



MEDIA CONTACT

Michael Bilello
Executive Vice President, Strategic Communications & Marketing
michael@swa.org | (202) 716-4805

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

06/22/2023

WSWA Announces 2023 Access Craft Advisory Council Brand Representatives

Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America Welcomes 12 New Brand Representatives to the Access Craft Advisory Council

WASHINGTON, D.C., 06/22/2023 — Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America (WSWA) announced the craft, startup and small-production brand representatives selected for the 2023 Access Craft Advisory Council. Nine emerging brands from across the country have joined 12 returning representatives and 11 wholesaler advisors to help steer the initiative's programming and resource creation over the next year.

Since its inception in December 2020, WSWA's Access Craft initiative has provided expert guidance, resources, and best practices to help brands navigate industry challenges and identify opportunities to get to market. The 2022 Craft Advisory Council was instrumental in the production of Volume 02 of Access Craft's Distribution Playbook and new members will play a vital role in the third edition of this industry resource as well as new, exciting in-person activations for craft brands at WSWA's [Access LIVE 2024](#) in Las Vegas.

Meet the 2023 WSWA Access Craft Advisory Council Brand Representatives

- Scott Neil, [American Freedom Distillery](#)
- Chris Papariello, [Brandywine Branch Distillers](#)
- Hatton Smith, [Campesino Rum](#)
- Ricardo Aguilar, [Cantadrink](#) (new)
- Patrick Jean-Baptiste, [Crafthouse Cocktails](#)
- Mara Smith, [Inspiro Tequila](#) (new)
- George Ata and Matteo Gaetani d'Aragona, [Inversa Premium Italian Spritz](#) (new)
- Chef Robert Irvine, [Irvine's Spirits](#) (new)
- Bob Gunter, [Kōloa Rum Company](#)
- Atlas Cheek, [Lady Bird Mixer Co.](#)
- Mimi Buttenheim, [Mad River Distillers](#)
- Subir Singh, [Mico Spirits](#)
- Joe Colucci, [Munyon's Paw-Paw](#) (new)
- Alexei Khimenko, [MyStory Wine](#)
- Bill Nolan, [Ohza](#) (new)

- David Schmier, [Proof and Wood Ventures Inc.](#) (new)
- René Paz Muñozcano, [QM Spirits LLC](#)
- Darlene Fallas Buonauro, [Rocavaka Vodka](#) (new)
- Phil Brandon, [Rock Town Distillery](#)
- Matt Hemmings & Brian Thomason, [Sunshine Punch](#) (new)
- John Bilello, [Sweet Amber Distilling Co.](#)
- Sheila Donohue, [VeroVino](#) (new)

“As the founder of a growing craft spirits brand and other popular consumer products, I know firsthand the challenges and complexities of building a successful business, that’s why I’m incredibly honored to join the WSWA Access Craft Wine & Spirits program to join with other industry leaders to help provide support, guidance, and resources to strengthen all of our companies.” — **Chef Robert Irvine, Founder, Irvine’s Spirits.**

“We are thrilled to be joining this esteemed advisory council for craft beverage brands. It's a humbling experience to be surrounded by our talented peers in the industry, and we are eager to learn from and collaborate with each and every one of them. This opportunity is a testament to the incredible creativity and potential of the craft beverage industry, and we are grateful to be a part of it. Let's raise a glass to shared knowledge, innovation, and the remarkable journey ahead!” — **George Ata and Matteo Gaetani d’Aragona, Founders, Inversa Premium Italian Spritz**

"It is truly an honor to be selected as a Brand Representative for the WSWA Access Craft Advisory Council. As an independent craft brand, access to industry experts is very limited. Participating on the Council affords me the opportunity to connect with industry thought leaders with vast knowledge. I also look forward to collaborating with my fellow Brand Representatives to share insights and learnings. I hope my experience on the Council will enable me to provide guidance to other craft brands that are entering the spirits industry." — **Mara Smith, Founder and CEO, Inspiro Tequila**

“The community support, industry expertise, and member engagement of WSWA is unmatched. I’ve never experienced an organization with more meaningful impact to an emerging brand in any industry. We are extremely appreciative to be involved in both WSWA and the Craft Advisory Council.” — **Matt Hemmings, Co-Founder, Sunshine Punch.**

“Coming off of the WSWA Brand Battle win, we want to keep the momentum going and bring what we have learned to this group as well as gain insights from others involved and committed to Access Craft – it’s all about continuous growth with the right people!” – **Brian Thomason, Co-Founder, Sunshine Punch**

"We are honored and thrilled to learn from and contribute to this group of professionals and look forward to sharing the product, personalities and story of Rocavaka!" – **Darlene Fallas, Vice President, Rocavaka Vodka**

###