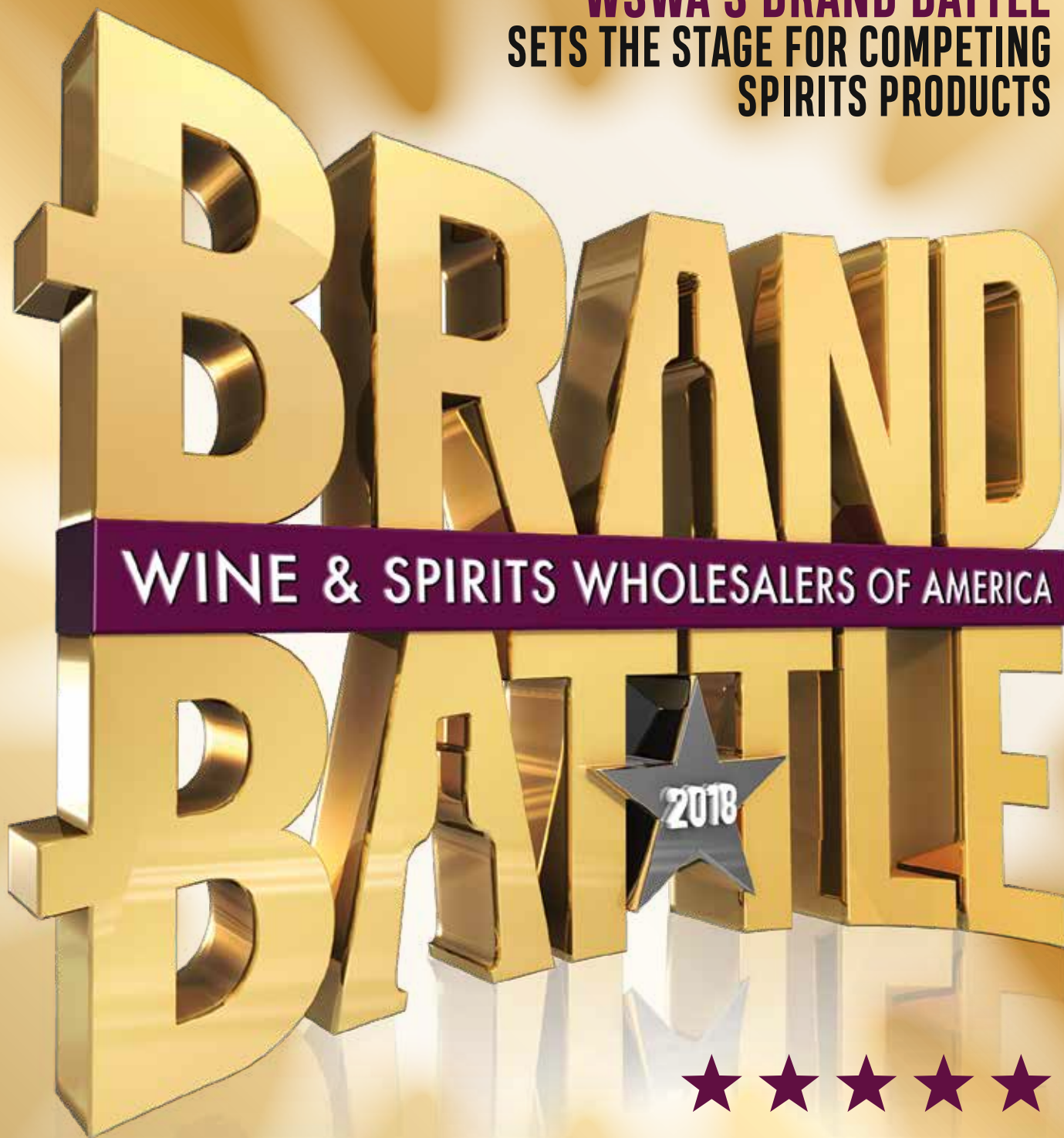


**WSWA'S BRAND BATTLE  
SETS THE STAGE FOR COMPETING  
SPIRITS PRODUCTS**





The Brand Battle judges included Charlie Merinoff, Co-Chairman, Breakthru Beverage Group; Steve Slater, Executive Vice President/General Manager–Wine Division, Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits; Meridith May, Publisher/Editorial Director for The Tasting Panel, The SOMM Journal and The Clever Root; Marc Sachs, Vice President of Supplier Business Development, Republic National Distributing Company; Bill Rancic, author and restaurateur; and Syd Ross, Co-CEO, Great Lakes Wine & Spirits.

# PITCH *Perfect*

by Bill Brandel / photos by Tony Tran



**Mixologist extraordinaire Tobin Ellis served as the host and moderator of Brand Battle at the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America 75th Annual Convention & Exposition in May. Ellis is the Owner of BarMagic, an award-winning hospitality design and consulting firm in Las Vegas.**

Not unlike the popular TV show *Shark Tank*, which introduces aspiring brands to investors and millions of viewers, the Brand Battle competition at the annual Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America (WSWA) Convention & Exposition puts wine and spirit entrepreneurs in front of some of the country's most important distributors and trade media representatives. For the industry, that's a priceless opportunity: It's a win in itself to have an in-person "meeting" with these decision makers when it comes to promoting a burgeoning brand.

In fact, the goal of the competition is to showcase how the three-tier system of distribution succeeds in introducing new products to the market. While the judges had the power to choose the top contenders, an audience of more than 200 industry influencers also chimed in with their votes. The WSWA 75th Annual Convention & Exposition this May in Las Vegas ended on a high note for the contestants, who performed a timed pitch and tasting for the judges after the screening of their "sizzle reels."

These colorful, recyclable 200-milliliter cans contain all-natural, ready-to-drink, pre-mixed cocktails and spirits in 12 flavors, including Greyhound, Vodka Soda, and Mojito. Blue Marble Ultra-Premium Cocktails co-founder/CEO Alan Miller—a veteran diagnostic and surgical innovator who has pioneered award-winning patented products—continues his entrepreneurial endeavors with the company as its Mixologist. "One of our goals, with these recyclable cans, is to keep plastic out of the ocean," Miller says.

Miller's fellow co-founder Danyelle Rabine is a businesswoman and philanthropist who heads up public and investor relations for the company. She also hails from the medical profession, with experience as an educator, technician, and recruiter.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MAZZA ILLUSTRATIONS

# BRAND BATTLE

WINE & SPIRITS WHOLESALERS OF AMERICA

2018

## BRAND BATTLE CHAMPION

# GRAY WHALE GIN

### *Takes Home The Title*



Marsh Mokhtari is the Co-Founder and Master Distiller of Gray Whale Gin.

Every year, the California gray whale makes a 12,000-mile migration from the warm lagoons of the Baja Peninsula to the cold waters of the Arctic. This small-batch gin, made in California with locally sourced botanicals, celebrates this incredible mammal's journey.

A member of 1% For the Planet, which requires companies to donate at least 1 percent of their sales to environmental causes, Gray Whale Gin also supports the international organization Oceana in their efforts to protect the world's oceans and the gray whale's natural habitats.

Gray Whale Gin Co-Founder Marsh Mokhtari hosts Food Network's *Extreme Chef* and also holds a degree in medical physics. As the Master Distiller at Golden State Distillery, Gray Whale's parent company, he's created a highly memorable spirit that wowed the judges and the audience—resulting in an overwhelming number of votes.

Marsh explained that tasting Gray Whale is akin to traveling along the Pacific coastline, as its ingredients are sourced along the West Coast: from citrus to fresh mint, the umami flavors of kombu sea kelp, and a finish of California almonds.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GRAY WHALE GIN

Almonds are among the ingredients sourced along the California coast for Gray Whale Gin.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GRAY WHALE

Gray Whale, a handcrafted gin, came in first place at the WSWA Brand Battle competition.

## SECOND PLACE: KOHLER DARK CHOCOLATE

In 2016, Herb Kohler, Executive Chairman of Kohler Co. (the same company behind an expansive line of high-quality fixtures and decorative kitchen and bath products) combined his love for brandy with his branded Original Recipe Chocolates. Aged two years, the brandy is produced in California and naturally infused with Kohler's dark chocolate. A second product, Kohler Mint Brandy, has also been launched.



In addition to KOHLER'S Dark Chocolate Brandy, the judges also sipped on KOHLER Chocolate Mint Brandy.



Gerald Allison, Business Manager for KOHLER Original Recipe Chocolate Brandy, presented the product to the judges.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KOHLER

## RUNNER-UP: ROSÉ PISCINE

With a pool-safe bottle that doesn't require pre-chilling, Rosé Piscine checks off all the boxes as a rosé built for drinking outdoors. The semi-sweet wine is meant to be sipped on the rocks: a traditional style enjoyed throughout Western Europe.

Rosé Piscine is made with an indigenous varietal from southwest France: Négrette, a small, dark, and tough-skinned grape known for its powerful aromatic qualities. The fruit is sourced in Côtes du Frontonnais, which is located just southwest of Gaillac and north of the city of Toulouse on the western bank of the Tarn river.



Blake Helpie serves as Managing Director for Rosé Piscine.

# THE OTHER WORTHY COMPETITORS

## UNICORN TEARS GIN LIQUEUR



After launching Unicorn Tears Gin Liqueur in London in January 2017, Kristian Bromley hopes to bring the brand stateside thanks to the contacts he made at Brand Battle. “We use a free-range unicorn herd and a closely guarded extraction process,” Bromley noted cheekily of Unicorn Tears’ production. “Real unicorn tears provide the iridescent sparkle and glittery finish to this 80-proof spirit.”

**Kristian Bromley is CEO/Managing Director for Firebox, the parent company of Unicorn Tears Gin Liqueur.**



**Unicorn Tears Gin liqueur, launched in the U.K. in January 2017, is part of the “Mythical Spirits” range created by the London-based company Firebox.**



**Religion Tequila, New Zealand’s first tequila company, recently made its U.S. debut.**

## RELIGION TEQUILA

Originally founded as New Zealand’s first tequila company (its parent company is Dirty Liquor, LLC), Religion has arrived in the U.S. as it seeks to become a premiere organic brand. Founder Aidan Uttinger is a self-described “tequila prophet” and entrepreneur who says he sees a gap in the industry for genuine, authentic brands with compelling stories. After tasting the spirit, the judges all claimed they were believers.



**Aidan Uttinger is the founder of Religion Tequila.**

# BLUE MARBLE ULTRA-PREMIUM COCKTAILS



Blue Marble Ultra-Premium Cocktails CEO Alan Miller with fellow co-founder Danyelle Rabine.

These colorful, recyclable 200-milliliter cans contain all-natural, ready-to-drink, pre-mixed cocktails and spirits in 12 flavors, including Greyhound, Vodka Soda, and Mojito. Blue Marble Ultra-Premium Cocktails co-founder/CEO Alan Miller—a veteran diagnostic and surgical innovator who has pioneered award-winning patented products—continues his entrepreneurial endeavors with the company as its Mixologist. “One of our goals, with these recyclable cans, is to keep plastic out of the ocean,” Miller says. Miller’s fellow co-founder Danyelle Rabine is a businesswoman and philanthropist who heads up public and investor relations for the company. She also hails from the medical profession, with experience as an educator, technician, and recruiter.



The Blue Marble Ultra-Premium Cocktails line comes in 12 flavors, including Greyhound, Vodka Soda, and Mojito.



PHOTO COURTESY OF EARTH DELICACIES

## GINJA9

A Portuguese sour cherry liqueur with no added colors or preservatives, Ginja9 features a recipe dating back to the Portuguese monks of the 17th century, when sour cherries were infused in alcohol distilled from rice and cereal. Ginja9 is traditionally served in a dark chocolate “cup,” a particularly gratifying way to consume this silky-smooth liquid.

Alexander Dias, the founder of Ginja9’s Los-Angeles-based parent company Earth Delicacies, imports unique products from around the world. “I love sharing a piece of my beloved Portugal with the rest of the world,” Dias told the Brand Battle judges. “Ginja9 is one of the country’s best delicacies.” ■■

Ginja9, a Portuguese sour cherry liqueur, is typically served in dark chocolate “cups.”

missing

Alexander Dias is the founder and CEO of Ginja9’s parent company, Earth Delicacies.