

Reflecting The Unique Character Of Donegal

An Interview with Laura Bonner, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, The Muff Liquor Company



Laura Bonner

EDITORS' NOTE Laura Bonner is the visionary Founder and Chief Executive Officer of The Muff Liquor Company. Fulfilling a lifelong dream, Bonner launched the company in 2017 with a focus on her family's tradition of distilling, strong ethics, a sense of humor with a twist of fun, and a firm devotion to a place that affords every bottle their unique, authentic taste. Before founding The Muff Liquor Company, Bonner graduated with a law degree from Dublin Business School and embarked on a highly successful real estate career in London, eventually taking on a U.K. Sales Director role where she oversaw 300 employees across 17 offices. However, her dream of building her own distillery never left. Inspired by her grandfather's ingenuity and original Poitín recipes, Bonner has aspired to make a difference in the village of Muff and her community where The Muff Liquor Company is based today. Under Bonner's leadership, she sought out some of the world's biggest stars to invest in her liquor company. She set a goal of getting Ed Sheeran involved; she visualized it and took all action possible to make it happen. She heard Russell Crowe was filming in Ireland and she made it her mission to get her delicious spirits into his hands. One sip of each spirit and he called

her right away – they met and he was in, but he wanted to bring a few friends onboard too. Low and behold he brought Ed Sheeran, Jimmy Carr, Ronan Keating and a few others to join the business as The Muff Liquor Men. It wasn't all

plain sailing as just before Bonner landed these celebrities, she was in real danger of bankruptcy. The pandemic had decimated the fledgling business, but she managed to keep it going by offering direct to consumer cocktail boxes which proved to be a favorite and kept the company afloat until she secured the celebrities and their investment which allowed the company to grow to where it is today. Her pioneering work for The Muff Liquor Company has earned Bonner numerous accolades including the Business All-Star award in 2018 and selection as a key spokesperson for the "Back to Business" roundtable sessions with the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade in 2019. In the same year, she was named Most Inspiring Ulster Businesswoman of the Year, and is also a respected member of Women in Business Northern Ireland. In 2022, Bonner was shortlisted as Entrepreneur of the Year by IMAGE Magazine and PwC at their Businesswoman of the Year Awards. In 2023, she won Handcrafted Spirits Leader in Western Europe and this year Bonner was named International Entrepreneur of the Year overseas by Great Companies. Bonner's unwavering commitment to community development extends beyond her business success. With her sights set on expanding into the American market and opening a brand home experience with a shop, café, and bar, Bonner continues to drive The Muff Liquor Company forward, embodying her dedication to family tradition and innovation.



COMPANY BRIEF *The Muff Liquor Company (themuffliquorcompany.com) is an award-winning craft spirits brand from the village of Muff in County Donegal, Ireland. It has earned international acclaim for its premium craft Irish gin and vodka, collecting numerous awards. In 2023, its vodka received the prestigious Double Gold at the New York World Wine & Spirits Competition (NYWSC), as well as Gold at the Spirits Business Vodka Masters Competition 2023. The Muff Gin was awarded the coveted Master Medal at the Global Gin Masters 2023.*

Will you discuss the history of The Muff Liquor Company and how do you define its mission?

The Muff Liquor Company was founded in 2018 in Muff, County Donegal, Ireland. We specialize in crafting premium potato-based spirits and peated whiskey that celebrate the region's agricultural heritage. My Grandpa was a potato farmer who introduced me to Póitín (moonshine), which inspired me to start the company. Our mission is to produce exceptional spirits while promoting sustainability, community engagement, and cultural heritage, ensuring that our products reflect the unique character of Donegal, contribute positively to our local economy, and, most importantly, make the process enjoyable.

Will you provide an overview of The Muff Liquor Company's products?

We specialize in premium potato-based spirits, including a distinctive gin, vodka, and a unique five-part blended smoked peat whiskey. Our gin is not juniper-led; instead, it features vibrant citrus notes from botanicals such as mandarin, lemon, and elderflower, enhanced by a champagne extract for a refined finish. Both the gin and vodka are distilled six times, ensuring exceptional purity



and smoothness while being gluten-free and coeliac-friendly. Our whiskey, inspired by cherished memories of my grandfather, offers a rich, smoky flavor that sets it apart in the Irish whiskey market. All three products have received multiple awards in blind tastings globally, and we are currently developing a fourth product to further expand our innovative portfolio.

Will you highlight The Muff Liquor Company's new home in the village of Muff?

We celebrated the opening of our new visiting center in Muff in July 2024, fulfilling

a decade-long dream. This vibrant destination features a merchandise shop, guided tours that delve into the company's rich history, and engaging spirit-tasting sessions. Guests can also enjoy expertly crafted cocktails at the beautifully designed bar, all situated on the main street of Muff. This new establishment offers a unique opportunity for both locals and visitors to connect with the heritage of Donegal while indulging in the exceptional flavors that our company is known for.

How do you differentiate The Muff Liquor Company's offerings within their categories?

We differentiate by focusing on high-quality, pure ingredients – such as potatoes for our vodka and gin – resulting in unique flavor profiles that appeal to sophisticated palates. We cater to health-conscious consumers with gluten-free and coeliac-friendly options and employ innovative marketing strategies to build a compelling brand identity.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth for The Muff Liquor Company?

I see significant growth opportunities in the U.S. market through strategic brand awareness initiatives, enhanced e-commerce capabilities, and innovative product offerings that cater to diverse consumer preferences. We have forged a strong partnership with Lucas Bols, national distributors, and local businesses, and by engaging consumers through tastings and experiential marketing, we aim to build brand loyalty and visibility. Additionally, exploring emerging markets and leveraging data analytics to understand consumer behavior will enable us to make informed decisions that drive growth. With our recent launch in 31 states, we are excited to capitalize on these opportunities and make a lasting impact in the spirits industry.

What are your priorities for The Muff Liquor Company as you look to the future?

As the founder and CEO, my priorities for the future revolve around mental health, sustainability, community engagement, and growth. We will continue our commitment to the environment by planting trees for every bottle sold. Product innovation will be key, as we invest in eco-friendly solutions that meet customer needs. Supporting charities remains vital, and we will build partnerships that encourage customer involvement. Additionally, I will prioritize team development to maintain a strong company culture, explore market expansion to reach new audiences, enhance customer engagement through improved service, and ensure financial sustainability to support our initiatives. By focusing on these areas, I aim to create a successful and impactful company that positively contributes to society and the environment and, as previously mentioned, have a lot of fun while doing it. ●

