

Raising her glass

Winery owner Lauren Maillian Bias toasts triumphs

“No nonsense with the best of intentions.” That’s how Sugarleaf Vineyards owner Lauren Maillian Bias says most people would describe her. And, she adds, they’d be right.

It’s those intentions that have earned her so many points of pride. Bias, in her late 20s, is already the youngest female minority self-made winery owner (whew!) in the United States.

“We learned as we went along,” she says. There was a lot of trial and error, a lot of paperwork and, as she calls them, a few tests. “A kind of, ‘Do you really know your stuff?’ when I’m in other markets,” says Bias, a former runway and print model for the likes of Tommy Hilfinger and Avon. “I’ve established a lot of friendships by reinforcing the fact that smart women can be beautiful, too.”

Bias says she’s noticed that attitude works in her favor. “I think a lot of the folks that come in to visit really do appreciate the opinion and knowledge of a smart, savvy, independent, somewhat strong-willed female who really knows her stuff.”

When she’s not in North Garden running the winery on-site, she’s running the business from her home base in Manhattan, where she donates plenty of time to her philanthropic interests, such as the New York Urban League, the Children’s Aid Society and the Alvin Ailey Arts in Education programs.

“Even the work that I do philanthropically is about my children,” says Bias, mom to 3-year-old Jayden and 18-month-old Chloe, “so that other children can have the same opportunities and one day end up in the same place, irrespective of the fact that they came from different starting points.”

“When people feel empowered and when they feel confident, it just makes things better for the people around them.” —*Caite White*

“I have a degree in international trade and marketing. Some of the business workings—that, overall, was not foreign to me. What was certainly foreign to me was all of the different legal loopholes and hurdles you must jump, and the time constraints and...”

“I’ve had people come to a wine dinner and leave just so grateful that I took the time to talk about the wine and talk about the pairings. And they leave with this newfound confidence. They no longer feel intimidated to say, ‘I like this’ or, ‘I don’t like this.’”

“There’s a large sense of pride in what I’ve been able to accomplish at my age and that one day my children can look back and say, ‘Wow. We’re still the *only* [minority-owned winery] here on the East Coast,’ or, ‘We were the first.’ And that’s pretty awesome.”

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