

Marsing grad takes his shot in tequila world

Textbooks, travels built Austin's empire of experience, entrepreneurship

The is the final installment in a two-part feature on 1977 Marsing High School graduate Rico (Richard) Austin. — Ed.

Education has always been a top priority for Rico Austin.

The one-time Marsing resident dreamt of going to college and playing football at Boise State University.

Because of his father's poor health, Rico helped provide for his mother and siblings. His dad passed away at an early age, and when his mother remarried a widower, Rico was finally able to pursue his dream as a walk-on player at BSU and earned an Associates Degree in Sales and Marketing — more than 10 years after finishing high school.

He went on to earn a BBA in International Business at Grand Canyon University in Arizona in 1995 while being honored as "most outstanding International Business student," and a post-graduate degree at Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire, England where he started as cornerback and safety for the Staffordshire Stallions. Then he earned a Master's Degree in International Marketing with a focus on Latin America and Spanish in 1998 at Thunderbird, American Graduate School of International Management.

Right when he thought his degrees were done, he pursued a Master's Degree in Tequila, receiving the degree on Elvis' birthday, Jan. 8, 2014. Still, not satisfied and wanting to become one of the few in the world to have a Ph. D. behind his name, he furthered his studies in tequila.

"I wasn't drinking, I was studying," he said.

On his birthday, June 4, 2016, Rico earned his Doctorate Degree in Tequila (yes, this is a real thing). Fewer than 200 people in the world can make this claim.

Naturally, the degree led to starting his own tequila brand, Bajarriba.

Rico met his Tres Cabo Amigos partners some 20 years ago in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, when he had book signings for his first book, *My Bad Tequila*, at two bars. Jay Nance owned the Cabo Lounge. A local Cabo musician named Mike Hill owned "Miguel Locos."

The men reunited where they now live in Arizona, and the company, "Tres Cabo Amigos," was founded in October 2020. The partners love fine, premium tequila, so they decided to brand their own tequila.



Above: Tres Cabo Amigos LLC, from left, Mike Hill, Rico Austin, and Jay Nance toast their new tequila venture Bajarriba. **Below:** The first shipment of unique bottles, made from recycled glass, are ready to head to the artist to be hand-painted. Submitted photos



"Tequila can only be called tequila if it is made from 100 percent Blue Weber agave and produced in the State of Jalisco, Mexico, along with a few other municipalities in the surrounding area," Rico said. "If it is not made from Blue Weber agave and produced in these areas of Mexico, it is not legally tequila."

The tequila is distilled in a third-generation family-owned operation called Tequila El Viejito, which is located in the Highlands region of Jalisco. The distillery was founded in

1937 and just celebrated its 85th anniversary.

"Our 100 percent pesticide-free, estate-grown Blue Weber agave is distilled at 7,000 feet in copper pots, baked in stone brick ovens, fermented in stainless steel tanks and then aged in white oak whiskey barrels using the purest of deep well water," Rico said.

The distinctive bottle shaped like the Baja California peninsula (but upside down) and brand name "Baja Arriba" came from Mike Hill.

"When Mike told me about

it, I loved the idea and flew to Cabo to have an artist friend, Silvestre, make a plaster of Paris mold, brought it back to Arizona, invited both Jay and Mike to meet me in Fountain Hills, Ariz., at The Streets of New York pizza joint, and 'viola,' the three of us decided to form our Arizona LLC — Tres Cabo Amigos, LLC. From the words Baja and Arriba, we formed the shortened version — 'Bajarriba,'" Rico said.

Rico's wife Connie, a graphic artist, designed the company brand label and perfected the bottle and shape to include the major highways and towns all up and down the Baja, the beautiful blue waters of the Sea of Cortez and the Pacific Ocean. An artist in Guadalajara hand-paints the bottles, which are mold-sculpted using recycled glass.

"It's been quite the journey, with lots of traveling back and forth to Guadalajara to make this dream a reality," Rico said.

The partners expect distribution contracts in place and bottles available for sale in most states by July or August. There are plans to establish distribution in Canada and Mexico eventually.

Tres Cabo Amigos, LLC supports many organizations in Baja, Mexico, that help orphaned and abandoned children with continued education while housing and feeding the less fortunate.

You can get more information and product availability updates by signing up with your email address at <http://www.Bajarriba.com>.

"As we like to say — We are excited to share our love for the Baja in a bottle! Bajarriba® equals Bottoms Up! Peace, Love & Tequila!!!®" the Tres Cabo Amigos write in promotional literature.

Also found in promotional material:

"Tequila Aficionado Media, the most comprehensive and informative source for tequila, mezcal, and agave spirit news and interviews, just reviewed the Tres Cabo Amigos tequila BAJARRIBA on Saturday, May 21st, 2022 and gave both the Plata and Reposado a stunning, raving review and has nominated BAJARRIBA in both expressions for "Brand of Promise" for its annual best of agave spirits awards. BAJARRIBA was also nominated by Tequila Aficionado's "Brand of Promise" for its unique bottle design and shape of the BAJA California being upside down."

The influence of Cabo is evident in excerpts from Rico's first book, *My Bad Tequila*, which was published in 2010: "The roar of my Harley calmed and the calm of Cortez' sea roared."

"You'll see the true reflection of me when the TEQUILA bottle is empty!"