

Sunkissed SCANDAL

With a passion for his profession, bartender Matt Haskins of Trattoria Pizzeria in Downtown Hattiesburg explained that he takes “immense pride in crafting cocktails that aren’t just drinks, but experiences.” He added, “I’m constantly experimenting with new ingredients and mixing the unexpected. Some of those experiments succeed and others fail. But that’s life – a little sweet, a little bitter, and always worth the sip.”

Not only did Haskins concoct a refreshing, summer-inspired cocktail for us – the Sunkissed Scandal – he also recounted his journey to becoming one of the Hub City’s most appreciated bartenders and offered words of wisdom learned along the way.

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Twenty years ago, I landed my first restaurant gig in New Orleans and met my boss (and bartender) Mike. Watching him work was like watching a master storyteller – he didn’t just make drinks, he created moments. He mixed in his own life stories, and everyone who came to the bar felt it. I remember thinking, “Man, I want to be just like that someday.”

Maybe I was just playing it safe, but life took me back to retail – a field I already had two years of experience in. I spent another 13 years climbing the corporate retail ladder, but I always felt something was missing. Though I had learned a lot, there was always a part of me that longed for something different. Eventually, I decided to return to the service industry and give bartending a shot. And now, I bring a little retail savvy to the bartending game, because great customer service never goes out of style.



Photos by Rob Walker

I've been behind the bar for almost seven years now. I got my start, downtown, at Front Street Bar, soaking up every bit of knowledge I could from that iconic 206 spot. After that, I worked at various restaurants in both downtown and midtown, honing my craft and finding my voice behind the bar. Then I found Trattoria, where I've been for almost three years now. And honestly? It feels like home. The owner, my coworkers, the patrons – they make me feel like family, and they are the ones that keep a smile on my face (sometimes with a little sass).

Something people may not know about me is that I've been sober for over two years. Alcohol and I had a toxic relationship, and breaking up was the best thing I could have done. Believe it or not, my sobriety has made me a better bartender than I could have ever imagined. It's given me focus, clarity, and a fresh perspective on the craft I love.

Looking back, I'm now the same age Mike was when I met him. And guess what? I became the bartender I dreamed of being all those years ago (maybe with a little extra flair). So, if you're wondering whether you can change direction or chase a dream, trust me: you can. My story is proof that you really can do anything you set your mind to. Life changes, you adapt, and when you do it with heart, you can have everything you've ever wanted. Don't settle for less than what lights you up. Show the world your sparkle!

Today, I'm blessed, thankful, humble, and yeah, still a little sassy. And I wouldn't have it any other way. ✦

Trattoria Pizzeria
128 E. Front Street, Hattiesburg
trattoriapizzeriams.com



SUNKISSED SCANDAL

- 1 ounce mezcal
- 1 ounce reposado tequila
- 1 ounce lime juice
- 1 ounce passion fruit puree
- 2 ounces Ruby Red Grapefruit Juice
- 2 dashes cayenne pepper
- Splash of ginger beer
- Lime wheel, for garnish
- Salt and Tajin, for rim

Combine mezcal, tequila, lime juice, passion fruit puree, grapefruit juice, and cayenne pepper in a cocktail shaker, fill with ice, and shake. Rim a glass with a mixture of salt and Tajin and fill with ice. Strain cocktail shaker over ice. Top with a splash of ginger beer, and then garnish with lime.