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seven interviews

cleo rocos



cleo rocos

shares the secret of
how TV stars are partying
hangover-free...

The last time I chatted with the gorgeous Cleo Rocos she told me that she was working on her own brand of tequila and as a spirits judge herself, we expected great things from her! We're delighted to say that she's not only launched her brand, but her tequila range has already won coveted awards and gained a host of celebrity fans!

Cleo's 100% Agave AquaRiva® Tequila range is made from hand-selected eight-year-old blue agave plants and volcanic spring water from the highlands of Jalisco, Mexico and has been awarded the Masters Medal and a Gold Medal – an internationally recognised sign of the highest quality – enabling Cleo to proudly declare it, "The world's best tequila." AquaRiva® Tequila can be sipped and savoured as a short drink, but additionally for cocktail enthusiasts, Cleo has developed AquaRiva® Organic Agave Syrup, already in use in bars, restaurants and clubs nationwide, enabling drinkers to create sugar-free, mineral-laden versions of traditional cocktails such as Margaritas, Cosmopolitans and Mojitos, which again can be enjoyed entirely hangover-free with greatly reduced calories.

In this interview Cleo tells us about the inspiration behind AquaRiva®, the reaction from her celebrity friends and 'converts' and her plans for the States. Read on to find out why this delicious drink is the party secret of so many stars...

Interview by Katie McPhillimey

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Cleo, the last time we chatted you told me you were launching your own brand of tequila, which you now have, tell us about the journey and how you came up with that stylish name?

Oh you are lovely! Well I wanted to put everything 'on' the bottle and 'in' the bottle that made you feel fabulous, feel good! The painting on the label, the lovely picture of the boy and the girl on the wing of the airplane is from a young artist I met on the train, someone had asked me for my autograph and he asked if that happened often and so we started chatting. He was a 17-year-old art student, a very smart, but slightly eccentric looking fellow, so we chatted and I gave him my card and said I'd love to see his work. About 18 months later I was creating the tequila and decided I wanted to commission him to create the label, I gave him a rundown of how I wanted it to feel and he went away and created the painting, which I have and which is on the label! The name AquaRiva® comes from when I was a little girl. My father was friendly with Onassis and when we were little, my brothers and I went for dinner on the Christina and one of the boats that would take you from the port to the yacht was Aquariva. It was one of those beautiful launches like Sophia Loren used to ride on, you know, one of those '50's Capri launches, which is how I wanted the tequila to feel.

They are gorgeous stories, how lucky is that art student to have such a commission? What an amazing start to anyone's career!

He's a really talented artist, his name is Jamie Stiby-Harris; he's a real talent. I've subsequently bought several pieces of his art and I'm trying to help him with his career and introduce him to people in London.

The brand has been inspired by all things glamorous and you had some very glamorous friends to help you launch the tequila too, didn't you?

Well the thing is I'm not part of a big business, everything that's there is what I've put in, so it's 100 percent my business, I don't have a big PR department or anything like that. So I invited people for Bongalee dinners and made them AquaRiva® cocktails that don't give you a hangover and everyone just loved them and then if they wanted to tweet anything or write about them then they could. If people like something, then they like it and talk about it! It's lovely to have all these fabulous people around a table and having such a wonderful time and I never ask the press, as these are my friends and I never want to constrict them in anyway, so it's a bit like an 'anti-press launch party!' As they're friends I'd rather they enjoy something and write about it themselves than have the press steal a picture of them as they leave a venue.

As a connoisseur of tequila you must have been very strict on yourself in creating AquaRiva®?

It took over 11 months working with a master blender, Carlos Perez. I've already given master classes in tequila and I'm a spirits judge across the board, but with tequila,

“I've been to the annual dinner of Cleo Rocos' Tequila Society and tested the assurance that large amounts of pure 100% agave tequila don't induce a hangover. 'Tis true. Pure agave tequila leaves you as fresh and bright as the dew on a morning daisy-button. Plus it's actually very nice.”

Derren Brown

I and many others notice that there can be a very harsh burn, which I don't think is pleasant, so I wanted to minimise the burn and leave this lovely warmth with a hint of citrus flavours. That's a very long process to get right, reducing the burn and also reducing the methanol to a very, very low level so really reducing the hangover people experience – I mean you'd have to go out of your way to get one! [laughing]

When we last chatted you gave me a recipe for a low-calorie tequila cocktail and to hear that your tequila cocktails also leave you with no hangover... that must be the reason why they are so popular with celebrities?

Yes that's the thing! I have five or six recipes for different cocktails, the most popular always being the AquaRiva® Margarita which includes the organic agave syrup replacing the triple sec and Cointreau and is the secret ingredient which means you're not going to get the hangover or that horrible drunk feeling. There are still calories in this drink, but not as many as there would be in a normal Margarita.

You've had some major success with AquaRiva® already as it's available in some great outlets and in Richard Branson's Virgin Clubhouses!

Yes, it's in the Virgin Clubhouses and it's available in Gatwick, Heathrow and JFK and in the duty-free and we're also going 'on' the planes – we're going through the system for that now, which is great! We had an inaugural flight and we invited Keith Lemon, Derren Brown, Richard Arnold and Richard Branson of course and several press and they all drank tequilas, the no-hangover Margaritas, all the way over and they drank the plane dry of tequila. No one had a hangover and everyone felt fabulous, so people were able to experience it for themselves.

It's also available in some great High Street outlets isn't it?

From the 5th November it will be available in Waitrose, from the last week of October it's in Sainsbury's and it's already in Harvey Nichols. It's also available in lots of great restaurants, bars, clubs like Gilgamesh and private members clubs like The Brompton Club, so we're in many great places which has generally happened by word of mouth – for me it's really important that people live the experience! I prefer people to try something and like it and talk about it rather than pay for a poster or billboard!

Have you converted many friends, people that weren't tequila lovers before?

Holly Willoughby! We were out for Keith Lemon's birthday, he's one of my oldest friends, it was a Monday lunchtime, Holly had to do This Morning the next day and she said, “Oh it's such a shame I can't drink anything as I have to be up early tomorrow,” and I said, “You can, you can drink this and I wouldn't lead you down the path!” We ended up finishing very late at night and the next day she was up and off to work and couldn't believe she hadn't got a hangover! So she's given everyone a hip flask on This Morning and now she doesn't drink wine anymore, she drinks tequila and the no-hangover cocktails which really does change your life, you feel happy and can have a drink with friends and then wake up the next day feeling absolutely 100 percent! She even got Phillip Schofield to try it for himself and he tweeted, “Remarkable! @hollywills was right, I can confirm the #AquaRivatequilaexperiment was a success!”



Cleo Rocos

“The Bellagio has actually approached me and keep re-approaching me saying, “When can you come over with it?” So I'm planning a Vegas trip...”

You're a judge yourself, how does it feel to have your own drink win some very special awards?

It's such a good question. I can't explain how excited and honoured I feel! I really do feel so honoured as I put every bit of heart and soul into it. There's no bigger thrill for me than seeing people have a good time drinking AquaRiva® and know that the next day they're going to feel fine! I dread to think of people drinking champagne and wine, drinking a headache basically, so to be awarded medals for AquaRiva® has really just blown me away.

What's next for you?

We're going to the US!

They do love their spirits over there, but they are a hard crew to crack too, aren't they?

Yes they are, but we've actually been approached by people in Vegas and LA, which is great. The Bellagio has actually approached me and keep re-approaching me saying, “When can you come over with it?” So I'm planning a Vegas trip, but of course the real excitement is being in Waitrose and Sainsbury's, that is massive for AquaRiva® as there are a lot

of tequilas they could stock, but it's AquaRiva® that will be on the shelves!

You've had a lifetime of achievements and a great career, but do you think of all your achievements, AquaRiva® has to be the best?

Absolutely yes! I haven't had this drive and excitement about work since I worked with Kenny. Although I work every hour and am technically exhausted, I love it so much! I've also written a book which comes out April 2013, I can't say too much about it yet, but I think in this climate, with all that is happening politically and financially, it's good to know that if you are passionate about something and have the drive you can succeed. People kept saying to me that it wasn't a great time to launch a business, but I didn't listen to them and was determined to bring the brand out.

Sainsbury's, Harvey Nichols and Waitrose will carry AquaRiva® Tequila from November 2012.

For full details please see www.aquariva.co.uk



Cleo's Hangover Free Margarita!

- 50ml 100% Agave AquaRiva® Tequila
- 1-1½ limes, freshly squeezed
- 20ml AquaRiva® Organic Agave Syrup
- Twist of orange peel
- Wedge of lime
- Lots of ice

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