

Innovation Through Storytelling

An Interview with Uduimoh Umolu, Co-Founder, Jon Basil Tequila



Uduimoh Umolu

EDITORS' NOTE Uduimoh Umolu is a first generation West African American. Born and raised on the Northside of Chicago, Umolu graduated from the University of Illinois, but not before starting a business in the spirits industry. He is the Co-Founder of Jon Basil Tequila (jonbasiltequila.com), one of the first minority millennial owned and operated spirits companies in Chicago, which he founded with his business partner, Belall Taber. Launched in December 2018, the brand was named after Umolu's grandfather following an inspirational visit to Jalisco, Mexico. While the brand amassed a loyal customer base of 15,000 in Illinois, the pair shortly started distributing in other states after securing deals with Walmart, Binny's and Mariano's. Over the years, Jon Basil has been placed in 350 locations throughout the state of Illinois and sold through its first shipment in less than one year. Additionally, it is found in over 130 on and off premise accounts.

What was your vision for creating Jon Basil Tequila and how do you define the brand's mission?



Jon Basil Tequila is one of the first minority millennial owned and operated spirits companies in the world. I founded it in 2018 with my business partner, Belall Taher, setting out to become some of the youngest creators of a premium liquor brand. As we launched in December 2018, we knew it was important to create a brand that could be used during moments that were authentically memorable and personal to us. Spirits have always been a huge part of our culture and have always been infused with so many intimate memories. We knew it was important for us to have a brand that could connect with us and our communities.

Did you always know that you had an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build your own business?

I've always had an entrepreneurial spirit due to being from parents that immigrated to this country. Both my partner and I came from situations where we watched our parents build from scratch. The goal has always been to build upon the opportunities that have been passed to us and to continue that legacy.

How do you describe Jon Basil Tequila?

Jon Basil Tequila is a complex blend of high- and low-land agave plants. Both plant origins give a unique blend that touches on earth notes as well as citrus ones. Its smooth finish is always the opener that introduces tasters to the world of tequila.



A Jon Basil Tequila cocktail (above) and Jon Basil Tequila Blanco (top right)



How critical is it for Jon Basil to continue to innovate and where is innovation taking place for the brand?

Innovation through storytelling is always at the heart of Jon Basil Tequila. Being one of the first multicultural, millennial owned and operated brands that was grown from the ground up, we have consistently had to find ways to innovate through design, storytelling, and marketing. We constantly infuse the lifestyle of the brand with the product, and I believe that is what allows our consumers to identify with the brand in a meaningful way.

Where do you see opportunities for expansion for Jon Basil as you look to the future?

We are aiming to make Jon Basil a global brand. Tequila as an industry is growing quickly and our brand recognition has traveled to international markets despite the geographical limitations. I'm excited to continue to connect with our consumers in authentic ways in more of these markets.

What has allowed you to offer a high-quality, premium product at an accessible price?

We use the highest quality products available to us and allow our agave to mature. We are also extremely detail-oriented while being creative in our approach to design. Ultimately, we focus on the entire experience of the brand and product – how it tastes, looks and feels are all a part of that, as well as where it lives and the quality of time it's presented.

What are your views on the importance of building more diversity in the spirits industry and do you see progress being made in this regard?

Spirits are something that bring people together, and are used to celebrate special moments as well as during times to reflect. It's extremely important to have brands that understand the intricacies of these moments for the end buyer. Having a diverse industry allows for more brands that can truly connect with a diverse audience. I believe we have finally started to make some strides in this area, but I think there is so much more room for growth.

Jon Basil is celebrating its fourth anniversary. Are you able to take moments to reflect and celebrate what you have achieved?

A main pillar of our brand is celebrating the wins and learning from the losses. It is difficult to celebrate those moments when you're in the process of building something from scratch, especially something as large as a spirit brand because there are so many moving pieces at all times. However, as the year closes and we actually reflect on the journey so far, we can't help but toast to it. We couldn't have imagined how it was going to unfold or where we would be four years later. So much has happened since we began. We survived a global pandemic and so many other hurdles, and we're still here and growing. We couldn't be more grateful for all of the support. ●