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MEET OUR
makers

What's New in Tucson? Collaborations galore. In this newsletter, we mention one of the newest collabs between Borderlands Brewing and Boca Tacos y Tequila Chef Maria Mazon, beloved Top Chef Season 18 contestant. Don't forget to check out our What's New release for all the details.

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Meet Borderlands' Head Brewer: Ayla Kapahi

Production for the renowned Tucson Borderlands Brewing Company, and one part human rights activist with a focus on leveling the playing field for women, minorities, and other underrepresented groups in alcohol production. She describes herself as a petite and feminine mixed-raced Latina and Asian Indian woman, yet when she walks into a room, she commands attention by being the most enthusiastic, confident and in many cases, smartest person you'll encounter.

The confidence, she says, has come with time. At 32 years old and with eight years of experience in brewing, she's considered a veteran in the industry. That reputation is well earned: when she started, she was one of only two female brewers in Tucson. Today, the landscape has changed dramatically, and Ayla's proud there are more than 30 women in Southern Arizona's industry and the entire brewing staff at Borderlands is female.

"I looked around one day and realized I was surrounded by women," Ayla said. "It's not something I did with intentionality. We just hired the most qualified people and they all happened to be women."

What allowed for this shift to occur? People like Ayla are passionate about eliminating barriers that have historically made it challenging for women to succeed in alcohol production. In 2021, Ayla and Brooke Nelson, formerly of Ten55 Brewing Co., founded the Southern Arizona chapter of the Pink Boots Society, a nationally recognized nonprofit for women in fermentation sciences. In doing so, they opened the lines of communication among female brewers in Tucson and beyond, providing support, advice and educational resources that were available to neither when they started their journeys.

Ayla's influence has permeated both sides of the border. In honor of Hispanic Heritage Month Sept. 15-Oct. 15, Borderlands released a new installment of its Las Hermanas beer, an ongoing collaboration between Borderlands and female brewers in Mexico. The beer making process began at Voltron Brewing Company in Tucson, before heading to Cerveceria Macaria in Mexico City, with the release party at Borderlands Brewing Co.



While Ayla is proud of the bi-national brew, she's elated the beer's production dovetailed her first ever educational conference for female brewers. More than 30 female brewers from both the U.S. and Mexico were in attendance to discuss best practices and products, and tackle some of the larger conversations about reframing societal prejudices against women in alcohol production.

"So many of the women brewers from Mexico are classically trained, resulting in superior beers that are complex in flavor," Ayla said, ever humble. "I've learned so much from these women and I hope they learned something during the conference, too."

As Ayla continues to grow as a brewer, so too does Borderlands. It's slated to open an additional location in the coming months in conjunction with Maria Mazon, the chef and owner of Tucson's own Boca Tacos y Tequila and beloved contestant on Top Chef: Portland, who will create the menus at the new locale.

Mazon and James Beard Award Winning Baker Don Guerra, who collaborated with Borderlands to create the Sonoran Jefe (a hefeweizen) from Don's signature Sonora white wheat, are among Ayla's biggest supporters and idols.

"They are always telling me, 'There aren't many Latina women in your position;

That's led to her experimenting with new ingredients like the 60-day Tohono O'Odham maiz she used when crafting Borderlands' Viejo Pueblo Blonde Ale.

"It's a really flavorful, young corn, unlike any I'd ever worked with before," said Ayla. "We made it for the Pueblo del Maiz festival last spring and now it's one of the most popular beers on the menu."

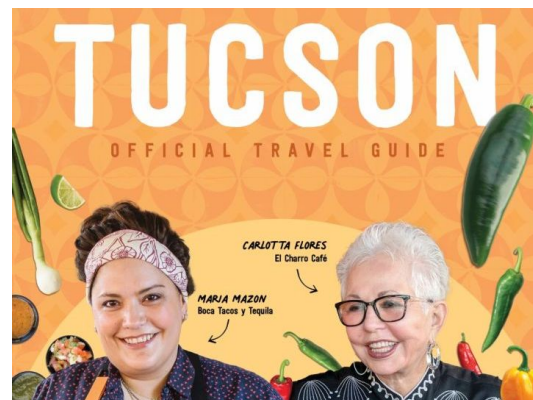
As Ayla continues to perfect her craft, solidify relationships in the community, and advocate for women and other underrepresented groups in alcohol production, she's also honing her business acumen.

She's currently enrolled in the MBA Program at the University of Arizona. She admits it's a lot for her to juggle, but just what she needs to temper her "high energy levels."

What does she drink during her fleeting moments of down time? Micheladas, a Mexican drink made with beer, lime juice, assorted sauces, spices, and chili peppers. She calls perfecting them her "COVID project." Now you can find her delicious concoction on tap at Borderlands, with locally made chamoy adorning the rim.

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