

FREE

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austin woman

Margaret
JABOUR
of Twin Liquors



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THE ENTERTAINING ISSUE

+ PLUS

Soirée Stars

Holiday Gifts

Tips + Recipes

Margaret Jabour, *Uncorked*

The spirited co-owner of Austin's Twin Liquors says achieving balance in your life, just like the blending in a good bottle of wine, is what makes a business successful.

Story by Nancy Miller Barton
Photos by John Langford + Courtesy of Margaret Jabour

“A S A 7-YEAR-OLD GIRL, IT WAS FASCINATING for me to be able to be a part of the business.” Margaret Jabour was a hard worker from early on. “This was Austin when Congress Avenue was everything ... Sixth Street was a focal point.” And her family’s business was in the midst of that hub. It’s the kind of business that this second grader fell in love with, however, that may surprise you. Her father, Theodore Jabour, son of a Lebanese immigrant, owned a liquor store in downtown Austin. It was called Jabour’s Package Store and called 407 East Sixth Street home.

What follows is the intriguing story of an Austin institution with a quirky name. That 7-year-old daughter is today the co-owner of Twin Liquors, a liquor store that has evolved from a post-prohibition family business to 55 stores across Central Texas still run by family. A group of shops that takes pride in being more than a place to pick up a six-pack, but a source of education and elegance. A place where even “Norm” would feel welcome because ‘everyone knows your name.’ Twin Liquors, an Austin institution that is constantly, quietly, giving back. A family business owned by

Margaret Jabour and her brother David Jabour. A business that’s such a big part of the family it seems to fill its own seat at the dinner table.

On a sunny, cool morning in November, Margaret Jabour sits at a corner table at the Four Seasons’ Trio Restaurant in downtown Austin recounting the tale of a business that’s also the tale of an Austin family, and a reflection of the times. This woman who seems more like party hostess than interview subject slyly says, “This is going to unveil the secret of Twin Liquors,” – but first, about that history.

Jabour’s Package Store was part liquor store, part drug store and perhaps best of all, had a soda fountain in the back. “Sixth Street in those days ...” reminisces Jabour, “... there were no shopping malls, no drug stores.” We’re talking Austin in the mid-1960s. The area was sprinkled with family mainstays. Long time Austinites will remember Laves Jewelry also on Sixth, kin to Benold’s Jewelry that’s still around town today. For Margaret Jabour, these families and their customers were her playmates, more intriguing than any playground. “When I was not >>



Toasting the season and another successful year are Twin Liquors power female trio (also sometimes referred to around town as "Charlie's Angels"): Margaret Jabour (center); Brenda Audino, sommelier + wine manager (left); and Sandra Spalding, retail sales and community events manager (right).

Photo by John Langford. Assisted by Lance Rosenfield.

Flowers courtesy of Verbena Floral Design.

Styling + location courtesy of Sylvia + David Jabour; Margaret Jabour.





LEFT TOP: Jabour has lived in Austin nearly all her life. She doesn't like to reveal how long that is exactly saying, "Age is just a number." She's shown here with her older brother Ralph and their father Theodore. LEFT MIDDLE: Margaret and her dear brother Ralph on the family Christmas card. The siblings were just three years apart. LEFT BOTTOM: Family is essential to what makes Twin Liquors a success. Margaret Jabour (in red) is pictured here with her mother and two brothers. She had the drive for retail early on, working in her father's store at age seven. She opened a business of her own by the time she turned 16.

in school," she says, "I enjoyed going down and working at the soda fountain. I took control at that soda fountain ... I loved to be around people, I loved meeting people." She said she had no interest in things like playing Barbies, which occupied the imaginations of other girls her age. Instead she says, "When I was at home I was playing store. Retail was in my blood for sure. As I got a little older," she sits a little taller, "I was promoted to the drug side (of the business)."

Life seemed almost sitcom ideal. Margaret's mom stayed home, while her dad ran the package store. Theodore and Elaine Jabour had three children; Ralph was the eldest, Margaret was three years younger, and finally there was little brother David. The trio would walk back and forth to Ridgetop Elementary School in their Hyde Park neighborhood. "I remember coming home from school," Jabour says, "you could smell that aroma of mom's cooking." What may have been on the stove hints at a rich family heritage – Elaine Jabour was born in Lebanon. Margaret Jabour's paternal grandfather also came to this country from Lebanon as a young boy. By the time Margaret and her brothers were growing up,

the family lived just a hike away from Hancock Shopping Center at 41st and Red River. It was a very different Austin, TX in the 1960s. Consider this: Jabour remembers traffic on nearby I-35 would literally have to stop to let the train go by. A simpler time, meaning, at seven years old, Margaret Jabour could work in her dad's store. By the time Jabour turned eight, however, her big brother got sick.

"Ralph had rheumatic fever as a young child." You can see the pain in her eyes as she remembers. Her comments stick to the factual. "He developed a heart condition." Jabour's older brother was just 11 years old when he got sick. Rheumatic fever, a much feared childhood illness, has thankfully become fairly rare since the '60s with the advent of antibiotics. A recent article in *The New York Times* describes rheumatic fever as "an autoimmune reaction and harmful inflammation of the heart and its valves and joints." In the '60s and early '70s, however, when Ralph Jabour was a little boy, the illness was terrifying. Jabour offers only hints saying, "you can imagine you're a child and getting rheumatic fever in your household" – especially if you're the little sister watching from the sidelines.



Guess What We're Having for Dinner?

The Jabour family doesn't wait for the holidays to sit and break bread together. Each and every Sunday you'll find three generations gathered around someone's dining table talking business and enjoying each other's company.

Over the holidays they uncork holiday favorites. Margaret Jabour shares some favorites from their holiday meals along with wine suggestions.

Christmas Eve

New England Clam Chowder with Chardonnay

SUGGESTION: Mer Soleil Chardonnay Silver or Geode Chardonnay



Christmas Day

Appetizers with Champagne. Jabour adds however that, "Champagne should be enjoyed every day as every day is a blessing."

SUGGESTION: Veuve Clicquot or Moët White Star Champagnes

For dinner they'll have Prime Rib with Cabernet

SUGGESTION: Joseph Phelps Innisfree Cabernet, which Jabour calls "a lovely deep cabernet."



Wine Tasting 101 – or the Secret Behind Sniff, Sip, Swish, Swallow

Super Quick Tips offered by Twin Liquors Sommelier Brenda Audino

STEP 1 – Appearance

Really look at the wine. Tilt it to the side; hold it against a white background. Is it clear or hazy? If it's clear and bright it means good health.

STEP 2 – Smell

Quick sniff for first impressions. Swirl (“not only fun but a sure way to impress your friends”) to release aromas. Nose in glass, quick deep sniffs. Do you smell fruit, flora? Vegetables or spice? There are no wrong answers.

STEP 3 – Taste

(Finally!) Take a sip and swish it around in your mouth, like you're chewing, so it hits all the taste receptors in your mouth. The tip of your tongue is where you detect sweetness. White wines have more acidity, which gives them crispness. Tannin in reds offers a “feel” in your mouth. It can leave your mouth feeling dry or possibly smooth and velvety.

STEP 4 – Conclusion

Do you like it? Sommelier Brenda Audino says the best way to get good at wine tasting is to “practice, practice, practice.”



See more photos of Margaret Jabour online:
www.austinwomanmagazine.com

Holiday Party Tips

(excerpted from Twin Liquors website blog by Sandra Spalding)

Hostess with the Most-ess

- When planning holiday cocktails, figure on a glass of wine per person per hour
- If you're serving cocktails, make a few big pitchers ahead of time, without ice, so you'll have time to mingle.
- Consider serving simple holiday drinks like a Velvet Amber (Champagne, Grand Marnier and cranberry juice)

Being a Guest Worthy of Repeat Invitation

- A bottle of red wine is a sophisticated hostess gift.
- If you bring two bottles you can share one at the party and they'll have a gift for later.
- Champagne or a cordial are also festive choices.



With that illness her big brother became frail, and his heart weakened. He had to be home-schooled, and Margaret Jabour turned to her work in the family business.

“As a 10-year-old girl I got promoted to stocking all the drug items on the drugstore side of the store,” remembers Jabour. “At Christmas time it was wrapping gifts, and selling toys and perfumes.” Fast-forward a few years and Jabour has even more business savvy. At 13 years old she starts work for another relative in his car stereo business. (We're talking about the days of 8-tracks here.) Jabour laughs, remembering how he let other employees go, leaving her, a 13-year-old, in charge of the place. Eventually Jabour managed to turn what she learned there into a business of her own, opening a car stereo shop with her mother's brother who'd just moved to town from Lebanon. “I've always had a lot in my life, I've always juggled a lot in my life, and it's never been calm, tranquil.” She smiles. And juggle she did. Jabour went on to graduate in the top 2% in her class at Lanier High School, and later studied business management at The University of Texas Business School (she even tossed around the idea at one point of opening a fine clothing shop). >>>



ABOVE LEFT: Jabour says she learned “old world hospitality” from her mother who always made guests feel welcome and warm when they visited the Jabour home. Today three generations of the Jabour family gather every Sunday for lunch or dinner. Margaret Jabour is pictured here with her mom and niece Gabrielle, as part of the St. Elias Church Mediterranean Festival. The family attends the Orthodox Church in downtown Austin and co-sponsor the annual wine + food event. ABOVE RIGHT: Jabour is a single mother with two boys, Joseph Salome (15) and Michael Salome (17), both now in high school. She says she prides herself on being a mom the kids can talk to. She relishes the responsibility of juggling motherhood and business, saying both need to be nurtured.



A Short History Lesson

When Prohibition ended in 1933, our country, which had been dry for 14 years, was again able, and ready, to drink a beer, or raise a glass in celebration – legally. The climate was ripe – a mid-1930s Austin featured 26 liquor stores on Sixth Street alone. Over two-dozen liquor stores at Austin's core and Theodore Jabour's father, Margaret's grandpa, owned one of them. By the time Margaret Jabour and her brothers were young adults with thoughts about continuing the family tradition, opening their own business seemed logical. So in 1982, the three Jabour siblings decided to stay in the business they grew up with. "Let's continue the business that Dad started," Jabour remembers the

Twin Liquors and its owners Margaret and David Jabour have been named United States Retailer of the Year by *Market Watch* magazine. Jabour and her staff beamed as they talked about the honor given by this magazine for industry professionals. (*Market Watch* is a sister publication to *Wine Spectator* and *Cigar Aficionado* magazines.)



discussions, "but on another level. Let's do fine wine. Let's do fine liquors." Their shop would be right around the corner, at 7th and Red River, and they'd name it after their father Theodore, and his brother Arthur. They'd name it Twin Liquors.

Remember Jabour's allusion to, "the secret of Twin Liquors?" That secret evolves from family, specifically Jabour's brother Ralph. While the stage was set in 1982 and the Jabour brothers and sister are ready to open the Twin Liquors of their dreams, there was a problem. Ralph's heart had become weaker and weaker because of his childhood bout with rheumatic fever. He'd studied to become a biochemist, but along the way, he also had to endure three open-heart surgeries (the first at just 16 years old). Despite his limited stamina, he turned his love of science into the joy of cooking. As Margaret Jabour explains it, "When he came back from his heart surgeries ... he became the most magnificent gourmet cook." Ralph Jabour was a scientist by trade who grew up in and around a package goods store. "The biochem-

ist in him loved the wine and food pairings; so here's the secret of where my passion unfolds," Jabour says with a twinkle in her eye. Ralph Jabour provided his sister and brother with a vision: "Wouldn't it be great to really do a liquor and wine business in Austin and to really educate the public about wine and food pairings?"

"The industry was looked at as taboo," says Jabour. But she and her siblings felt, "if we would do it as third generation, we could evolve the business into a department store kind of business," and things would change. Her father warned it could be tough. "Dad said we'd have challenges with premium goods. This was Austin, TX in the 1980s," she says, "not the Austin it is today." But the idea to open an elegant store grew, "so when you walk into a Twin Liquors there are ceramic tile

Passionate Community Partner

Twin Liquors can hardly say no, offering help to as many as 500 area nonprofit organizations in a given year. "Giving back to the community" is actually part of the Twin Liquors business creed. Their participation can mean donating an auction item or providing some or all of the beverages. They often help with food and wine pairings and manpower.

Here is just a partial list:

American Heart Association

Austin Lyric Opera

Austin Museum of Art

Austin Symphony

Ballet Austin

Caritas

Circle of Friends

Health Alliance for Austin Musicians

Junior League of Austin

KLRU

The Long Center

Ronald McDonald House

Seton Hospitals

United Way

Wonders and Worries

And many more ...

Powerful impact. Whether making an event more enjoyable or helping raise funds Margaret Jabour is committed to making a difference. Pat Byrum, former marketing director for the American Heart Association, says Margaret Jabour is well aware that also means time. Byrum says Jabour offers her own committed heart to any effort. Jabour has served as past chair of the Heart Association Gala. The cause is near to Jabour after the heartbreaking loss of her brother because his own heart was weakened by illness. Byrum says, "The second you meet her, you know she is a beautiful person on the outside, but she's also beautiful on the inside." Additionally, Twin Liquors has been very involved in the Go Red for Women campaign. Pat Byrum says it's obvious Margaret Jabour appreciates what she has, life, friends, success – you simply sense that when you meet her.



The Jabour siblings have been honored for their professionalism. They are pictured here as part of the Wine and Spirits Guild of America at a conference in California. They were named Top National Industry Retailer. There was a ribbon-cutting ceremony this fall at the opening of their first store in the San Antonio area.

floors, hardwood shelves, nice music playing.” The Jabours’ goals were clear: “Let’s do tastings, along with education ... because (for example) when you go to the cosmetic counter,” (at a department store) “you splash something on so you don’t go home with something you haven’t tried.” Why not do the same with wine and spirits?

And then Ralph died. He was just 35. Ralph Jabour suffered complications after a heart transplant. That was 1990, yet even today Margaret Jabour offers few specifics. She speaks in sentence fragments, holding back tears, trying to keep the pain closed away. “What really ignites me about life,” she starts, but can’t finish. Jabour will say she and her brother were extremely close. “Losing my brother,” she says, “turned me around to becoming the most robust, outgoing person and blessed me with the life I have today.” Losing her big brother has been the driving force for success – the “secret behind Twin Liquors.”

So, on a sunny November day our interview is filled with so much talk that morning has turned to afternoon and “coffee” has turned into lunch. This woman of Lebanese descent, who’s lived most of her life in Austin, is very thoughtful. She thinks about her customers, wants them to feel

welcome and accommodated; she thinks about her co-workers, wanting them to feel heard and to hear their customers; and she thinks about her family, raising two sons alone and caring for aging parents. Margaret Jabour is indeed very thoughtful. She believes you have to live life as if you might not be here tomorrow, or worse, someone you love might not be here tomorrow. That’s not something she just throws out there because it sounds nice. It’s something she’s thought about. It’s something she knows.

Jabour makes a lovely analogy, “Every bottle of liquor or wine has a story behind it.” One thinks of the vineyards, the bottles that bear a family name, “the passion and the drive that makes that perfect bottle ... it’s no different if you are a retailer in the liquor industry, you are touching people’s lives.” She sees the depth and beauty in every effort. Her goal in business is to make every day “extraordinary ... a blessing.” But she also lives her life that way. She may be running and growing a company, but nonetheless starts her day in the five-o’clock hour so that she can fix her teenage boys a real breakfast. She often picks them up after school or will take their friends out for lunch. They know

New Twin Liquors Marketplace

Where

1000 E. 41st Street, in the Hancock Center

What

- Daily wine and spirit tastings
- Wine Bar
- Wine Cellar
- Cigar Humidor
- Space for wine and food pairing classes, and a dining room with guest chefs



Behind the scenes: Margaret Jabour and her brother David grew up around the corner from the new Marketplace, in the Hyde Park neighborhood. As kids, the siblings, along with their brother Ralph, would walk over to Hancock Center to shop and hang out. They are hoping to continue that small town feeling and the warmth of being a neighborhood hub despite the fact that the Marketplace is 15,000 square feet in area. The size however will mean they can offer tastings, lessons with their own sommelier and meals with visiting chefs, all with the feeling of an upscale wine bar.

www.twinliquors.com

they can have her ear. Making life “extraordinary” in little, important, ways.

Jabour beams when talking about her boys. She’s raised them alone since Michael was 3 and Joseph was 1. She and their father divorced because, “my marriage was having trouble,” and that was “not the environment I wanted” for the children. She says simply, “it’s all about my boys.” To hear Jabour describe it, the boys’ lives have been rich. She remembers fondly the days when Michael and Joseph were young and her dad, their grandpa, would pick them up for school. The trio would head off to lunch together. Jabour seems to thrive on the multi-generational influences. Today she says she feels her role is to be Michael and Joseph’s friend – they can talk to her about anything. They also know, however, that despite the highly-charged demands of her work, she’d drop anything for them. “We believe in honesty and communication,” she says of raising teens, “as long as we know the truth, we can work



through anything.” And increasingly there is plenty to “work through.” Jabour has never remarried. Ever thoughtful, she fears she wouldn’t be able to give a new partner the attention he deserves. And, as in so many families these days, Margaret finds herself a member of the so-called “sandwich generation,” watching and caring for her aging parents while raising her two sons.

Sunshine warms the room at the Four Seasons, Lady Bird Lake sparkles outside the window and Margaret Jabour acts as host. She’s most comfortable making others feel welcome. Two of her staff members, Brenda Audino, sommelier and wine manager, and Sandra Spalding, the Twin Liquors retail sales and community events manager, join her and suddenly the magazine interview takes on

the feeling of a girls’ lunch out. There is laughter, tales about this event or that community gathering; they even chat about an upcoming fundraiser. Funny, true story: no sooner do the three finish talking about another Austin institution, Antone’s, and what’s needed to help their upcoming benefit for American Youth Works, then one of the three says, “Oh, look! There’s Susan Antone!” (Clifford Antone’s sister) That happened no fewer than three more times. A person they’d worked with at a charitable fundraiser happened to pass by. These women are seriously connected when it comes to nonprofits and creating lovely occasions. Some folks have dubbed them “Charlie’s Angels.” Desserts are shared, the check grabbed and you can feel what it’s like to be in a world that’s just happy.

Twin Liquors has grown from five stores in 1998 to 55 in 2008 – in just 10 years. Jabour says it’s something every woman can do, with “enough passion and fire.” The fact that she’s achieved so much in a traditionally man’s world, the liquor industry, is something that in a sense she’s prepped all her life for. Consider this: She is the single mother of two teenage boys; she grew up with two brothers, and is the daughter of a father who had a twin brother. The synchronicity there does not escape her. So on this sunny day in November, she lives and enjoys life, because she knows all too well that tomorrow it could all be different. ★

MORE INFO

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