

BERTHA GONZÁLEZ NIEVES

THE FIRST LADY OF TEQUILA

SOPHISTICATION AND MEXICAN CRAFTSMANSHIP IN EVERY SIP

By Christina Staalstrom | Photos courtesy of Casa Dragones



Tacos and Margaritas will always be a part of the Mexican tequila culture, but overstuffed tortillas and blue-rimmed glasses filled with double shot floaters should probably be left behind. Today's Mexico is modern and elevated with a casual yet sophisticated vibe that has grown from an ancestry deeply rooted in crafts, culture, and community. Cool and collected, this is Casa Dragones tequila's Mexico, and Bertha González Nieves, the entrepreneurial force behind the brand, is on a mission to introduce it to the world one bottle of at a time.

Born and raised in Mexico, Bertha's passion for her country and its national elixir is contagious, and her journey an interesting one. Known worldwide as the "First Lady of Tequila" and recognized by the industry as a Master Tequilera, Bertha is first and foremost an entrepreneur.

She is a self-proclaimed "doer" who thrives on taking an idea and executing. Like most born entrepreneurs, she started tinkering with business at an early age and even as a teenage tycoon Bertha always pushed the envelope. One of her early ventures was designing and selling holiday cards. While enterprising, many teenagers create cards to sell to family friends for some extra holiday money. Still, Bertha, in all her entrepreneurial boldness, took it one step further and used her savings to hire a cartoonist, giving her cards an extra cool vibe. That modern, rebellious and independent spirit is what has come to define Bertha González Nieves and her award-winning Casa Dragones tequilas.

Passion for tequila comes with growing up in Mexico, but it was in her early 20's when she was selected to represent Mexico as a part of a cultural ambassador program for Japan that it became a personal mission. The trip allowed her to see tequila from many different angles and set out to learn all she could about the industry inside and out. After completing a graduate business degree at Northwestern University, she knocked on doors in the tequila industry. She joined the Mexican family company Grupo Cuervo, producers of Jose Cuervo tequilas, where she worked her way up the ranks to its Global Innovation and Marketing Divisions. With a successful career in a growing company, most would happily stay the course, but Bertha's journey to satisfy her never-ending curiosity was just getting started.

In 2007 a chance meeting at a party in Brooklyn connected her with Bob Pittman, the media mogul who famously created MTV and is CEO and Chairman of media powerhouse iHeart Media. The two shared a common passion for tequilas, and the idea to introduce a sipping tequila that pushes the boundaries of taste and expands the category was born. "My goal was to come in with a unique point of view and seduce the tequila lover with a truly unique tasting tequila." And seduce she has. Casa Dragones has created a shift in the 250-year-old industry. Casa Dragones Joven is enjoyed in Riedel Overture Tequila glasses served

alongside dishes made by culinary masters like chef Thomas Keller, Enrique Olvera, and Daniela Soto-Innes. Undoubtedly a far cry from your college tequila experience.

Casa Dragones tequila launched in 2009, right when the country was going through an economic crisis, but Bertha and her team stayed the course, and the brand grew. For the first five years, the focus was on Casa Dragones Joven, a true sipping tequila in an old-style decanter made modern to celebrate and present the product's true craftsmanship. This authentically beautiful packaging keeps Casa Dragones leading year after year in spirited holiday gifting.

Casa Dragones Joven could have been an only child, but bartenders asked for a Casa Dragones tequila made for mixing, so Casa Blanco was born. The crisp, herbaceous, agave-forward tequila showcases the purity of the brand's water and agave. It has quickly become the darling of mixologists and industry professionals in both the United States and Mexico.

Bertha built her career and dedicated it to the tequila industry, and when asked what her favorite part of the business is, it is no surprise that this innovator loves to explore ideas and learn. "To innovate, you must forget," she says with a smile, and the discussion moves to its newly launched Casa Dragones Barrel Blend, which has put this theory into practice. The 100% Blue Agave Añejo Tequila has a distinctive character from being matured in custom-made French Oak and American oak barrels, resulting in a new style of sipping tequila that is not only smooth but elegant. Once again, pushing the envelope and seducing the senses all at once.

Bertha's passion for learning is surpassed only by her love of travel and connecting with people. Seeing someone connect with the product and experience it through their eyes motivates her to continue to create and innovate. "It's always important to keep your sense of surprise because then you can find inspiration everywhere," says González Nieves, who has managed to surprise, inspire, and elevate an entire category.

