



# Bridget Firtle Episode Transcript

## *Intro music plays.*

Rashaun: Shot Caller is for mature audiences only. 21 and over. Please drink responsibly.

Welcome to Shot Caller, a premium podcast, with two parts booze, one part pop culture. Every week we'll be bringing you 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 cocktail connoisseur. Thanks to growing up in a dive bar in Jersey.

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 to the end of the episode for a one-of-a-kind recipe inspired by our guest.

R&L: Cheers!

## *Musical interlude*

Lucinda: We've got Bridget Firtle here from The Noble Experiment, and more importantly, Owney's Rum. Welcome to Middle Branch!

Bridget: Thanks for having me, this is awesome! Happy to be here.

Lucinda: You know what else is awesome? Drinking a Daiquiri before 5 o'clock. Made with the new Owney's Rum blended version.

Bridget: Yeah, before 5 o'clock on a Monday too.

Lucinda: Mondays are bartenders' Friday, I guess right? Or Saturday.

Bridget: It's looking really delicious on this 85 degree day too.

Lucinda: Well, cheers first of all! Um, let's take a sip of this. Well, that goes down nice and easy.

Bridget: Perfect.

Lucinda: And the recipe for this particular Daiquiri was two ounces of Owney's Blended Rum, one ounce of fresh lime juice and three quarters of an ounce of simple syrup. We shook that with ice and then we poured it out and we're serving it up. Um, you can ask for it on the rocks. That's fine. But then it's not a Snackari. A Snackari is basically a shot version of the same drink. Yeah. Alright. Cool. Well, I think Rashaun would've liked to ask you to tell us a lot about your background, where you're from and what's your story?

Bridget: Cool. Yeah. So when I tell people, oh, I make rum in Brooklyn, and that's one of the first things. They're like, wait, how did, like, where does that come from? How do you get there? And I'm, I'm a native New Yorker. I was born in Brooklyn Hospital, spent most of my life in Queens in Rockaway Beach. My grandfather owned a bar, so I kinda had been on the outskirts of the business for a while. But, my academic background led me to business school. I studied finance and then I went and worked for a hedge fund after my MBA and happened to be placed on the consumer staples team there at the hedge fund.

And I kind of learned about the industry from the outside looking in and had followed craft beer, was really excited about the fits and starts that had happened there and kind of led me to think about craft spirits. And I basically started becoming a little bit jealous honestly, of all these people who had left their careers to open distilleries around the country. And at the time there were only, you know, several dozen distilleries and they were making awesome gins and whiskeys and liqueurs and embracing history and the branding of their products and American distilling. And I kind of was like, wait, rum was America's first spirit. It's my favorite spirit. It was first distilled in my hometown of New York and there's a lack of American rum production. So I had this vision, dream, to bring rum distilling back to New York. It was first distilled on present-day Staten Island in the 1660s. We're the only exclusive rum distillery in New York today in over 90 years, so...

Lucinda: Wait. Okay, let's dial this back. First of all, um, I think you said a lot of big titles there for you personally, having come along the way. Then it takes a lot of money to open up a distillery.

Bridget: Right.

Lucinda: Yeah. You have to have so much, um, as far as just, like, research and development before you even open the distillery, right?

Bridget: Yeah. You know, it's, it takes more money to build the brand, honestly. That I learned that I did not know when I was getting into it. Of course there was the build out of the distillery and the construction of the equipment. The stills are very expensive, so I used all the savings that I had. I moved home with my parents in Queens. I lived there for the first four years of, you know, running the distillery. I got some friends to give me some money, which was pretty cool.

Lucinda: That's nice.

Bridget: Yeah, you know, they believed in my ability and they believed in the idea. I guess there's probably a cool factor to be involved with it as well. But I totally, one of my learning

experiences, like, I totally underestimated the marketing and sales dollars and everything and time that it takes. Months are going by and it takes time to build a brand. So, you know, it's one thing just to get the distillery open. It's another to survive.

Lucinda: So you mentioned an interesting factoid though. Rum is the first spirit in America?

Bridget: Yeah, yeah.

Lucinda: Wow, I didn't know that! I thought it was AppleJack.

Bridget: Yeah. So we, um, the Northeast colonies actually made a ton of rum from molasses that was being brought up by the British Navy from their Caribbean colonies because it's a byproduct of sugar refining, they were refining a ton of sugar there. Whatever was getting discarded from the sugar refining process they were bringing here, it was getting turned into rum and a bunch of distilleries in New York and Massachusetts and it became a big part of colonial life. And actually one of the causes of the American Revolution ultimately, because of the molasses tax, The Sugar Act of 1764 put a tax on molasses, made rum distilling unprofitable. A lot of historians say the Boston Tea Party was really about molasses and not tea because molasses was too valuable to dump into the bay. So they used tea as a symbol of molasses.

Lucinda: Interesting.

Bridget: And then, you know, after the revolution, the British Navy was no longer supplying molasses to the colonies and the colonists started moving west and growing grains and distilling whiskey from the grains that they were growing. So that's how, you know, whiskey became known as American spirit, but it was really rum first.

***Music plays.***

**Nipyata Ad**

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 let you have a drink on them every day.

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: And use our special code "ShotCaller" -- All one word.  
R&L: Cheers.

***Music fades.***

Lucinda: Can I ask you a little bit about your namesake? I don't think we know about that yet.

Bridget: Yeah. So again, going back to okay, like I'm gonna bring rum distilling back. I'm going to make a really unique white rum high ester content, flavorful, all this good stuff. Okay. Like now what am I going to call it? So the house I grew up in in Queens houses a speakeasy that was active during Prohibition actually.

Lucinda: That's pretty cool.

Bridget: The house was built in 1911 and like side trapdoor, the whole nine yards. And I, my family actually didn't know that it was a speakeasy until I was about 10 years old and one of the older women on the block was like, Oh yeah, like I'm talking. She was probably nine years old at the time. She was like, oh yeah, that was like a speakeasy during prohibition. It was just like the cool old basement bar until we figured that out. So I was thinking about that. I was thinking about Prohibition as a time where we drank a ton of rum in New York and the Eastern seaboard. We smuggled a lot in from the Caribbean. So thinking about that, I start reading about the time period. I start learning about rum running, which is basically the act of smuggling rum in from the Caribbean. And I come across this man named Owen Madden, who's nickname was Owney. And he sort of resonated with me. He was, um, an Irish immigrant. Was a hustler from day one, trying to get his family out of poverty. He was a Westie, a leader of the gopher gang, got nicknamed "The Killer," actually at quite a young age, very rambunctious, worked his way up to the leader, basically the top ranks. Um, and long story short, he got shot 13 times and lived.

Lucinda: Wow!

Bridget: And about five days later, 10 members of the rival gang went missing, missing quote unquote.

Lucinda: In The Bronx...

Bridget: Um, and it was the first time he was convicted. I think he was arrested like 60 something times. And this was the first time he got convicted and it was in the nineteen, I want to say like 1915 and 1916 and he went to jail and he did like seven or eight years in jail. And during that time he calmed down, became less rambunctious, more calculating, more visionary from a business standpoint. And he gets out and it's Prohibition. He was like, wow, there's a tremendous amount of opportunity to make money here. So he buys the Cotton Club, he starts operating speakeasies...

Lucinda: That's so cool.

Bridget: And the thing that resonated most with me is that he was a rum runner and he had a, um, an estate in my hometown, which is Rockaway Beach in Queens. And it's, for those that don't know, it's the southernmost point of New York City and it's like this little peninsula where the ocean is on one side and the bay is on the other. And so it's perfect for doing discreet deliveries of rum during the time. So he was a huge pusher of rum to

the Cotton Club and all of his friends' speakeasies. And I'm like, this guy's a badass entrepreneur that made money and pushed rum. Like duh, let's, we're going with this.

Lucinda: So that's cool. Well, the label definitely matches the bottle. It's nice and masculine. I like, you know, and it does fit in the well. And that's one of the most important things, you know, being a female bartender, I can't just grab any style bottle.

Bridget: No.

Lucinda: And so that also lends itself to being available in the well.

Bridget: Yes.

Lucinda: So it's a little square on the bottom and then the new bottle though, which is really cool because I think it is more like one of those prescription bottles that you would have found during Prohibition.

Bridget: Yeah. So the new blend, a lot of the liquid is inspired from old school. So this is like the original is sort of my take on some crazy rum geek funky rum that I loved and wanted to create. But this rum, I also love, but a lot of the inspiration was historical and how I think Owney's Rum might have tasted. So, when we were developing the bottle for, for this new product, I was looking at old school bottles as well and a lot of them were purple. And I think it, well not I think, I did some research [*laughs*] And uh, there was a chemical in the glass during the time that if you left the glass outside, it turned purple in the sun. So that's why a lot of vintage bottles were purple. And so we're like, alright, let's go with purple. I don't know of any other purple bottles and I want to be bold and different and unique. And so it's a dark purple color. We've got some new embossing on the side, my signature and then I'm on the bottom, Original New York City Rum. So we got a little bit of a different label design too. We have Owney's face on the bottle and as well as some hand drawn, all of the drawings have been done by this artist who's a friend of mine named Jo Beck and she did the skyline. It's The New York City skyline to pay homage to where Owney was from and where he did business and then the Brooklyn Skyline, which is obviously where our distillery is and where the product is made. So...

Lucinda: And I'm so glad I was able to ask you, like the word "killer" is on there and "noble"...

Bridget: Yeah...

Lucinda: Those are all references to Owney?

Bridget: Yeah.

Lucinda: That's really cool.

***Musical intro***

**Nipyata Ad**

Lucinda: Hey Shot Caller, fam! Are you guys planning a bridal shower, or maybe a birthday party for somebody who is turning 21? Or how about watching the game at home?

Rashaun: Well, no matter what you're planning, the perfect party favor would be a Nipyata. Check out [nipyata.com](http://nipyata.com), they have awesome pinatas that are filled with little nips, aka airplane bottles of liquor. It's perfect for the over 21 party. So go to [nipyata.com](http://nipyata.com) and use the promo code "shotcaller" at checkout so they know we sent you.

R&L: Cheers.

***Music fades.***

Lucinda: If you were to describe Owney's original to somebody outside of being rum agricole, what guess the agricole kind of connotes a little funkiness right?

Bridget: Right.

Lucinda: And what is the funk though? It's not necessarily, um, a flavor or a smell. It's, it's a result of...

Bridget: I would say most of the quote unquote funk or most of the unique flavor to the original comes from the fermentation process. So those are esters that we create during the six to eight days of fermentation that come from our east and essentially without getting too sciency. An ester is when an organic acid binds with an alcohol molecule and so we get a lot of alcohol molecules, methanol, ethanol, butanol, propanol from the fermentation process. And the yeast also create a lot of organic acids in that point. And because we'd keep the temperature of the tanks at 75 degrees and we keep the fermentation going for so long, eventually those acids and alcohols bind together and create flavors. And then we distill that fermented wash in a way that showcases the flavor. So a lot, especially of white rums are distilled in column stills to basically neutral ethanol. We use a pot column hybrid still, so traditional pot distillation combined with some modern column distillation to distill the original because we want to showcase the flavors of the fermentation and our ingredients. So, um, I think it's a combination of the fermentation and also where we make our cuts off the still.

Lucinda: That neutrality that you were talking about is something that bartenders would often look for when we were looking to substitute vodka.

Bridget: Right.

Lucinda: So we would use a rum of that nature.

Bridget: Right.

Lucinda: But with this characteristic of Owney's, it lends itself more to a complex cocktail.

Bridget: Right.

Lucinda: Which is definitely good for bartenders.

Bridget: Yeah. Yeah.

Lucinda: We really I appreciate that.

Bridget: I like to definitely think of the original as it makes an awesome Daiquiri, but a lot of other flavors can play off of it because it isn't a neutral style.

Lucinda: It's not neutral at all.

Bridget: Yeah,

Lucinda: It's really tasty.

Bridget: Yeah. There is a real difference between the two products in a real place for both of them, which I think is pretty cool that you can show the world that white rum can be pretty interesting and not just a neutral cane spirit. And to have multiple white rums is pretty unique for a distillery I would say.

Lucinda: So tell me about why you wanted to use the blend in the daiquiri today.

Bridget: Yeah, well we're obviously a, I love it. And a Daiquiri. I love the original and a Daiquiri as well. But um, we're launching this this summer, so I figured it'd be apropos for today's, you know, it's not even available in markets yet, so...

Lucinda: When will it be available?

Bridget: It's rolling out nationally over the course of the summer and hopefully, you know, the rest of the world eventually, one day will take over the world, you know, over the course of the next few months. There's like, given the nature of the industry, there's a little bit of unpredictability on distributors and trucking and when things are actually getting into warehouses or not. I can only control so much on that end.

Lucinda: Touching on the spirit of the industry or the nature of the industry, sorry, you're a female and you're a female owner of an awesome company. So are there any challenges that were beset upon you or anything that you can talk about?

Bridget: I think for the most part it's been an advantage because it's something that differentiates us and it's unique and um, it's pretty cool. I think, uh, you know, there are of course been a lot of, especially during like the construction process, building out the distillery, trying to manage like construction crews, they don't believe that it's really mine. Like, where's, where's your dad? Or like, where's your this or that. And then of course, given the nature of the industry, standing, for the first three to, I still do it, stand in liquor stores doing tastings and people don't believe that it's my company. Right. Because...

Lucinda: No, it's Mr. Owney's.

Bridget: Yeah, exactly. Uh, you know, I'm just some person that's been asked to stand there to taste people on it, you know, which there's obviously nothing wrong with. It's just a funny that you wouldn't believe me if I don't know.

Lucinda: Oh man... Yeah, it's a great challenge to overcome on a regular basis. So when we're talking about the, the product rum, um, I think a lot of people still think back to college and the flavored rums like coconut rum or, or, or what have you received today is as popular I think as ever.

Bridget: Yes.

Lucinda: You know, and we know not to order vodka, we know to order something that has more complexity to it and that's, that's, you know, rum or gin or whiskey. So how would, how would you go about, for first timers, ordering rum?

Bridget: I think one of the opportunities but also a challenge is the lack of education for the masses. Just to your point, like college, spring break, lots of sugar in a drink, you know.

Lucinda: Pina Colada.

Bridget: Yeah. Which, you know, there's a time and a place or don't get me wrong, I enjoy a frozen drink on the beach or in the winter too, but uh, there's a lot more to the obviously to the spirit and the category, the knowledge. And I think that the only reason that I could have come this far with Owney's is because of cocktail culture and the cocktail movement and cocktail menus and people getting introduced to rum again because of bartenders. And because bartenders are putting their rums on their menus and people are trying cocktails that are featured and you know, places like Middle Branch. One of the things that inspired me for rum way before I even thought about having the distillery, I had a classic daiquiri on a menu and I never had a real daiquiri before, and I think one of my dreams for the rum category in general and specifically Owney's, is to get people to order a daiquiri with Owney's the way they would order. And I'm not talking, obviously bartenders know what a daiquiri is, but I'm talking about the general consumer feel uncomfortable enough calling for Owney's in a daiquiri at a cocktail bar or a place that does cocktails the way they would call for. You know, I'm just looking behind your bar. Michter's. I see Michter's. Okay. Uh, Michter's Manhattan are Michter's Old Fashioned. Um, I don't think we're there yet with the Daiquiri yet. Unfortunately it should be. It's just as classic of a cocktail as any of the whiskey or Martini, you know, white-spirit cocktail, like a Martini. So hopefully we get there one day. We need to get past rum and coke because that was such a. there's nothing wrong with a rum and coke if you want to drink a Rum and Coke, but I think there's a lot more. There are a lot more ways to order the order.

Lucinda: A lot better options. Have you heard of a ti' punch?

Bridget: Yes.

Lucinda: Okay..

Bridget: I love a Ti' Punch

Lucinda: You do love a ti' punch? that's great. That's very intimidating now. Cause I was going to make you one, I don't want to be judged.

Bridget: No, no, please... You should make me one. I haven't had one in a long time.

Lucinda: Well, it's going to be a variation of a ti' punch 'cause I don't like to replicate recipes. I don't want to reinvent the wheel.

Bridget: Yup.

Lucinda: But I do want to add elements. Alright, Bridget, thank you so much for coming to Middle Branch and doing this today.

Bridget: Oh my God, this was so much fun. I'll come anytime you ask me. It was great.

Lucinda: I'm really looking forward to having your rum behind our bar. Uh, that purple bottle. Purple is my favorite color is...

Bridget: Thank you! You made my day.

Lucinda: Such a draw. Okay. On to cocktail making!

Bridget: Cool.

Lucinda: Alrighty. Cheers everybody! Thanks for listening.

Lucinda: This is the Firtli-li-ti Punch Cocktail named after bridget Firtle. So this is like a version of a Ti' Punch.

Bridget: Sweet!

Lucinda: It kind of blends in with the recipe that I made you a long time ago.

Bridget: Uh huh

Lucinda: We were using Pivon and Yvonne had some orange blossom. It's some muscat grape liqueur. So I'm going to take away from that and I'm gonna use some passionfruit bitters.

Bridget: Nice.

Lucinda: I still like the idea of having an orange blossom, but I'm going to go with some falernum instead. I think that there are a lot of notes of bitter in the falernum already that kind of

come out when blended with rum and then I decided to use some riesling instead of a muscat grape. Three quarters of an ounce of that.

Bridget: This might be my first Owney's cocktail that has wine in it, so that's pretty cool.

Lucinda: That's what I wanted to do some research on you.

Bridget: Yeah

Lucinda: And then I'm going to make it just a little bit less potent. I'm just going to go with an ounce and three quarters, so total of two and a half ounces of actual hard spirit. Just a little bit light muddle in the glass because you don't wanna break the glass and I'm so strong. And, you know, Ti' Punch arguably has or does not have ice in it. So what we'll do is we'll meet it in the middle. And we'll add just a very small piece of ice and that's our version of the Ti' Punch for Bridget Firtle.

Bridget: Looks delicious!

Lucinda: Let me know if you like it.

Bridget: Cheers! Thank you! [Drinks] Oh yeah, that's delicious.

Lucinda: It is delicious?

Bridget: It's perfect. This is really, really good and super cool that six years and never had an Owney's drink with wine in it. I thought that. That's very, Huh? It's like a whole new world. I love wine.

Lucinda: Avant garde.

Bridget: Yeah.

***Music fades.***

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.

Rashaun: This episode was produced by Oluwakemi Aladesuyi.

Lucinda: The podcast is produced and distributed by Lantigua Williams & Co.

Rashaun: Big thanks to Middle Branch in New York City for letting us hang today. And thank you for listening! Follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram @ShotCallerPod 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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