

Local bartenders win national award

Rory Stark, bartender from [Hoot The Redeemer](#) and Caron Richmond, bartender from [Panda & Sons](#), both in Edinburgh, have won a national competition that celebrates creativity within the bartending industry.

The inaugural Punch Pong competition, hosted by syrup producer MONIN, brings the bartending and hospitality community together to share in the excitement of innovative cocktail making.

As part of their prize, Rory and Caron will head down to MONIN HQ in Bourges, France and Maison Ferrand Plantation HQ in Cognac, France, to learn first-hand from the brands' experts about how the products are made and how different mixes are created.

Dipping her toe into the hospitality scene as a student in Aberdeen, looking for extra pocket money, Caron started life in the nightclub scene before moving her way up in the industry, working in a range of bars and pubs around the city. Caron also took her expertise up to the Balblair Distillery in The Highlands as a tour guide, before relocating to Edinburgh last year and starting at Panda & Sons in Edinburgh New Town.

Rory also started life in the Aberdeen hospitality scene in

his late teens, working in restaurant kitchens before realising he was better suited in front of house. From here, Rory started working with drinks and his passion for bartending grew. When he relocated to Edinburgh at 21, he started working in bars and found an affinity with the hospitality scene where he felt he could truly be himself.

Rory and Caron competed alongside 50 other entrants. Across six regional heats, gathered in teams of two and, armed with bottles of MONIN syrup and Plantation Rum, they created an innovative and delicious low ABV rum punch. Entrants' creations were judged by a panel of industry experts from MONIN and Plantation Rum.

Following Rory and Caron's win at the Edinburgh heat, the bartenders attended the final at Barrio, East Shoreditch, London, where all the heat winners plus two wild card teams, went head-to-head in a number of Punch Pong games, to crown an overall winner. All profits from purchased drinks were donated to The Drinks Trust, to the value of £1,000.

The winners had this to say about their Punch Pong experience: "We're feeling electric! Punch Pong has been such a fun and inclusive way of getting to know people in the hospitality industry better and celebrating something that we're all passionate about – bartending. The competition felt so different. Bartending competitions can be stressful, so it was fun having one where people could come along, have a laugh and make some new pals – all while throwing balls in tiny cups!"

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