

SCHOOL HOUSE BOOZE

DRINKING 101: GET SCHOOLED BY THE TIPSY TEACHERS

words Sara Kloepfer

“There’s more to life
than a vodka cran.”

Frustrated with deciphering drink menus at bars, Rachel and Ashley, the self-proclaimed “Tippy Teachers” behind School House Booze, embarked on a mission to educate themselves and their fellow Torontonians about alcohol. Rachel, 24, and Ashley, 26, founded School House Booze in 2013 as a platform for alcohol education. Their blog soon expanded to include events, including their popular Detox to Retox series, which is held in local breweries and features a yoga class followed by a beer tasting.



photo The Watermelon Keg by School House Booze

Rachel and Ashley approach alcohol from a DIY perspective, encouraging their audience to not only define and expand their palette, but also to experiment with their own concoctions. Most importantly, they pose the questions that others may be too embarrassed to ask. “We take from the rich and give to the poor in the sense that we speak to people who are professionals in the industry and we break it down so that other beginners, like ourselves, can understand and get comfortable with experimenting on their own,” said Ashley. By de-mystifying intimidating concepts for their novice audience, School House Booze aims to break down barriers between consumers and professionals.

Inspiration for the project hit when Rachel and Ashley found themselves at the 2013 Toronto Festival of Beer, even though both claim to have hated beer at the time. Unhappy with the

corporate section of the festival, they decided to leave. On their way out, the two stumbled across craft beer company Mad and Noisy. After participating in a tasting with an enthusiastic bartender, they were hooked. “In that conversation, we basically fell in love with craft beer,” said Ashley. “The passion became addictive.”

Recognizing that their frustration with beer came from a lack of education, Rachel and Ashley realized that many of their peers felt similarly. “There’s so much more to alcohol than the one bad experience,” Rachel said. “It’s not fair to write off one type of alcohol; there’s just so much to learn.” School House Booze was born with the intention of helping its audience become foodies, but for alcohol – or as the blog puts it, “boozies, if you will.”



photo Katrina Sung

Rachel and Ashley’s first project was learning how to homebrew, with the help of Toronto Brewing Company. The duo found the educational aspect of the process the most fascinating. According to Rachel, “The professionals really appreciate the questions that we ask. We ask the silliest questions, like ‘What’s a hop? What is yeast? Why is this important to beer?’ People who are really involved in beer talk about how they know all about this, but it’s very refreshing for the craft beer professionals to be able to talk about their passion. I think that’s what really drew us in: the passion behind beer.”

It did not take long for Rachel and Ashley to want to share that passion with others. The two never expected to host events, but their excitement to learn became contagious: their first event, a Valentine’s Day beer and cheese pairing, sold out. The Air Canada Centre offered to host their next event, a wine tasting followed by a Raptor’s game. Their events have since included a barrel tasting (via school bus – “our dream come true,” said Rachel) at Kacaba Vineyards, a pumpkin carving and pub crawl, and a bourbon and chocolate pairing.

Most popular is their Detox to Retox series, which the pair credits to their initial relationships within the craft beer industry. “It’s good timing,” said Ashley. “The craft beer movement in Toronto is exploding. Everybody wants to home brew and try different beers at festivals, and everybody is very young in

the industry.” The grassroots, collaborative mentality of the craft beer industry made School House Booze feel welcome as alcohol initiates. By reaching out to interview new breweries during the early stages of the blog, Ashley and Rachel formed relationships that grew along with their business. Their first Detox to Retox event was hosted by Left Field, a brewery the two had interviewed two years earlier. Most recently, School House Booze collaborated with Junction Brewery to host Detox to Retox at Craft Brew Cruise, a beer tasting event aboard a cruise ship.

Ashley describes the blog’s evolution as a “complete roller coaster, all uphill” – and it shows no signs of slowing down. The two plan to travel to Europe for the blog, to add cideries to their events repertoire, and to develop a craft beer survival guide. They eventually want to open their own space, but are keeping quiet about the details, except to say it will be collaborative and unique. One certainty is that the Topsy Teachers will continue to share their knowledge and passion for all things alcohol – as their motto states, “there’s more to life than a vodka cran.”

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Website: www.schoolhousebooze.com

Instagram: @tipsyteachers



photos Simple Syrups & Dark n Stormy Cold Remedy Cocktail by School House Booze