

# Lady Bonin's Tea Bar

 By [Eugene Yiga](#)

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Bree Street may be the cool kid on the block, but Cape Town's Long Street is home to the country's first dedicated tea bar.



Image source: [Facebook](#)

[Lady Bonin's Tea](#) sources, blends, and distributes various loose leaf teas and herbals from around the world. It imports Matcha, Sencha, and Genmaicha tea from Japan predominantly, and sources from China for its more specialised products, such as Puehr and Oolong.

The greatest sellers and most popular products are its local blends of Honeybush, Buchu, and Rooibos. Its speciality is the unique blends that founder Jessica Bonin developed using real ingredients and not additives or artificial flavours.

## ***What did you do prior to starting your own business?***

Growing up, I wanted to be an entrepreneur. It always seemed like an exciting way to express my dreams, passions, and creativity without limit. I wanted to have the opportunity to effect change through the choices I made, and thereby inspire other towards a better world.

I studied drama and philosophy at Rhodes University. It was a wonderful, inspiring, and liberating experience, where the platforms were ours to mould. I made friends for life and have used every skill in my business so far.

Working in the film industry taught me that 'No' is always negotiable. As a result, I will always find solutions to problems I face. Logistically, it gave me excellent budgeting and administrative skills, and taught me about putting in long hours.



Image source: [Facebook](#)

### ***How did you get funding to get started?***

Sell, sell, and sell! I had to work hard to find sales avenues and increase the market demand. This meant long hours for four years. Constant work around the clock wasn't easy. Eventually, I decided I needed to acquire skills and advice. I applied for a business incubator programme with Impact Amplifier. They gave my business a five-month process that allowed me learn every aspect that provided me with the tools to strategise, budget, market, and understand my core value offering. Not only did this give me confidence in myself, but it allowed me to understand my product. In the end we pitched to investors and I was able to secure my first round of funding from valuable partners who share my vision.

### ***What's been the biggest difficulty you've had to overcome?***

Cash flow. It is the greatest challenge every business can attest to. I thought it was hopeless, I thought I would lose my dream, the thing I had worked so hard to achieve. But I became resourceful. Not having cash injections has forced me to grow the business in a way that it supports itself.

I have also been innovating and creating something new, which means building foundations that never existed before. I often wonder if I had all the money I could have needed whether I would have grown the way I have, and to be honest, I think not having the cash flow has taught me more and has allowed me to learn every aspect of the business, the market, and the product so that the foundations are solid.

Now that I have the know-how, I can put that cash flow to good use with specific, clear, and strategised direction that will bear fruit I don't believe I would have cultivated before. It's incredibly stressful, however, especially when you have other people's livelihoods to consider. And there is a point in any company where a cash injection is required. But I have learned that you have to double your expenses in order to triple your profits, and cash flow allows this to happen.

### ***What's the biggest lesson you've learned?***

Perseverance, diligence, focus, adaptation, and above all, to flow with the flux. We are conditioned to run in a capitalist world that is based on instant gratification and expects consistent output. As a woman, the process of working consistently drove me to burnout. I had to learn that things flow, like the seasons. No two days are the same. I had to learn how to listen to the changing tides and adapt to the conditions. Some days I couldn't push as hard, and others I could push harder. In the end I would still produce what was needed, but not putting the pressure to perform the same all the time allowed me to find freedom in my processes.

I love the Japanese way of life for teaching me that. They honour the seasons because they believe we as humans are not separate from the seasons. In winter you hibernate to replenish the hard energy expended in summer. In spring, the blossoms come back stronger with more energy, and in summer these bloom with radiance and power. Money is an interesting teacher in that it too ebbs and flows. There are times when a great input is needed, and you have to strategise it in order to get a greater output.



Jessica Bonin: Master blender of tea, passion and success

Lauren Hartzenberg 29 May 2017



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### ***What's the best business advice you've ever received?***

Find your passion and follow it. Don't worry about the how and why, just connect with the feeling of happiness and the rest will reveal itself. Keep committed to your path and know that every door closed is in order for another to open. There is a great orchestration to the way things unfold; we can set the strategy but we can't always control the time. If you listen to the way it wants to unfold and work closely to guide it, you will find the harmony that allows something beautiful to grow.

### ***How do you stay motivated?***

Passion. I wasn't going to allow my dreams I worked so hard to build just die without a fight. I truly believe if I wasn't passionate about my product, I wouldn't have fought so hard. It's important that we fight for what we believe in, and that takes sacrifice. But if you are fighting for your heart, your heart always wins.



Image source: [Facebook](#)

## ***What are your non-work habits that help you with your work-life balance?***

I'm an active person. I spend a lot of time in the ocean, in the mountains, and with my friends. I have just taken to surfing and skateboarding so this has become my play time! I love reading and, of course, I love tea. I travel to countries that are tea-based and I learn as much of the philosophy and practices as I can.

## ***What are your goals for the future of your business?***

We want to establish a strong footprint locally with our retail sales, expand our export avenues, and begin to franchise our Tea Bar concept. We want this local-is-lekker brand to become loved in the home locally as well as become something adored internationally.

## **ABOUT EUGENE YIGA**

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit [www.eugeneyiga.com](http://www.eugeneyiga.com), follow @eugeneyiga on Twitter, or email [helo@eugeneyiga.com](mailto:helo@eugeneyiga.com) to say, um, hello.

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