

WINTER 2019 Issue No. 8

edible LA

Sharing the Story of Local Food, Season by Season

the
drinks
issue

COCKTAILS & LEGENDS | EVERYDAY POTIONS | A WINTER JULEP

Member of Edible Communities



Simples Tonics

EVERYDAY POTIONS

Exploring how local entrepreneurs craft
modern-day potions for everyday life.

BY LISA ALEXANDER

Los Angeles is infamous for its many health trends and seems to be full of interesting and unique ways to nourish both body and soul. Whether the mood of the morning is coffee, tea, maca, cold-pressed juice, rooibos, or a collagen smoothie, there are all kinds of little things to add which will deliciously zip up the experience. From adaptogens to tonics to CBD, the city is experiencing a moment brought to us by entrepreneurs who are exquisitely sensitive to the fact that whatever we put into our bodies should be extraordinary.

In her bright shop on Main Street in Santa Monica, Traci Donat brews plant-based tonics expressly made to amplify her client's sense of well-being. A close cousin to teas, tonics are more concentrated and potent due to the quantity of plant material and the extended brewing times. Roots, flowers, stems, and leaves – everything goes into the pot – but only one ingredient a time, hence the name **Simples Tonics**. The tonics are made fresh each day and, though Traci grows much of the material for her line of vinegars on her garden in Malibu, the tonic ingredients are sourced from organic distributors.

"No one was really exploring these plants," Traci tells me. A lovely woman with a halo of light hair, she glows from within as she talks about the herbs she's been studying since her teens. She admits to having been a junk food junkie; when she discovered Susan Weed, a master folk herbalist, it changed her life and she's been brewing up tonics for friends and family ever since. She exudes bright energy – flitting from one subject to another like a hummingbird –

and a huge passion for her products.

"People look to exotic locations for superfoods, but these are in your backyard," she explains. They're also the invisibles of the plant kingdom because, well, they're weeds. Who knew they could taste so good?

Traci gives me the rundown on the tonics she features and there is definitely something for everyone. I immediately notice the lovely color palette on display – from the pale pink of Schisandra berry to the almost turquoise blue pea flower and the darker, deeper chickweed to the golden burdock root – all serving their own unique healing purpose, which is what drives Traci everyday. The tonics are subtle and crave-worthy – and I don't want to put it down once I've had a sip.

In addition to the tonics, Traci carries her own line of infused vinegars because, as she tells me, apple cider vinegar is a great way to extract the nourishment of the plants. She's also made it her mission to discover obscure and talented herbalists from all over the world, so one side of the shop has digestive bitters, turmeric honey, flower essences, and much more. She also carries a line of CBD tinctures, which make a glowing add-on to the herbtails her assistant Hanna whips up behind the bar.

"We were just asked to do a whole mocktail bar for a baby shower," Traci shares, with a delighted smile. Now they offer a happy hour on Thursday and Saturday afternoons, and have even branched out into offering classes so anyone can become an expert at combining tonics with flower essences. (See *sidebar* for a few recipes



Traci Donat at Simples Tonics in Santa Monica

SIMPLE(S) MOCKTAILS

SASS IN A GLASS

2 parts Schisandra tonic
 1 part Blue Pea tonic
 5 drops Venus Flower tincture with CBD
 Lemon verbena garnish

BLESSED

2 parts rose tonic
 1 part Tulsi tonic
 Half to full dropper of strawberry cardamom bitters
 5 drops goddess bless flower essence
 Rose geranium garnish

TRANSFORMED

7oz Tulsi tonic
 Half to full dropper smoked bourbon bitters
 Dropper full of Chaga tincture
 Infuse with Lavender sprig

using *Simples Tonics*.)

Just before I venture out into the Santa Monica traffic, Hanna mixes up a personalized brew with blue pea and rose (the combo turns a lovely lavender) with a pinch of CBD and I floated out of the store.

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Emily O'Brien, a blond, emphatic woman with sparkling eyes and a big smile, had a back injury when she was 21 years old. She was prescribed opioid painkillers but found cannabis to be the only treatment that would help counter her considerable side effects. Pot brownies were her first choice but they were heavy, put her to sleep, and made her gain weight. That's when Emily realized there was a need in the market for an edible that was delicious, lighter, and organic.

Her first attempt was a sugar-free vegan granola bar with cannabis-infused coconut oil, but she wanted an even more versatile product that people would be able to use every day. At the time, she was really into maca and spirulina smoothies and wondered why she couldn't just create a powder to add to beverages. It would have to be something easy to use so it would be a no-brainer for someone who's shy about beginning to use cannabis. Emily also liked the idea of micro-dosing, she tells me, because it stimulates the body on a cellular level, but not enough to change perception, and clients can really control the high.

By then, Emily was also struggling with anxiety and not only wanted pain relief but an alternative to synthetic

chemicals that would give her relief without the possibility of addiction. After much experimentation, she figured out how to do a coconut oil extraction that is dehydrated, fixed, and then bound with a final addition of tapioca starch. The result is **Mondo Dust**, a soft, cloudlike powder that can be added to all kinds of drinks and smoothies.

"I take the whole plant," Emily explains. "The trim and the sugar leaves too – all of it goes into the infusion pot and this way I'm able to get all the terpenes and cannabis oils that make that wonderful entourage effect." Her preferred strain is a 50/50 indica and sativa hybrid grown in Humboldt County. It worked best for the most number of people, according to Emily, and delivers a subtle full-body high with no loss of clarity or focus; a daytime edible that can be easily infused into a client's routine.

A smidge of Mondo can dress up a morning shake and provide all the potential health benefits of THC and CBD, too. For those who don't want or like the high, Emily's just come out with a new product that is just CBD with a touch of theanine thrown in – this amino acid is found in green tea and is being used for its potential in treating anxiety along with a whole host of other diseases.

Gone is the old head shop with its brightly colored bong and artificially flavored gummy bears. These days, dispensaries are more like luxury boutiques with vegan, sugar-free, and small-batch products made by a new breed of entrepreneur. Emily made Mondo Dust with a very specific intention: an easy, user-friendly way to use cannabis to ease over the bumps of life.

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Mushrooms were here on earth before the plant kingdom and they could just be the oldest form of medicine

TOASTED SESAME ADAPTOGENIC VEGAN CHAI

INGREDIENTS

1 teaspoon Moodbeli Calming Adaptogen
2 tablespoons Moodbeli Cloud Powder
1/2 teaspoon toasted sesame oil
hot water (or your favorite black tea)
black sesame seeds, for garnish

METHOD

Combine ingredients in a blender and blend on high.
Garnish with black sesame seeds.

CHILLY NIGHTS MUSHROOM IMMUNITY LATTE

INGREDIENTS

2 teaspoons Moodbeli Mushroom Adaptogen
1 teaspoon coconut butter
drop of vanilla extract
hot water

METHOD

Combine ingredients in a blender and blend on high.
Swap out the hot water for coffee for the perfect winter mushroom mocha.

on the planet. Adaptogens, a buzz word these days, are plants or herbs that may help the body adapt to life's stresses.

Moodbeli's products (the name is an attempt to focus the conversation between the gut and brain) are backed by modern science and rooted in ancient wisdom, or so says Kryisia Zajonc, co-founder of the company. In this case, she's preaching to the converted as I sip on Moodbeli's Bliss Booster, a seductive blend of maca, cacao, and cayenne that's perfect mixed into my homemade almond milk.

Kryisia and Mateo Aguilar, her husband and Moodbeli's co-founder, had the perfect bohemian dream life – a bookstore and chocolate shop on the beach in Costa Rica specializing in treats made from locally-grown, heirloom cacao and coffee. "Our customers were locals and tourists and ex-pats and it was just beautiful and divine," she tells me, though it was also really hard to grow beyond a mom-and-pop shop.

When they moved back to California, their first instinct was to continue with chocolate, but sugar was the new no-no on the block, so they decided to create a line of products that were inspired by all of the ethically sourced ingredients they'd learned about – like cacao, maca, reishi, turmeric, gotu kola – but with no added sugar. The result is spicy deliciousness because the absence of sweeteners allows the ingredients to really shine, especially with a pop of pink sea salt.

Their goal was to offer these ancient ingredients in a way that was straightforward and delicious. They interviewed experts, farmers, and food makers, and tested hundreds of recipes to come up with their product line – things like Golden Turmeric and Ceremony tonic, even a very cool coconut creamer called Cloud Dream.

But what I really wanted to know about were



Moodbeli's Toasted Sesame Adaptogenic Chai



Moodbeli's Chilly Nights
Mushroom Immunity Latte

the mushrooms. Turns out theirs are ethically sourced and cultivated because some varieties like ashwaganda, rhodiolus, and astragalus can take up to five years to mature. "The only plants we work with are wild-harvested ones that grow all over the place...it's a big deal to be pulling up [older] plants, so we wouldn't want to do that," she explains.

Moodbeli's Mushroom Adaptogen contains raw cacao from Peru mixed with reishi and cordyceps mushrooms. Reishi, the great multi-tasker, has been touted for its almost endless list of healing properties. Moodbeli's Calming Adaptogen contains ashwagandha and the Meditation Tonic is all about memory and mindfulness, with gotu kola, reishi, and schisandra.

"I'm a big fan of our Energy Tonic in the morning... if I don't do a tea or coffee," she says. She tells me the astragalus keeps her from getting sick and the rhodiola banishes her brain fog. Blue Green Protein is a meal in a smoothie with spirulina protein and tocopherols, or fluffy rice bran solubles that taste sort of like vanilla ice cream.

Krysia says she also loves the Calming Adaptogen in the afternoon or before bed – ashwaganda in a spicy chai base (see the recipe below). And the Golden Turmeric is

her go-to to cook with. She uses it with roasted cauliflower, squash soup, and always adds a dash of black pepper to make the turmeric even more bioavailable.

As Krysia tells me, this is about more than what's in Moodbeli's amber glass jars, "a huge part of these products is the intention you set when you decide to make yourself a tonic: that in itself is a healing part."

And it makes sense – our minds are powerful. Besides, it's fun to add a dash of this and a dab of that to my routine, as if I am an ancient potion master.

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Simple Tonics may be found online at simpletonics.com or at their Santa Monica boutique. **Mondo Dust** may be ordered online at mondomed.com. **Moodbeli** products are at moodbeli.com or local Erewhon Markets.

These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. These products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. ◆