?

Living in three different countries has already given me exposure to different cultures and ways of life. With that exposure there is a level of acceptance not only for the differences in people and culture, but also the similarities of people as human beings. It has also piqued my curiosity to see the world.

You launched your brand just after Covid happened, with the hope of travelling the world. How have you been able to still travel?

It's all about the pivot. I exchanged international travel for #InMiBackYaad travel. So instead of getting on a plane, we got in the car, explored the unseen and unheard places right here in Jamaica. Travel is still a thing, just in a different way.

You've recently travelled with the family to see family in America. What was it like travelling outside of Jamaica again?

Stressful! The anxiety was real. Travelling with two children who are unvaccinated changed everything and limited our movements. We had to second guess what we did and where we went. Not to mention constantly stalking them to keep their masks on, keep their hands out of their face and keeping them sanitised.

What are the type of places that you like visiting?

Spin the globe, point to a place and I am there. I want to see it all!

Where is your favourite spot?

In Jamaica, my favourites are Negril for the beach, Treasure Beach for local small-town vibes and Portland because it's the adventure capital of Jamaica with endless hiking, camping, rivers and waterfalls.

How do you plan on using your brand to give back to local communities in Jamaica?

By highlighting communities and their business, especially places to sleep, eat and explore. The local travel guides play such an important part in being able to see so much of Jamaica, so any support and exposure I can give them helps. Also, I've become passionate about the 'leave-no-trace' agenda.

What are your hopes for the brand?

To continue building an engaged community and to expand globally by working with tourist boards and other travel brands.

Where Next Heidi?

We don't have definitive trips just yet - due to the changing nature of the pandemic - but let's just say we are discussing trips that takes us to the outdoors - US National Parks RV Road trip, a European Winter Getaway, and a Central American Eco Adventure.



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