



Tim Cooper Episode Transcript

Intro music plays.

Rashaun: Welcome to Shot Caller, a premium podcast, two parts booze, one part pop culture. Every other week, we'll be bringing a spirited conversation with bartenders, artists, influencers, and anyone else who loves a good cocktail.

I'm your host, Rashaun Hall, pop-culture expert and a cocktail connoisseur thanks to growing up in a New Jersey dive bar.

Lucinda: And I'm Lucinda Sterling. I'm a bartender and managing partner of Middle Branch in NYC. I'll be mixing it up with our guests and creating original cocktails for our Shot Caller fam. Stay tuned until the end of the episode for a one-of-a-kind recipe inspired by our guests. Cheers!

Rashaun & Lucinda: Cheers!

Rashaun: Hey Lucinda, so I've always been curious. What does the term "86" mean? I know it's a restaurant industry term.

Lucinda: Yeah, the contemporary meaning is when you run out of something, you have to 86 it. You have to remove it from the menu.

Rashaun: Any historical references to that you might be aware of? It has to come from somewhere, and I know you know all things historical.

Lucinda: I think there are quite a few.

Rashaun: To the Google!

Lucinda: On stlmag.com, blogger named George Mahe, M-A-H-E, who has compiled a list of 86'd stories.

Rashaun: Not 86 stories, but stories about the term 86'd, right?

Lucinda: The term 86'd, and its origin.

Rashaun: Okay.

Lucinda: One of the stories was a soup-pot reference. Where soup kitchens of the Great Depression only held 85 cups of soup, so the 86th person was out of luck.

Rashaun: I like the one where George talks about the exit being eight feet and six inches, so that being the standard height of a door back then. So, when someone was thrown out of the bar, they were 86'd.

Lucinda: There's another one about the military shorthand. Rotary phones had "t" on the eight, and an "o" on the six, so to 'throw out' something was to 86 it.

Rashaun: I think my favorite though is the 86 plane, World War II.

Lucinda: F86?

Rashaun: F86, there you go. How when people got shot down, other enemy planes got shot down, they were 86'd. Very "Die Hard."

Lucinda: Something that's relevant for Middle Branch, there's a code, code 86 in New York, that made it a crime for bartenders to serve drunken patrons. Bartenders would tell such patrons, sorry, they've been 86'd.

Rashaun: So, if something has been 86'd, and someone wants it, how do you handle that, as a bar manager?

Lucinda: Well, a respectable place would offer something in kind. Something that is comparable to that original item. So, for instance, if we don't have Beefeater, we'll sell them Ford's Gin.

Rashaun: And funny you bring up Ford's Gin because today we're going to talk to Tim Cooper from The 86 Company, which represents and sells Ford's Gin. Welcome to Shot Caller, Tim Cooper.

Tim: Thank you, Rashaun. Thank you. I'm so excited to be here.

Rashaun: Pleasure to have you. Pleasure to have you. I know Lucinda and I have a ton of questions for you about The 86 Company, about your background, and all things gin related. So, let's jump into it.

Lucinda: Why The 86 Company? Why 86?

Tim: Well, I mean listen, you know, we had to 86 the bullshit. That's first and foremost. We're a group of longtime New York City bartenders and we were tired of the fluff, tired of the bad marketing, tired of the lies, and we said, "You know what? We're going to get rid of all of that." So, as all my bar friends know, in the industry when you're out of something, you 86 it. So, quite simply, that's how the name came to be. We were just like, "No more of the bullshit." We're going to be an honest, straightforward company that can look people in the eye and stand behind what we're creating.

Lucinda: Where have you been a bartender here?

Tim: Where have I been a bartender? Wow. This goes back. This goes back. I actually have a list here, as you can see, of all the--

Rashaun: We appreciate that. Appreciate the preparation.

Tim: Yeah, and see that? You know?

Lucinda: His resume is sitting right here in front of me.

Tim: Literally. So, I started bartending back in the late 90's . I believe it was 1997 or 1998. And I worked at a place called the Soho Grand Hotel. At the time, the Soho Grand was a very hot New York City spot, downtown Manhattan.

Rashaun: Hell of a place to start.

Tim: Yeah. I was working as a room service person and a server, and I would go in and pick my drinks up at night, and I would see how busy this bar was, and see all these beautiful people. And, I'm looking at these bartenders and I'm like, "Holy shit, they have to be making so much money." So, I basically, pestered the hell out of the bar manager, and was like, "Listen, I need to do what these guys are doing. You have to train me. I need to get behind the bar."

Tim: And I basically harassed her day in and day out, and of course, back in those days, there was no training behind the bar. It was pretty much, you get thrown behind the bar and you either sink or swim, and you figure things out as you go. I thought if I could impress these guys and really do a good job setting up, they would eventually take me under their wing.

Lucinda: So, you were the barback?

Tim: I was the barback, yeah.

Lucinda: This is before the cocktail revolution was started by people like Angel's Share and Milk & Honey?

Tim: Correct, correct. This is back before we had big beards and mustaches. Lots of bar tools tattooed on our arms, and lots of sour mix off of a soda gun.

Rashaun: Okay.

Tim: So, I mean there's only a few places that were probably doing fresh ingredient cocktails at that time. It was mostly in hotel bars.

Lucinda: What were you making?

Tim: Oh, I was making just horrible drinks. I was making things called the Tartini, which, what was the recipe for the Tartini? It was Stoli Raspberry, Chambord, cranberry juice, and sour mix off a gun.

Rashaun: Ooof.

Tim: Delicious.

Rashaun: Yeah.

Lucinda: All of these things sound really good to me.

Tim: Just a sweet tooth.

Rashaun: So, when did you realize that bartending was going to be a career, beyond just, obviously you say you wanted to get behind the bar because you saw the excitement of that bar. When did it become more than that for you?

Tim: Honestly, it was a straight money grab at that time. I was just a young kid who was like 21, 22 years old, and the environment was really electric, so it was really appealing to this young man living in New York City. I can honestly say, probably for the first three years bartending, I didn't really know what I was doing. I didn't really know how to make proper classic cocktails. It was all just slop. I was just trying to bartend as fast as I could and put as much money into the register as I could. Because that was the thing back then. It wasn't necessarily about the quality of what you were giving, it was about the speed at which you give it.

Rashaun: When did you make that turn to really caring about the cocktail that you were making?

Tim: This may sound really funny now, considering where we're at in this cocktail movement, but I remember going to a place called Café Noir, which was right behind the Soho Grand Hotel, and there were bartenders there who were making caipirinhas and mojitos.

Lucinda: Oh, cool.

Tim: And you know, this is the late 90's , so there were only a couple of places in the city that were doing that. So, once I got my first taste of a fresh ingredient cocktail, I was hooked on it. I was like, "Okay, I need to figure out how to do this." So, I started talking with the chef, and getting fresh ingredients, and I started to take things a little bit more serious as far as what I was putting out.

I would say probably around 2002 I was working at a bar called Odea, which is on Broome Street, and I was doing this fresh-ingredient cocktail program. I was also working in nightclubs, so I was working at a place called Chaos. I was working at a place called Lobby, and these were, you know, straight turn-and-burn, pretty people, lots of young kids, you know, there may have been body shots involved. There might have been lots of flavored vodka. That was back in the day when we had every fruit in the world lined up as vodka. We had Absolut ten flavors, Stolichnoff with their ten flavors, like who can outdo who? At that time, also, that's when bottle service was really popping off.

Lucinda: Oh, yeah.

Tim: So, I think it's really important to talk about that because it had such an influence on the bar industry. I mean, in some respects, it's still going on today in many nightclubs. But, I think from the year 2000 to 2010, New York City was all about bottle service. It was insane. Basically, when I first started going out and I was a young bartender in the late 90's, early 2000s, you'd show up to a nightclub, and it was about the door person would take a look at you and was like, "Does this person have soul? Do they have a vibe?" And you'd get into these places, and there was like a really mixed crowd of people. You had your rich people, your poor people, your artists. You had this beautiful synopsis of New York City. You had people from all walks. And, it was interesting, because at that time, you had these rich nerdy stockbrokers and investment bankers who'd show up, and they're like, "Yeah, we want to get in." And the door people would be like, "Fuck you. You're a douchebag. You're not coming in."

Lucinda: Shot down.

Tim: Shot down. So, what started happening is these guys literally started buying their way in. They would push the door person, they're like, "All right, well I want to get in, and money's not an object. What do I need to do to get in?" And so they're like, "All right, well you're going to buy three bottles of Dom Perignon." And they're like, "Pff. Fine." So, people figured out that you could just charge these people a tremendous amount of money to sit in the back corner with a few bottles of champagne. You know, the whole game changed and then the bottle service exploded.

Tim: And of course that lead to excessive drinking and really bad behavior.

Rashaun: Did it make bartending easier, harder? Did it impact what you all were doing behind the bar at that time, in any definitive way?

Tim: For me, I probably lost out on some money because of it. Because you started seeing the cocktail servers make the real good money. I think it was very oppressive in many senses for a lot of the cocktail servers, because they started to become very sexualized--

Lucinda: Objectified.

Tim: Yeah, objectified. You started to see a lot of these women basically wearing anything, and they started to get regular clients, which is just kind of--

Lucinda: Questionable.

Tim: Yeah, questionable and creepy. You know, you have these guys come in and spend \$2,000, \$3,000, and they feel like they're owed something.

Lucinda: Yeah, what's a little spank on the ass? You earned it, right?

Tim: Yeah, absolutely. So it creates this hyper sexualized environment that, in many respects, can be downright abusive.

Lucinda: So, you made a moral turn to better service?

Tim: Yeah, I guess as far as going the cocktail route. I did, I guess, make a moral turn. Right after I was leaving a place called Lobby, which is over on 38th Street in the garment district, I went in and interviewed at a place called Bed. And Bed was a very special place. That was where things really took a serious turn, as far as being in the industry. And Bed was this massive, two floor, sprawling place over on 27th Street, between 10th and 11th Avenue. At the time, all these nightclubs basically went as far as they could to the West side because no one was living over there. And the community boards basically shut down every place that was even remotely close to where people were living. So, all the places in the West Village, in the East Village, they basically just got booted out.

So, you had this intense area of nightclubs, where it's Bed, Spirit, Home, Guesthouse, Bungalow 8, Marquee, Crobar, I mean it was literally referred to as the bottle service block. Bed was the one place that was putting out a really good product. So, we actually had a

massive fresh ingredient cocktail program. Over 40 cocktails on the menu, over 400 spirits on the back bar.

Rashaun: Wow.

Tim: It's so funny, I always remember the time we had like nine different piscos, and like 25 different rye whiskeys. And while the rye whiskey thing might not be that big of a deal now, back then--

Rashaun: That's a lot.

Tim: Yeah, no one was really drinking rye. It was still all about bourbon. So, it was just a really special place. And I remember going there and trying to learn the cocktail menu and just being completely overwhelmed because we had 30 different syrups, all these different spirits behind the bar, but I basically put my head down and just busted my ass and accepted that I was going to learn new things.

Lucinda: Did you end up having the same issues with the objectification of women when you working at Bed? Because the name kind of connotes--

Tim: Sure. Of course. And we literally had beds. I mean, we were serving people bottles of champagne, bottles of vodka--

Rashaun: And they were laying in bed.

Tim: And they were laying in bed. So, of course, you know, things happened. But, you know, it was interesting, out of all the nightclubs I've worked at, I feel like the women at Bed were probably the least objectified. Number one, they weren't scantily clad, they had pants on, they weren't wearing skirts or anything like that. It was very interesting because the majority of the time, the people who came to Bed would usually come with a significant other or they would come with friends. And it's one of those things when you're laying on a bed, you're not necessarily looking to engage with the waitress, you're looking to engage with whoever you've come with.

Lucinda: Which is cool.

Tim: Yeah, so it was interesting in that respect.

Rashaun: And what was the inspiration for such a great cocktail program at a nightclub that was on the bottle service block?

Tim: I think it was just about creating a well rounded experience. The guy whose brainchild it was, is a guy named Dirk van Stockum, and Dirk was ahead of his time as far as creating experiences. And he wanted to touch on every single angle of the nightlife experience. You have the opportunity to dance, you have the opportunity to lay on the bed, he wants to serve the best spirits, the best cocktails, and really it's as simple as that. Giving people an amazing experience.

Musical intro

Lucinda: So, you're ready to make one of Shot Callers signature cocktails. But you don't have all of your ingredients. Hmm.

Rashaun: That reminds me. I need a bourbon. Can I get a bottle from you?

Lucinda: No, I can't lend you one. I don't have any to spare, but you can get your own from our friends at Saucey. They'll deliver whatever spirits, beer, wine, or mixers you need, directly to your door.

Rashaun: Well that's a relief. You can go to saucey.com, that's s-a-u-c-e-y, or download the Saucey app today in the App Store or Google Play.

Lucinda: Remember to use our special code "shotcaller" all one word.

Rashaun & Lucinda: Cheers!

Music fades

Lucinda: I'd like to talk about Ford's. Why the significance of Ford's Gin?

Tim: Because it's the best gin ever.

Lucinda: That's--

Rashaun: There you go. Enough said. That's my guy.

Tim: So, going back to the name of our company, The 86 Company. We're all longtime industry bartenders and we set out to create a jack-of-all-trades gin. Essentially, the way we created the formula for Ford's is there is nine different botanicals and we took 25 classic gin cocktails, really broke the gin cocktails down, pulled out the main ingredient that really stands out, so as an example if you're talking about a Last Word, the chartreuse is what jumps out. If you're talking about a Negroni, campari really stands out.

What we did is we chose the botanical profile so that they really reflect and pair well with these ingredients that really stand out in all these classic cocktails. It's actually a really interesting background on it that a lot of people don't know, besides just the fact that it's signed and collaborated on it with Charles Maxwell, who's an eighth generation gin distiller. Sasha Petraske actually had a lot to do with Ford's Gin as well, and he worked with Simon, at the beginning stages of it.

Lucinda: That's great. Would you compare it to Beefeater or Plymouth, or any other gin that's out there on the market right now?

Tim: Really good question. I would say, and hopefully Simon doesn't kill me for saying this, but it's probably most similar to Plymouth. Although I think it's got a little more firepower to it. Whereas Plymouth is 41-point-something percent alcohol, Ford's is 45 percent. So, it has a little more body. I think it might have a little bit of a richer oil content, but I do think there's some similarities there. And Simon worked with Plymouth for many years.

Rashaun: So, was Ford's Gin the first spirit in The 86 Company line?

Tim: Ford's was actually the last to arrive.

Lucinda: So, no bourbon? No whiskey?

Tim: Yeah, no, we tried. We tried.

Lucinda: Oh, okay.

Tim: The bartending community asked us for a rye whiskey, one that would be inexpensive, wouldn't run out of stock, would be great for Manhattans and Old Fashioneds. And, we essentially failed, so we decided to come out with a vodka instead.

Lucinda: Oh, okay.

Tim: Because, you know, the bar community really needed that.

Lucinda: Yes.

Rashaun: I mean, what is one more vodka?

Lucinda: Still. What's one more?

Rashaun: And is the current line, the line? So, no plans to get into a pisco, or something else?

Tim: We have some tricks up our sleeve.

Rashaun: Okay.

Tim: They'll be some interesting things coming about this year and next year. One that I actually can talk about is we're launching a navy-gin. So, that will be coming out pretty soon. So, for all of my friends out there who like to make Gimlets or tiki style cocktails with gin, we got your back.

Rashaun: And explain to our audience what a navy-strength gin is.

Tim: It's essentially a gin that will light on fire, and the whole premise being, the British Navy used to get their rations in alcohol. And, so if you're going into battle and you're manning a cannon, and you have gunpowder, it needs to be able to light. There's waves and things like that, that rock a boat, and you know, if those treacherous French vessels are upon you, and you need to fire a cannon at them, you need to make sure that shit lights.

Lucinda: That's a true story?

Rashaun: There you go.

Tim: Apparently so.

Musical intro

Rashaun: Hey, are you listening to us on your commute, at the office, or at the gym?

Lucinda: Wherever you are, all this talk about cocktails probably has you thinking about having one.

Rashaun: Well, we've got you covered. Thanks to our friends at Hooch, the app that gets you access to hundreds of bars and lets you have a drink on them everyday.

Lucinda: And all of that for less than \$10 a month.

Rashaun: That's right. Download Hooch today in the App Store or Google Play.

Lucinda: Use our special code, "shotcaller", all one word.

Rashaun & Lucinda: Cheers.

Music fades

Lucinda: Speaking of bottles, The 86 Company has a very unique presentation for their contents. Comes in a nice ergonomic bottle.

Tim: It's an ergonomically friendly bottle that works great for bartenders. We basically set out to make a bottle that bartenders want to grab. We got the bright idea to basically put a measuring grid on the back of the bottle, so you can actually see how many ounces of product is in the bottle. It also works really well if you're batching out a cocktail and you want to see where to pour on the bottle, that's a great feature. We also made our label so that they peel off. So you don't have to take a scouring pad and you know, scrub the hell out of the bottle and create a mess.

Lucinda: 86 Company, working towards sustainability, folks.

Tim: It's actually one of the things that we're most proud of, is that we love walking into the bars and seeing people using our bottles for water or for juice or syrups. But, the other great aspect of the bottle is, we basically, indented the bottle in some key aspects, so that bartenders have a happy time gripping the bottle. So, we have a long neck, which pretty much every bartender likes. So, if it happens to be on the rail you can pull it out really easily. We indented the middle of the bottle for my Middle Branch, Little Branch, Attaboy friends, who don't use pour spouts and who actually can get good grip in the middle of the bottle. Then we fortified the bottom of the bottle, so if you do happen to drop it, it's not as likely to break.

Lucinda: I think more companies should follow that lead. You know, making it well friendly. Because that way, we use it all the time. It's more and more present in bars. Are they doing anything unique with gin and food pairing or the like?

Tim: Yeah, it's a really interesting lead in, you asking me that question, because we're actually doing a program called Beats and Botanicals right now. We're creating an experience with restaurants, DJs, and Ford's Gin, where we're pairing with top-of-the-line chefs in different cities, along with Dan the Automater. So, we're working with Dan, and we're going into restaurants and we're creating a night revolving around music that Dan has paired with food that the chef is putting out, and then us creating gin cocktails to match it all. This program is called Beats and Botanicals. We've already done it in San Francisco, we're doing it in New York.

Lucinda: If you're drinking gin at home, what would you cook up?

Tim: I'll tell you, for me, you know, the natural pairing is martinis and oysters.

Lucinda: Oh, yes!

Rashaun: There you go.

Tim: You know, ice-cold gin martini with a lemon twist, and oysters with a little mignonette. Game over.

Lucinda: That sounds perfect.

Rashaun: And you said, ice-cold martinis. I know you guys were talking earlier, before we started recording, about this hot gin trend, or this warm gin trend--

Lucinda: Warm gin.

Rashaun: Please fill me in. I have not heard of this, and am a little apprehensive, but I want to know more about this warm gin.

Lucinda: It's warm gin, room temperature versus being chilled in say, a shaker or in a stirring glass. But I liken it to a candle because it has those botanicals, and it smells very nice, right? Lemon, things like that. So, you don't have to warm up your gin. You get a lot more of those elements when you don't shake it.

Rashaun: So, at its natural room temperature, it has that? You're losing the fragrancy by chilling it?

Lucinda: I think a little bit.

Tim: Yeah, well listen. Anytime you shake a cocktail, you're inevitably adding water dilution, so you're de-intensifying it so to speak.

Rashaun: So, you're actually seeing people do shots of room temperature gin?

Lucinda: Well, the bartenders that we know have been doing shots of everything, finally got to Fernet. Now after everybody's drunk on the Fernet in the whole world, you need something that's going to stimulate your palette, and that's gin. So, warm gin and tonics. You know, gin definitely has to have juniper, but the tonic doesn't necessarily have to have ginseng in it, which is that bark. So, you can make up a tonic out of anything. So, if you warm it up, it kind of makes sense that it's something soothing.

Tim: I was literally sipping on a gin toddy last week, interestingly enough. Saxon and Parole is actually doing a warm Ford's Gin toddy. It's actually called the Three Minute Hot Toddy, and it's really cool what they're doing. They're taking a tea bag, filling it with botanicals and hibiscus, and a few other secret ingredients, and they're putting the teabag in the warm gin and hot water, and hence, the Three Minute Toddy. This is actually my first gin toddy, I have to say.

Lucinda: And that's Saxon and Parole for you, folks. Like they're taking it to another level. That's what we need to know. It's good to hear that gin is becoming a part of the food culture. And I appreciate you talking about your little segue from club bartending to being an outstanding spirits mogul.

Rashaun: So, Tim, where can people find you if they want to know more about Tim Cooper? They want to know more about The 86 Company?

Tim: So, I'm on all the typical social media, the Instagrizzle, the Bookfaces, all those things. But you can generally find me at bars all throughout New York City. I'm like an antique sitting in the corner of the bar.

Lucinda: Wherever they carry Ford's Gin.

Rashaun: Well, Tim, thank you so much for being on the show. We really appreciate it.

Tim: Thank you, guys. It's been an amazing pleasure hanging out with you guys on this wonderful Tuesday afternoon.

COCKTAIL RECIPE

Lucinda: So, to make the Cooper Union, you start out with one and a half ounces of Ford's Gin. Ford's Gin is a higher proof than a lot of other gins, so you need that high proof element to balance out the sweetness from the Bonal and the Benedictine. That's also why we're calling for an ounce and a half. And then, half an ounce of the Bonal, which is an aperitif gentiane liqueur. It has some sweet and bitter notes. It's kind of musty. And then the final component is Benedictine. And Benedictine is a honey like herbal spiced liquor. Secret ingredient, also made by monks. Then, we'll put this one on ice. Give it a little stir to add some dilution. This one is built in the glass, similar to the Negroni. Benedictine is one of Tim Cooper's favorite ingredients. And the final component to bring together all of the ingredients is a grapefruit twist. Grapefruits being somewhat bitter on their own. The grapefruit twist is going to help bring out some of those botanicals that are locked into the gin, and the gentiane, and the benedictine. Cheers!

Rashaun: Last call, everybody.

Lucinda: I'm Lucinda Sterling.

Rashaun: And I'm Rashaun Hall, and in the immortal words of Kanye West, "Here's a toast to the assholes."

Lucinda: Thanks for listening! Our theme song is "You Know You Want To" by Dan Phillipson. The podcast is produced and distributed by Lantigua Williams & Co.

Rashaun: Big thanks to Middle Branch New York City for letting us hang out today. Our audio producer is Molly Nugent. Follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram at Shot Caller Pod, and use the hashtag shotcallerpod to let us know what you want to hear coming up, what's shaking, what's stirred, what's twisted, anything and everything. We want to hear about it. And make sure you subscribe, rate, and review us on iTunes or Google Play.

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