

Austin's Own Lil' Ms. Sunshine is All Grown Up

Story and Photos by Susan M. Cashin



Paula Angerstein enjoys a *Tres Amigas* in her garden.

Paula Angerstein, owner and creator of Paula's Texas Orange and Paula's Texas Lemon Liqueurs thinks outside the bottle and lights up Austin's social and foodie scenes with her zest for life and signature spirits.

UPON MEETING PAULA ANGERSTEIN there are several iconic details one notices immediately. For her, orange or yellow or a combination thereof is the “new black”. She’s one of the few women who truly can pull them off. The colors reflect not only her warm and bright personality, but she utilizes them to craft herself into a walking, talking avatar for her signature liqueurs – Paula’s Texas Orange and Paula’s Texas Lemon. She’s seen at events everywhere pouring and delighting a packed crowd hovering around her station, sampling her zesty liqueurs and the signature cocktails she creates with them. She is Austin’s own lil’ Ms. Sunshine, putting her heart and soul in every bottle for us to enjoy.

Angerstein did not start out to be the first woman distiller in Texas and the second after Tito Beveridge of Tito’s Handmade Vodka fame. “I was raised in the small town of Cuero, TX (the “Turkey Capital of the World”) that is about two hours from Austin. It had a population of 6,000 at the time, about the same number of students that live in Jester Hall at UT,” quips

Angerstein. She grew up with her parents, two sisters and a brother on a farm outside of town. As Angerstein bluntly states, “It was kind of boring. We had a good high school football team, (named the Cuero Gobblers, of course), and I had a short stint on the drill team.”

The youngest and precocious to boot, she skipped a grade and ended up attending The University of Texas at Austin at 17. “I finally decided upon a journalism degree and the bulk of my college career at UT was at *The Daily Texan*.” She eventually rose to the position of managing editor which is no small feat. With the end of college looming on the horizon she saw a disturbing trend. “My friends ahead of me started graduating and were not having a lot of luck finding jobs in ➤

Tres Amigas – a signature summer sparkler to enjoy while reading *austinwoman*

Pour into a champagne flute the following:

- 2 oz. of chilled Prosecco – a favorite is Loredan Gasparini Prosecco Venegazzu
- 1 oz. Paula's Texas Lemon Liqueur
- 1 oz. Peach Nectar

Find a comfortable spot, put your feet up and read your favorite magazine – (*austinwoman* we hope). And make sure you share this lovely concoction with the *mejor amigas* in your life.



journalism. You could get “free” internships. My closest friends moved to Lufkin because that’s the best they could do.” Things looked grim. Seeing the writing on the wall she began to look for another career avenue. “UT, at the time, offered a bachelor of arts in computer science, so all my previous course work counted as applicable credits. It took me an extra year to complete the computer science coursework and I graduated with journalism and computer science degrees.”

Landing her first job, Angerstein was off to southern California and the onset of a two-decade career in high tech. Eventually, she found herself in a very specialized field known as international standards where she met her life partner, Paul Grosso, at an industry conference. One of the founders of Arbor Text, a document publishing company, Grosso followed Angerstein upon her relocation assignment to England to serve her company’s European clientele.

Foodie devotees, they visited the culinary meccas of Europe. With Angerstein’s German/Czech and Grosso’s Italian heritages, they soaked up the regional cuisines of Europe while on business trips. “We were hardly ever in England and started to go to Italy for fun because it was so easy to get there,” explains Angerstein. It was in Tuscany where the foodie bug bit hard. At the end of their first visit, Angerstein told Grosso, “I’m going to break into tears unless I just tell myself that I can come back!” They made a vow to come back every year for the rest of their lives. For 11 years, the vow was kept but eventually other adventures intrigued them. “We still love to go there, but it’s a bit overly touristy and it’s not as quaint or as charm-

ing as it was.” It’s a sad fate that we often find a place and then watch helplessly as it is loved to death.

In 1996 they moved back to Austin and Angerstein rode the high tech wave with Vignette and experienced the industry’s wipeout in 2000. “I got laid off. It’s hard to imagine that I did nothing for two years. To continue at the level I was at would have meant a move back to California.” The thought of traveling for business again and the feeling that she had taken this career as far as she wanted to go left her burned out and depressed.

Like many in Austin at that time, Angerstein was at a loss. “It was a pathetic time.” Along with thousands of others in the same predicament, Angerstein thought of volunteering. “You couldn’t even get a volunteer gig for anything or anywhere. People were so desperate to have something to do.” With Angerstein not out working in the community and Grosso’s business being home-based, their social life ground to a halt. “We weren’t meeting people and we weren’t traveling as much anymore.” They joined several dinner groups and civic organizations but felt on the outside looking in. The realization hit them that what they were looking for was a hands-on connection with the growing Austin food scene.

“I can tell you the exact ‘Aha!’ moment,” says Angerstein. “We were on a drive trip killing time and I said, ‘Wonder if we can sell that limoncello I make?’ My sister, Linda had brought me a magazine that showed how to make limoncello. I decided I would make some for Valentine’s Day and surprise Paul.” She made a batch and it turned out to be surprisingly good. On that epiphanic drive she also recalls saying, “How hard could it be?” She was soon to find out.

Angerstein places several people in her thanks and gratitude column for helping

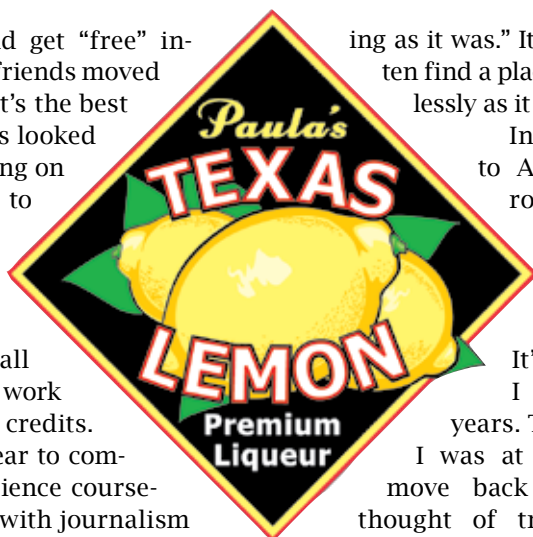
her get through the juggernaut of local, state and federal regulations and getting her liqueurs on the shelves. “I always say Tito Beveridge was the machete hacking through the jungle and I was just the lawnmower following behind. When Tito started the process to obtain a distiller’s permit, the Texas Alcohol Beverage Commission didn’t even have a form.” She sings the praises of Betty Lacy at the TABC for helping to make sure all the paperwork was filled out properly. Russell Smith, formerly a manager at Twin Liquors, gave her the idea to produce and market Paula’s Texas Orange first. This idea helped to position her in the marketplace and grow the brand more quickly. Five years ago limoncello was not very well known and she could best the low end and weak-flavored, mass-produced orange liqueurs and cut into the market share of Cointreau and Grand

Marnier with high quality and lower prices. With a recommendation from Smith, David Jabour, president of Twin Liquors, agreed to take on the product and steered Angerstein to a distribution relationship with Republic National Distributing Company.

So while going through all the setup machinations, Angerstein furiously worked on developing an orange-cello (*arancello* in Italian). As with her limoncello-styled liqueur, the peel is removed from the orange with no pith. Next, it is soaked in grain alcohol for a pre-determined length of time and simple syrup is added in proportions to create an 80 proof liqueur. Paula’s Texas Lemon Liqueur comes in at 60 proof.

Both liqueurs have a fresh, zesty taste with no bitterness, artificial colorings or flavorings. They will become a secret ingredient to send any cocktail recipe calling for the fresh natural flavors of lemon or orange peel rocketing into the realm of the sublime. Add Paula’s Texas Orange to your mimosa for a Texas two-step of orange flavors dancing on your palate with sparkling

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Limoncello is often called the national liqueur of Italy. Used as a digestive after meals it is always served chilled. Consisting only of lemon rind, sugar, water and alcohol it is sweet and refreshing on its own or mixed with other ingredients.

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focused and to offer personal attention to her clients and staff.

"It's nothing for Samia to cook up a whole bunch of food and bring it in for the staff," says Nanette. "She really cares about our needs as much as she cares about the needs of her clients. I've worked for her on-and-off for years and she really cares about her staff."

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Only her twins elicit as much passion from Dhawan as her new enterprise. The six-year-olds came into her life just as she was facing a nest left empty by her grown son and daughter.

Earlier this year, because Dhawan had been on the road so much, her "babies, the loves of my life," were at her other residence in India. "They love it there. They're very well settled and looked after," she said. "But my husband still laughs at me because I call to talk to them." Wait a minute. Why would he find a mother calling her young

children so amusing? With a mischievous twinkle in her eye, Dhawan shares photos of her younger "son" and "daughter." Simba and Nala are adorable Pomeranians. Dhawan visited her twins a couple of times earlier in the year, and promised that when she is less busy, she'll bring them home to Austin. Don't tell the pups, but given her drive, they might be staying half a world away for a while longer. ★

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effervescence. Paula's Texas Lemon delivers a kick to any baked goods, tart, custard or lemon cream topping crying out for more lemony liveliness. Out of lemons or oranges? Too tired to peel or find the micro-grater in your cluttered utensil drawer? Pull out your Paula's Texas Orange or Lemon from the freezer and splash on those layers of liquid lemon and orange.

Launched in 2003, Paula's Texas Orange took Austin by storm and has conquered the state. Unfortunately for the rest of the world, these liqueurs are available only in Texas. Tasting after tasting, the fresh, hand-crafted quality places her products at the top of the list. Angerstein and Grosso tirelessly promote their products as well as use them to help many worthy causes especially in the central Texas area.

At a recent event, Angerstein was situated next to one of the owners of Dr. Kracker. A native of Germany, when introduced to her, he mentioned that her last name meant "stony field" in German. "I thought this was kind of prophetic because I have always admired the owner of Stonyfield Farm yogurt," says Angerstein. "I read an interesting comment he made. He was, in a manner, apologizing for being so rich and

selling his company to Dannon for millions of dollars. Up until then he had been an activist whose only goal was to make a yogurt that was good for people. But he said, 'I look at it this way. I've done a lot and can feel good about it. Now I can decide how that money is spent and where it goes.'

"I found this inspirational because I don't need a whole lot more than I have right now, but I would like to be able to control one day where millions of dollars might go for worthy causes." A grin spreads across her face and one could swear that the room begins to glow. Angerstein hops up and goes into the kitchen. "I've got some peach nectar, a wonderful *prosecco* and Paula's Texas Lemon. Let's play and make a signature refreshing summer drink for all the women (and men) who love to read *austinwoman* magazine!" A day without Angerstein and her liqueurs truly is a day without sunshine. ★

MORE INFO

Paula's Texas Orange and Paula's Texas Lemon Liqueurs can be found at all SPEC'S, Grape Vine Market and Twin Liquors locations. For more information and recipes: www.paulastexasorange.com

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one side of each *injera*, making an ideally-textured surface for soaking up all the dripping sauces and for scooping up the many stews.

Its status in Ethiopian cuisine is also for practical reasons. Primarily grown in Ethiopia and bordering Eritrea, teff survives in high temperatures, has a quick growing time and high yield. Now grown in the U.S., its nutritional value is making it

increasingly common in stores. Besides being gluten-free, teff is high in calcium, iron, fiber and protein, is a good source of several minerals, and is low in fat.

It probably isn't the nutrition that keeps a wide-range of customers - young, old, professors, students, hippies, and vegetarians - coming back. Sharing food from a single plate and getting to eat with your hands can't help but lead to people coming together and spending extra time at the table just talking.

"Almost everybody likes the food and they keep coming. I really want to expand because there are people who come from San Antonio every week or twice a week...and from Temple...and Georgetown," Kassaye said.

Different types of expansion are always in her plans, including writing a vegetarian cookbook and expanding her pre-packaged teas and sauces to include other items. Having a unique Austin restaurant that is also succeeding is sure to bring lots of press, but talking in front of others isn't something Kassaye really enjoys. She readily acknowledges being very shy - it's really only when sitting with her family that Kassaye begins to laugh and chat, but a wish to accomplish more is beginning to win out and, of course, the people who are such a part of every meal keep asking for more.

"One thing I want to do that people keep asking for is a cooking class. I kept saying 'No, I'm too shy, they won't understand my English,' but I'm thinking I would like to," Kassaye said. ★

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