



Joe Magliocco 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 Rashawn 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

Rashaun: Joe, tell us a little bit about yourself.

Joe: I work in the wine and spirits business, primarily in the spirits business. I grew up in Brooklyn. Bartended in college and worked summers in the industry, wine and liquor industry. And went to law school. I'm a reformed lawyer. [laughs] Then right after I took the bar exam, I went straight into the liquor industry and I never regretted it.

Rashaun: Wow! So how did a guy decide to get into the spirits industry?

Joe: Well, I kinda grew up in the business. You know my dad Tony was a wine and spirits distributor and importer. And so, I grew up, from being a little kid, worked summers in the warehouse, on a delivery truck and stuff like that. And, I thinking about if I didn't want to go into the wine and spirit business, what else might I want to do? And I thought, well, maybe be a lawyer. And law school took care of that. [laughs]

Lucinda: Oh, right... [laughs]

Joe: I was fortunate to go to a wonderful law school. That being said, I did not like law school. It just wasn't really for me, but I got through it. You know, took the bar exam, got my license, but I couldn't wait to go into the spirit business and wine business full-time.

Lucinda: But it comes in handy...

Rashaun: Yeah, sure.

Joe: It is. I mean, we're obviously in a very regulated business and so many legal issues everywhere in the world today. It doesn't hurt. So, one of my first bosses was Charlie Wells, who had been president of Four Roses previously, you know, and so I was lucky to work with some really good whiskey people.

Lucinda: Good. Well, what was the first aspect of this industry that you started within spirits?

Joe: When I was in college, my first sales job between a junior and senior year was actually a closing at \$50,000 worth of gold plated Michter's King Tut minis, which nobody wanted to buy in those days. [laughs] Now, we're talking the late 70s. Taught. The king Tutankhamun exhibit was going around the US. It was like a big, big deal in those days. The tomb at the Metropolitan Museum, which is wonderful. But that was one of my first jobs in the industry, but I was very familiar with Michter's from drinking it and bartending, and stuff like that. But again, that's a way before I ever dreamed that I'd have anything to do with it.

Lucinda: Okay.

Rashaun: But what is it like, you know, never dreaming that you would work for a brand that you knew very well as a bartender and a drinker or to now be the face, the brains behind said brand?

Joe: You're very kind. We have a lot of great people really responsible for the success of Michter's. I've been very fortunate to work with a bunch of really great people like Pam Heilmann, our master distiller, who prior to joining us, ran the largest bourbon distillery in the world. To Andrea Wilson, our master of maturation, who was the first woman to ever chair the Kentucky Distillers Association. To Dan Mckee, our vice president of production and distiller, who's a brilliant distiller. I mean, we have a lot of really good people that are responsible for Michter's success—not to mention all the sales team and everybody else.

Lucinda: I like hearing all the females in these lead roles.

Joe: It's absolutely not something that was done by design. You know, we really hire the best people we can find for the position. But it turned out.. Hiring a master distiller is not quite like hiring a CEO or CFO where you can go to like a big search firm. It really is still sort of a craft. So, we spoke to people that we respected in the industry. People who deal with distilleries, people who service distilleries. People who fix the equipment

when it breaks. And we said to them, you know, “Alright, give us a list of the four best distillers in the country.” And Pam was on everybody's list.

Lucinda: Oh good!

Joe: Our goal is to make the greatest American whiskey and we do a lot of stuff that other companies don't do. From barreling at a much lower than industry standard proof that that is so expensive to do. To barrel at 103 proof instead of 125 proof. But that's how they used to do the better bourbons years ago in Kentucky. We'll heat up the warehouses when it's cold, and Kentucky gets quite cold in the winter time. We'll heat up the warehouse to about 90 degrees Fahrenheit for a period of time. And then we'll open the louvers and the windows. And so, by doing that, we induce an extra soaking in and out each time that we do that...

Lucinda: Okay...

Joe: And the reason that you know that it's not favored by a lot of people to do that, even though your whiskey is richer and we believe better, is your angel share goes way up.

Lucinda: Oh, sure.

Joe: You get a lot more evaporation. Is that less in the barrel when you go to bottle it, but our goal is to make the greatest American whiskey. The long and the short of it is that we wanted somebody who would really pay attention to the details and really be committed to putting out great stuff all the time and Pam is exactly like that. And Andrea Wilson, our master of maturation is just brilliant. When you go through our warehouse, you will see regularly throughout the warehouse, you will see thermometers where people can attach to a USB port and take regular readings to see what the temperature of the liquid is in the barrel.

Rashaun: Wow!

Joe: We have a team that's really dedicated to trying to make things as good as possible. And look, I've been fortunate to have Lucinda's amazing cocktails. It doesn't happen by accident. I mean she's so detailed in everything she does and her work is brilliant. That same sort of attitude is something we try to bring to our production.

Musical intro.

Hooch 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.

Rashaun: What made you decide to reinvigorate the Michter's brand.

Joe: The main reason is I had nothing good to sell. [laughs] So, I needed to something to sell. I drank it in the 70s, I bartended with it in the 70s. I sold it in the 70s. And, I thought, you know, let's try to bring back some rye. And then in those days, and now we're telling the 1990s, people in industry said, in those days I was younger, "You're a nice young man, you're really dumb." [laughs] "Nobody is going to drink rye whiskey and, you know, you better, if you want to sell anything, you better at least do a bourbon too." So we did, we started with two SKUs. We started with a 10 year bourbon and a 10 year rye.

Rashaun: So, I know we've talked a lot about Michter's, but I know you have some other lovely products over here that we're going to be talking to you about and tasting very shortly. So tell us a little bit about some of the other brands in the portfolio.

Joe: Obviously Michter's is our core brand and Chatham, the parent company of Michter's Kentucky, is a New York-based importer. We have some brands that are made in Minnesota, we do a USDA organic vodka called Crop. We also do one that has an infusion of essence that we get from cucumbers. It's Crop Cucumber Vodka. It makes amazing, amazing, amazing cocktails. We have Farmers Gin, also while USDA organic, which is a terrific product. And one thing that I brought today, which is just about to hit the market, literally like maybe now, it's Martí Rums from Panama. I was working with a friend of mine who's been in the industry a long time. Carlos Esquivel and Carlos co-founded and runs a distillery in Panama. It's Martí Autentico. We have a three year old Dorado and a three year old Plata. I'm Carlos is is amazing. These are a estate bottled rums. He grows his own cane on the estate. He also uses what he calls his indigenous yeast. He isolated the yeast from the skin of pineapples that were growing on his land. And, it's a pretty special thing. We can taste something if you want to taste.

Lucinda: Ok, ok, ok.

Joe: But also to the fact the fact that both of these, are dry relative to many other rums make some amazing for cocktails.

Rashaun: So, let's, you know, we'll pour some in and have a taste.

Lucinda: Definitely have to try it! And so I'm curious, which one would you, as far as, Michter's, Bourbon and Rye, which one do you really want to see on the shelf or in the well at a bar?

Joe: Our US One line are really, I think, are just unbelievable whiskeys for the money. Obviously, I am a bit prejudice. [laughs] But, those are, those are products that typically retail in the US at \$45 to \$50 a bottle. We put the same care into those, and the same attention to detail into those, that we do into our 25-year, which I've seen sell recently for \$10,000 a bottle in retailers.

Rashaun: And you talked about starting the 90s and how people thought you were incredibly nice but stupid...

Joe: Stupid. Quite stupid.

Rashaun: Yeah, but now, looking now looking back and in the bourbon craze and the love of American whiskey that you see all over and the success of American whiskey. Tell us a little bit about why you think that is and how you see Michter's in that success of that craze.

Joe: 70s, 80s, 90s... American whiskey was kind of in a depression and it's almost like what financial people call "reversion to the mean." When the stock market looks terrible, when there's a crash, it really isn't that as bad as the crash seems the day of the crash. And when the stock market is at an all-time high, it really isn't as great as it all seems at the all-time high. So I think somewhat, you have a reversion to the mean in the American whiskey business, where you have really people realizing again how good American whiskeys are. And I think, not just Michter's, I think that American distillers and especially, you know, a lot of the great distilleries in Kentucky have been just producing just really wonderful whiskeys and, you know, so I think that the quality is there. I think the recognition for the quality has come back. You know, but something like, rye... At Michter's, we were pushing rye pretty much before most anybody else was pushing, you know, well-made, you know, rye and I really think that two of the things that really helped us, and helped the industry in general, really were the bartenders and mixologists because when nobody was interested in rye and when nobody was buying rye, there were, there were really creative bartenders and creative mixologists that we're saying, "Hey, this makes really good cocktails" And they were experimenting with it and they were sort of pioneering bringing it back. And I really think that the restaurant/hotel/bar people around the US and now around the world have really been responsible for bringing rye whiskey back. As well as, we call on some stores and whether they're great whiskey stores are great wine stores with great whiskey selections. There are also very knowledgeable people there that would say, "Hey, you know, I know everybody's drinking this or that category, but if you want something special, why don't you try this? Why don't you try a really well made rye? Why don't you give a great bourbon a chance? And I think really the industry people, at retail and industry people on premise are really the ones who really did the most to bring the category a back for both rye and for bourbon.

Lucinda: I agree. We were pretty busy doing that. I totally understand why Michter's is a little bit more expensive than others in the same category. Um, but it doesn't stop it from falling off the shelf here. [laughs] People just, they read about it on the menu or they see that it's on the shelf and they, you know, they consume it very quickly.

Joe: That's great to hear. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Lucinda: So to keep up with production very well?

Joe: Well, when you talk about production, you know, one of the things that is challenging about the whiskey business is you have to age the stuff. And, when we're looking at our US Ones, and again, we release different barrels at different times with basically, you know, it's going to be a minimum of five years old, and more likely, anywhere from five to seven years old. And that's our youngest stuff. We sit in meetings and we're predicting what our sales are going to be and what the economy's going to be and what the world's going to be and what the trends are going to be, you know, six years from now. And the fact of the matter is, that we're very confident in those meetings that we will be wrong. We'll either be too optimistic or too un-optimistic and, so far, we've been on the low side of predicting. Last year, as of the end of October, we had no US One bourbon, forget our older marks. We had no US One bourbon to ship from the distillery—even for emergencies.

Lucinda: Emergencies?!? [laughs]

Joe: We had no US One rye to ship during this January for a while. We release something when it's ready. There are years that we don't do an offering. There are years that we don't release our 20 year bourbon. There are many years when we don't release our 25 year Bourbon or our 25 years rye. We'll release something when it's ready and not just because of the exact age. We have a certain quality level and a certain flavor profile that we're trying to pursue.

Lucinda: Which is great!

Musical intro.

Saucey Ad

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

Rashaun: Hmm, that reminds me... I need a bottle of 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 rude, but you can go to Saucey.com. That's s-a-u-c-e-y, or download the Saucey app today in the app store on Google play.

Lucinda: Remember to use our special code "ShotCaller." All one word.

R&L: Cheers.

Music fades.

Rashaun: So what is, uh... Obviously, we talked about Martí coming to market very soon and potentially by the time you hear this podcast, it's already out, so please go get some. But what's next long-term for Chatham? Are there, you know, do you have plans to getting into other categories or are you focusing on these four categories right now?

Joe: I mean these categories... [laughs] These categories are quite enough to keep us busy. Michter's alone is quite enough to keep us busy, between our Kentucky team and our New York team. Again, our focus is really on maintaining the quality on Michter's and making the absolute best whiskey that we possibly can. That is our single biggest priority.

Lucinda: Can I just ask, for the record, what's the price point on the Martí?

Joe: The suggested retail price on it for liters is a \$19.99.

Lucinda: Okay

Joe: So for what it is, it's not that that's inexpensive, but for what it is I think it's really pretty special. And I'm very happy to say that in the first competition that we entered it in, the Martí Dorado got a 95 rating and was one of the rum category finalists against much more expensive rums in Ultimate Spirits Challenge.

Rashaun: Congrats!

Joe: Do you want me to pour?

Rashaun: Sure, absolutely. Please.

Lucinda: This is the fun part. Merci!

Joe: The fact that this rum is relatively dry, it doesn't have a great deal of sugar.

Rashaun: It's not that sweet.

Joe: No, it's not very sweet. But it makes it really lovely for daiquiris and really great for, especially the Plata, for Daiquiris and really great for cocktails.

Lucinda: Yes, rum has a terrible reputation for being considered sweet among all the other spirits.

Rashaun: Now this is, yeah, this has nice bite to it in the best possible way. It's not at all sugary.

Lucinda: It's so smooth.

Joe: Yeah. And thank you very much. And then we have the Dorado to taste as well.

Lucinda: Yeah, I'll be making a daiquiri with that tonight. [laughs]

Rashaun: With the Dorado and a little ice, you can do this straight. It's. Yeah.

Lucinda: I hate my job!

Rashaun: Yeah, right.

Joe: The common thread is just that at Michter's and Chatham, the parent company, we try to offer spirits that are interesting and we want to have stuff that really is for what it is, you know, as good quality as we can offer. As you know, I mean your cocktails at Middle Branch are amazing! And everything I've tasted from you is so amazing. Obviously, the focus on ingredients, the spirits you use and everything else that you use just makes such a big difference.

Lucinda: Absolutely.

Rashaun: All quality.

Lucinda: Think quality.

Rashaun: And that's why we're the "premium podcast." There you go.

Lucinda: That's right! [laughs]

Rashaun: Well, thank you so much for coming in and sharing your time with us as well as sharing your lovely spirits with us.

Joe: Thank you so much! Thanks for having us on.

Musical intro

Lucinda: Hey, everybody! This is the Homegrown Cocktail made specifically for Joe Magliocco. Along the way, in my progression as a bartender, I started to experiment more and more with the mixing spirits that aren't usually found together in cocktails and it's easy to do in a Tiki style drink because you have so many different ingredients. It's almost like a mask each other. But, the idea here is to let the spirit be the star. We've always said that. Promote balance. So, this is in the vein of a Tiki drink. We started out with

Angostura bitters. It's the culprit and many, many classic cocktails. And then half an ounce of fresh lemon juice, half an ounce of fresh pineapple.

Joe: Wow, so you do your own pineapple juice?

Lucinda: Yes, we juice everything here in house that we use every day.

Joe: I shouldn't expect less from you.

Lucinda: So I used half an ounce of orange juice as well, and then half an ounce of toasted orgeat from a guy who lives here in New York. And the reason it's a toasted orgeat is it gives it an extra nuance like it does in your whiskeys—it just kind of elevates that flavor profile. So in this case, the two spirits, I'm going to use are Michter's Rye and then the Martí Dorado Rum, so we're doing an ounce of each so it will be a proper...

Joe: I'm excited because I have not had a lot of rye and rum drinks. So this is quite groundbreaking.

Lucinda: We're all experimenting all the time. So this one gets shaken just a little bit because we're adding soda to it and it's going into Collin's glass. So the soda is going to add a little bit of the dilution that we're looking for versus the shake. And so we strain this carefully into a Collins glass full of ice. And like I said, you do a short shake because what you're looking for is the bubbly component from the soda. And this might be a particularly sweet drink. Um, but that's okay...

Joe: It's a great color.

Lucinda: Because you have a very spirit-forward characteristic to it. Cheers!

Joe: Wow! That is so delicious! I mean, again, your drinks are always brilliant, but this is quite a remarkable combination. And what's really amazing is that I really taste the spirits. I can taste whiskey, but I can taste the rum and somehow you married them so that they go really well together. And it's remarkable.

Lucinda: Cool.

Joe: Thank you so much.

Lucinda: Cheers!

Music fades.

Outro

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 Samira Tazari and mixed 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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