

BLACK DRINKS INNOVATORS TO WATCH

**TEN RISING STARS CHARTING CREATIVE NEW PATHS
—AND PUSHING FOR INCLUSIVITY—IN THE WORLD
OF WINE, SPIRITS, AND BEER**

By Dorothy J. Gaiter

It has been a long time coming and progress is still slow and fitful, but Black people are having an increasing impact in the world of wine, spirits, and beer. Some have well-established reputations, such as André Mack, winemaker and owner of Maison Noir wines; legendary mixologist Franky Marshall, who has mentored countless Black spirits professionals; and Brooklyn Brewery's supremely talented brewmaster, Garrett Oliver.

Beyond them, however, is a growing number of tough, imaginative Black men and women, less-widely known, who are determined to make a mark in their trade through hard work and creativity. And, as they pave new paths, they are just as determined to find ways to raise up others.

In this issue, we profile 10 professionals who are helping make the world of beverage alcohol a more delicious and inclusive place.

Using Success to Pave the Road for Others

**PHIL LONG, LONGEVITY WINES,
LIVERMORE, CALIFORNIA**

Phil Long and his late wife, Debra, began making wine in their garage in 2003 in Livermore, California. In 2008, they opened their urban winery nearby and grew production to around 3,500 cases a year. They called their enterprise Longevity, a play on Phil's last name that also highlights a hallmark of a successful business.

Long's track record of success as a winemaker, his position as president of the Association of African American Vintners (AAAV), and his status as a government-certified minority-owned business helped him attract the attention of Bronco Wine Co., one of the largest wine producers in the U.S.

In March, Long and Bronco announced a partnership that will give Longevity's Classic label wines—a Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon—a huge jump in nationwide availability and volume (potentially "hundreds of thousands of cases," he reports), a first for a Black-owned and operated winery. Long, 61, will make these California-designated wines at Bronco's

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headquarters, and will continue to produce—with his son and assistant winemaker, Phil Jr.—his Reserve wines at his Livermore facility.

"I didn't get in the business to become a Black winemaker. I just wanted to make wine. And I never wanted to use [being Black] to leverage business," he says.

Yet he does want to use his unique position to help others. Only about "1 percent of 1 percent of all winemakers are Black," says Long. "One of the AAAV's goals is to let the public know that we are here. We must establish a career path for African American students coming up, and that's one of the primary goals of our internships, scholarships, and mentorships—to promote the idea that winemaking is an available career possibility for them."

Elevating Unheard Voices

**SUKARI BOWMAN, THE COLOR OF WINE,
ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

An Atlanta-based real estate banker, Sukari Bowman and her Black, college-educated, sophisticated, financially successful friends all love wine. She and her brother created a blog called Love & Vines where they discuss food, wine, and music. Yet as Bowman began to seriously read wine publications, she noticed that no one looked like her. So she set out to find them.

Since 2017, Bowman, 48, has been creating an oral history of people of color in the wine world for her podcast, The Color of Wine. Her brother, Shomari, provides technical help and great music. Today, they have accu-

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mulated 70 interviews which have been downloaded and listened to over 20,000 times, she says.

"Creating a space that celebrates people of color in the wine industry gives me a home base; I can go out and explore the world of wine confidently because I carry all these stories, all these connections with me," Bowman says.

"It is so important to memorialize our stories in our own words. As we all move and grow in this industry we can use the stories of those who came before us and are still blazing the trail to learn, to find inspiration, and to see what is possible," she says.



Empowering Others Through Education

LARISSA DUBOSE, SALES MANAGER, JUSTIN AND LANDMARK VINEYARDS; AND DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, BLACK WINE PROFESSIONALS, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Larissa Dubose understands the value of wine education. Certified as a sommelier with the Court of Master Sommeliers and as a specialist of wine from the Society of Wine Educators, Dubose is one of a handful of senior sales managers in the fine wine space, representing California wineries Justin and Landmark in many southeastern states.

Passionate that others should have access to wine education, Dubose recently took on an important new role, director of education for the Black Wine Professionals network that activist Julia Coney is assembling. Dubose, 43, will provide educational content and resources for members.

Bringing people into the world of wine by demystifying it is a role she has played for years, both in her monthly live videos on IG Live she produces called “The Perfect Pairing” with Jordan Traylor, a chef and sommelier, as well as on her blog, *The Lotus and the Vines*. Her mission: to bridge “the gap between the wine novice and the wine connoisseur.”

“Wine knowledge is powerful,” she says. “I see too many people give a piece of their power away when the wine list comes to the table by handing the wine list to someone else. I want more of us to have that power.”

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The Diversity Change Agent

TJ DOUGLAS, OWNER, THE URBAN GRAPE, BOSTON

With \$10,000 of their own money, TJ Douglas and his wife, Hadley, owners of The Urban Grape, a wine, craft beer, and spirits store in Boston, founded The Urban Grape Wine Studies Award for Students of Color.

In just over a week after its June launch, the Award’s fund had grown to \$83,000, through contributions from about 100 customers and friends.

The selected student will be mentored by Douglas, attend a year-long certification course at the Elizabeth Bishop Wine Resource Center at Boston University, and will receive a one year paid internship: Four months each working at The Urban Grape, distributor M.S. Walker, and Tiffani Faison’s Big Heart Hospitality restaurant group.

It’s a crash course in all aspects of selling wine—wine store, distributor, restaurant—and a path Douglas modeled after his own 20-year career in the wine and hospitality industries. Douglas founded The Urban Grape 10 years ago, when there were even fewer Black people in the fine wine business.

“The big problem with our industry is that there are very few people of color in it and a lot of that has to do with the base from which we source employees,” Douglas says.

His hope is that this program will bring about “generational change” for the recipient, the recipient’s community, and for the wine industry in Boston. The couple hopes to create a foundation that will partner with other colleges’ wine programs, and, in cases where perhaps a historically Black college or university may not have a program, help start one.

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Harnessing the Power of Hip-Hop

JERMAINE STONE, CRU LUV SELECTIONS, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Wine needs to enlarge its audience, and Jermaine Stone is someone who understands how to make that happen. President and CEO of Cru Luv Selections, a wine importing and consulting company in Brooklyn, Stone blends wine and hip-hop culture in his podcast, *Wine & Hip Hop*.

He was a promising teenage rapper when a summer job packing boxes for Zachys Auction led to over a decade in the fine wine world. Stone has managed auctions in Hong Kong, retrieved consignments in Switzerland and was a founding director for Wally's Wine & Spirits of Los Angeles's foray into the auction business. In the process, this young man from the Bronx, whom many in the auction world were curious about, brought with him hip-hop—"America's greatest export," he calls it.

"Wine can be enjoyed across all demograph-

ics the same way that hip-hop can be," he says. "And they're both better when paired together." Stone interviews hip-hop personalities and winemakers on his podcast, recently hosting Domaine Dujac's Jeremy Seysses to talk about his Burgundy estate and the song in which Jay-Z drops Dujac's name. In another episode, Stone talked to LeA (the granddaughter of Hip Hop) about how to transition from Moscato by pairing Drake's "Nice for What" with a bottle of 1990 Suduiraut from Sauternes.

Stone, 35, recently asked one of his oldest friends—a rapper whom he describes as "super rough around the edges but way into wine"—why he thinks wine isn't more widely embraced by Black people. "He said, 'No one introduces it to us. Someone needs to introduce it to us first before we can turn into wine lovers.' That's our mission and I think we're further along than we've ever been."



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audience, proving to the brand that there are many African Americans who love premium whiskey and have high discretionary incomes."

A year later, in 2016, she founded the Black Bourbon Society (BBS), a community for enjoying whiskey. "We are matchmakers," Davis says, with major brands often sponsoring events. The BBS has 19,000 total paying members worldwide. It focuses on "getting members up to speed with the vernacular and the process of making whiskey and allowing them to see what these brands look like face-to-face."

Davis, 39, is now a certified executive bourbon steward, accredited by the Stave & Thief Society, a Kentucky certification organization. Before lockdown, BBS was events- and travel-based, with tastings and distillery trips. Now, "we're developing virtual content for our members to stay engaged," she says. On their podcast, "Bonded in Bourbon," Davis and her husband, Armond, review whiskey. Their newest venture, Diversity Distilled, helps brands "recruit, retain and promote diverse talent."

BBS members "don't fit the mold that brands had put us in, the urban demographic mold," which is younger and pitched "with inexpensive, intro-level spirits," she said. BBS's members, are "CEOs of their own companies, professors, teachers, in management. They want high-end whiskey. It wasn't that some brands were excluding us from their marketing; some just didn't know we existed."

Highlighting a New Community in High-End Whiskey

SAMARA RIVERS DAVIS, THE BLACK BOURBON SOCIETY, ATLANTA

Samara Rivers Davis bought her first bottle of bourbon, Four Roses Single Barrel, while on vacation and fell in love.

An event planner in Atlanta, she had a career-changing experience when a spirits company hired her to stage a series of events. When she looked at the brand's marketing materials, "no one looked like me," Davis recalls. "So I began pulling together an





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Aiming for the Very Top

ANGELA SCOTT, POISED TO BECOME THE FIRST BLACK MASTER OF WINE

Angela Scott is not someone who shies away from difficult things. She's worked in Haiti with the Peace Corps and practiced Human Rights Law in East Africa and Central America.

Growing up in Pennsylvania with parents who cared a lot about food, and enjoyed wine occasionally, Scott became fascinated by wine as a teenage exchange student in Spain.

"Drinking wine with my host family was mind-blowing because it really enhanced the food and vice versa," Scott explains.

After a career practicing law, she made the switch to wine and began pursuing the elite Master of Wine degree, held by a mere 393 people worldwide. She was accepted into the program in 2018, and if she passes on her timetable, Scott, now 44, will become the world's first Black person to hold the Master of Wine title.

"I am pursuing the MW because I love to learn. The syllabus is insane... it's nerd paradise," she writes from New Zealand where she lives with her husband, a winemaker and MW.

But she is also pursuing the degree for credibility: "I sought out formal education because unlike my white counterparts I do not receive the presumption of belonging; as Black people we must prove ourselves over and over again. We are asked for credentials where others are presumed qualified."

What will it mean to her to become the first Black Master of Wine in the world? "I would be incredibly proud. But I would not be satisfied being alone. It would mean it is a start, but there is more work to be done," she shares.

Brewing for Social Justice

MARCUS BASKERVILLE, WEATHERED SOULS BREWING CO., SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

Marcus Baskerville, cofounder and head brewer of Weathered Souls Brewing Co. in San Antonio, Texas, created a global collaboration among breweries and beer lovers called Black Is Beautiful in response to police violence against Black people.

Weathered Souls posted a base recipe for a stout and invited other breweries to tweak it to their liking and use the Black Is Beautiful label, which provides room for each brewery's logo. Breweries are then asked to donate proceeds from the sales to a local organization that fights for social justice. Since the initiative was announced, more than 1,000 breweries have signed on, spread over all 50 states and 20 countries, Baskerville reports.

"I don't think this has ever been done in history; we have more than a thousand

separate businesses participating in the moving of commerce for social justice. To see something like that is absolutely amazing," he says.

When he was a teenager growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood in Sacramento, California, "I used to get pulled over all the time for driving a nice vehicle," he recalls. And once, he and a relative were at a party where a guest was stabbed and when they took that guest to the hospital, "we were treated as suspects," Baskerville recalls.

Weathered Souls' money from its Black Is Beautiful sales will primarily go to 100 Black Men of San Antonio, an organization that provides mentors for Black children, "especially boys, which is important," Baskerville says.

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Elevating Rum While Honoring History

MARC FARRELL, TEN TO ONE RUM, NEW YORK CITY

With the creation of his Ten To One brand last year, Mark Farrell has begun what he describes as “a revolution in people’s perception of rum.”

Farrell left his home in Trinidad and Tobago when he was 16 to study chemical engineering at MIT. He’s lived in the U.S. for many years, during which time he earned a Harvard MBA, a Master’s degree in public policy from Cambridge, and served as a vice president at Starbucks.

The self-described “rum nerd” watched as tequila, gin, vodka, and American whiskey all experienced image upgrades over the last decade, while rum—the distilled spirit of the Caribbean, a region with strong connections to Africa and a history of colonialism and slavery—remained

stuck in the public imagination, associated with beach vacations, college parties, and clichés like pirates and sea monsters. Rum doesn’t get the “reverence or appreciation it deserves,” he says.

He created Ten To One to honor the Caribbean’s history while providing a modern take on the spirit by blending rums made from “different distillation methods, different provenances, and different terroirs,” says Farrell, 37, from his New York office. “This is more than the story of a Trinidadian making rum from Trinidad.”

Ten To One refers to Trinidad and Tobago’s first prime minister’s belief that a federation of 10 Caribbean countries was stronger than each going it alone, an idea embraced and expanded by successor organizations. Ten To One Dark (\$43) is sourced from producers in Trinidad, Barbados, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic; White (\$29) is from Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. Both have minerality and acidity, and, according to Farrell, are most definitely not designed to be mixed with Coke.



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Pioneering Land Ownership

KRISTA SCRUGGS, WINEMAKER, ZAFSA WINES, BURLINGTON, VERMONT

Krista Scruggs is a queer, Black, female winemaker in Vermont who became the owner of that state’s 18th Black-owned farm with her recent purchase of the 50 acres she’d been vine farming for a few years.

Scruggs’s popular Zafa Wines are biodynamically grown sparkling wines made with cold-hardy hybrid grapes such as Frontenac Blanc, Louise Swenson, and La Crescent and sometimes also with cider. Zafa’s tasting notes: “No sulfur additions, fining, filtering, or funny business in the winery, just fucking fermented juice.”

A native Californian, Scruggs grew up helping her grandfather tend his farm. A job as logistics coordinator for Constellation Brands taught her every aspect of wine production, and opened her mind to the possibility of winegrowing. She learned to prune vines in Washington and then, through a labor-abroad program, worked for winegrowers in Italy and France. “I sought out growers across the world who would house me and feed me and I would work for them in exchange for their knowledge,” says Scruggs, 35.

Back in the U.S., she landed a job in 2016 working with Vermont star winemaker Deirdre Heekin at her winery, La

“BLACK FARMLAND-OWNERSHIP IS SECURITY. CONTROLLING YOUR FOOD SOURCE IS A FORM OF PROTEST.”

Garagista, and as a farmhand with Heekin’s husband, Caleb Barber. With grapes from a La Garagista vineyard and foraged apples, Scruggs made her first vintage of Zafa wines in 2017 and lightning struck. Today, there’s a waiting list to purchase her wines.

In March, Scruggs partnered with the Black-owned Clemmons Family Farm to grow crops embedded in the history of African Americans (“Zafa” is a difficult-to-explain anti-colonialist mindset). “Black farmland-ownership is security. Controlling your food source is a form of protest,” she says.

“My mother told me that a closed mouth rarely gets fed,” she says. So she urges the women she hires to be outspoken, too. “That’s the point of carving a path.”

