

Meg McCulloch breaks stereotypes on women and beer



By [Karabo Ledwaba](#)

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Meg McCulloch, originally from Vancouver, Canada, is the co-founder of Jack Black's Brewery Co. , a craft beer specialty company located in Cape Town. Alongside her husband and business partner, Ross, she embarked on an exciting journey when they decided to move to South Africa to pursue their venture.

McCulloch draws inspiration from the design and manufacturing prowess of South Africa. One of her missions is to challenge the stereotype that women do not have an affinity for beer. Through her work with Jack Black's Brewery Co., she aims to break down these preconceptions and promote inclusivity in the world of beer appreciation.



Meg McCulloch is the co-founder of Jack Black Beer. Source: Supplied.

■ **How and why did you get interested in craft beer?**

Although I studied law at university, my passion was actually in the wine industry, where I became a sommelier and had a lot of fun consulting and travelling abroad as a journalist. Fast forward to meeting my husband and partner Ross, we soon visited South Africa (where Ross grew up) and it was clear that, while South Africa had a lot of incredible wine, this was not the case for local beer! We saw a massive opportunity to bring South Africans a delicious local beer – and our dream grew from there.

■ **Take us through the journey of starting Jack Black with your partner.**

“ When we say we started on a shoestring, we mean it! It was just the two of us, and since we couldn't afford a brewery, we began brewing our own recipe with a contract brewer with the vision of one day having our own brewery. Our first sales were hand-to-hand at farmer's markets, beginning with The Neighbourgoods Market at the Old Biscuit Mill in Woodstock. ”

Markets were a great place to share our story with consumers that were interested in local, high-quality beer. Soon after starting our bottle business, we shifted our focus to draught beer and stood behind many bar counters serving fresh pints. From there, we moved into the restaurant world – and there began the love affair with 'Jack Black on Tap'.

■ **What are the challenges of running a brewery?**

Gosh, we've faced quite a few in recent years. I'd say outside of the challenges beyond our control (such as water shortages, prohibitions, and load shedding) – we deal with the same type of everyday challenges most medium-sized businesses face.

The added challenge, but excitement, is that while we're a production business (brewing is at the heart of what we do), we also have components of marketing, sales, and distribution in addition to our taproom, which is a combined restaurant and event space.

🏰 ***What have been the highlights?***

Over the years, we've become smarter about what we're doing, and how we're doing it – and we have an incredible team that allows us to do so. Looking back on our 15-year journey, a major highlight was opening our brewery, and welcoming all the folks that supported us throughout our first ten years who enabled us to reach that milestone.



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Another highlight was our move to sustainable packaging, which meant higher input costs, but it's a journey we're fully committed to – and we know our consumers are too. We've built a brand through strong partnerships and community support, and our Pint for Purpose programme (where proceeds from our taps are donated to local organisations) has also been super fulfilling and fun.

🏰 ***I believe this is a traditionally male-dominated industry. Are there any barriers you have had to overcome?***

While the beer business was once considered a male-dominated industry, those stereotypes have largely been broken down over the last two decades. I'd say the next stereotype we need to break is that women don't love beer! You'd be surprised how many women try craft beer for the first time and love it. We have a variety of beers now, including fruit-inspired beers, which has created a lot of excitement for new consumers.

🏰 ***What inspires you?***

Over and above the daily inspiration from our team, I'm super inspired by our wider community – we are so fortunate to meet so many people doing extraordinary things every day. As a foreigner, I have an external view of South Africa and I truly find it a place of opportunity. I believe Africa has so much to offer globally, but locally as well, whether it's design, production, manufacturing and so much more – it's inspiring and fulfilling to support local brands and businesses. Yes, South Africa has its fair set of challenges, but the resilience and dynamism of this country can't be beaten.

🏰 ***What advice do you have for women pursuing careers in this industry, or those who want to start up a business?***

When I think about all the obstacles we've faced, the old adage comes to mind, that 'most businesses fail just before success' – that's something that's stuck with us. Ultimately it's about believing in your dream and pursuing it, even when times are tough.

My advice, to anyone really, is to just start – I feel we often chase perfection (something I'm very guilty of) but when it comes to entrepreneurship, my opinion is that those who ultimately succeed are the ones willing to start, adapt, make mistakes and learn from them.

🏰 ***What are your future plans for yourself and your business?***

As a business, our future plans are to continue growing our community of loyal Jack Black drinkers and to encourage as

much discovery and trial of craft beer as possible. While we're no longer hand-selling at the Old Biscuit Mill, it's those types of opportunities — where people can try craft beer for the first time, discover what makes it special, and make a connection — that makes it all worth it! Beer is a sharing occasion for special moments in our lives. Whether it's the end of a project or the end of the week, those moments deserve to be treated as such – with a delicious local beer.

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

Karabo Ledwaba is a Marketing and Media Editor at Bizcommunity and award-winning journalist. Before joining the publication she worked at Sowetan as a content producer and reporter. She was also responsible for the leadership page at SiMug, Sowetan's lifestyle magazine. Contact her at karabo@bizcommunity.com

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