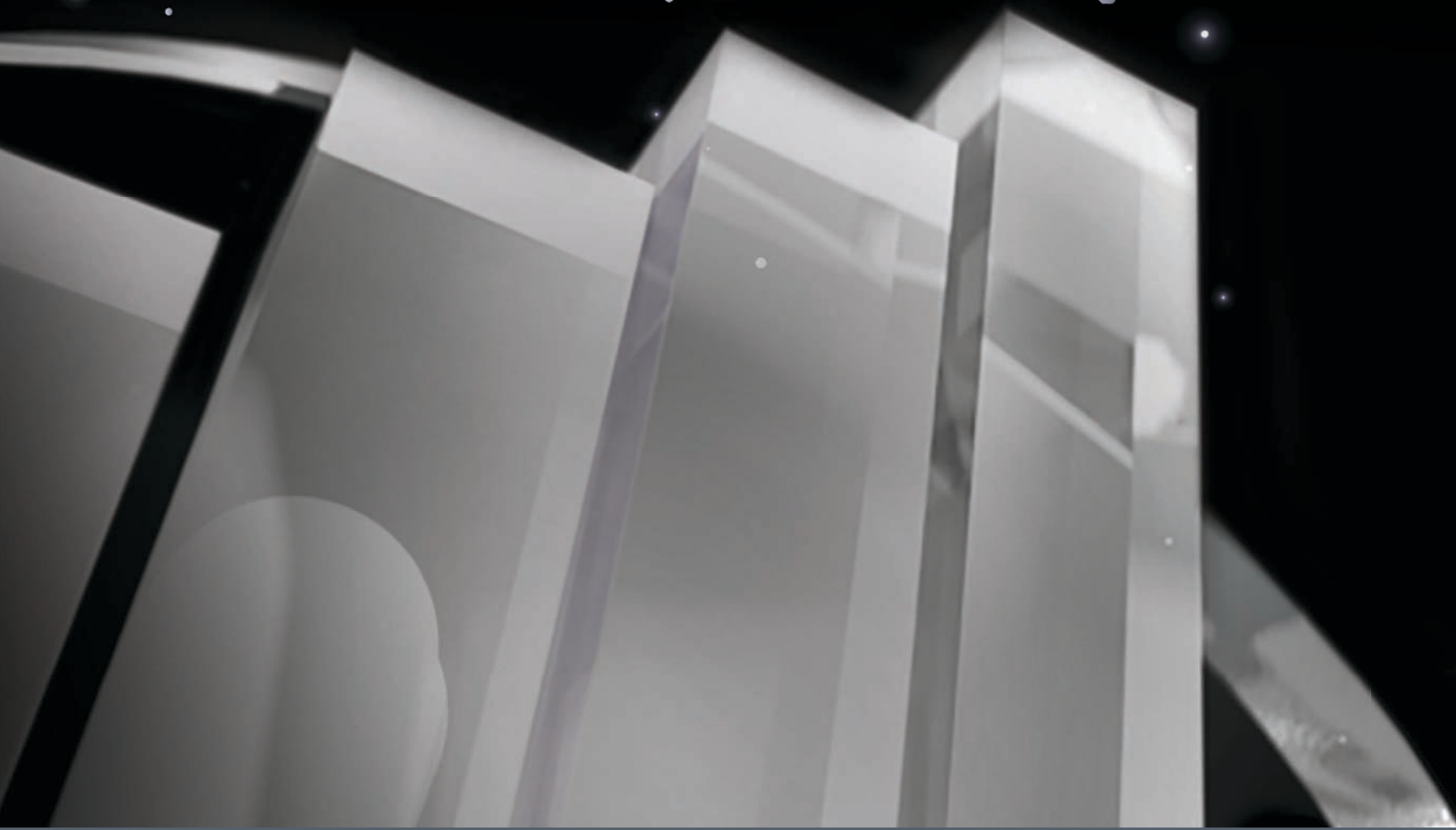


 **EY Entrepreneur
Of The Year®**

Celebrating ambitious entrepreneurs



© 2023 Ernst & Young LLP. All Rights Reserved. US Score no. 20140-231US - ED None

Founded and produced by



Presented by



Regionally sponsored by

Platinum sponsors



Gold sponsors





Letter from the Team



SCOTT A. PORTER
PROGRAM CO-DIRECTOR



BRIDGET AHERN
PROGRAM CO-DIRECTOR



RACHEL RUSSELL
PROGRAM MANAGER



BECCA KINSEY
PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Now in its 37th year, Entrepreneur Of The Year® is the ultimate global competition for transformative entrepreneurs and leaders of high-growth companies who are building a more equitable, sustainable and prosperous world. Throughout the program’s history, more than 11,000 entrepreneurs have been recognized across the US, and it has grown to celebrate business leaders in over 60 countries around the world.

This year we shine a spotlight on 36 outstanding Entrepreneur Of The Year Greater Los Angeles finalists, who were selected by an independent panel of judges based on their demonstration of long-term value through entrepreneurial spirit, purpose, growth and impact, among other core contributions and attributes. Each has demonstrated ambition and a passion for innovation as they reimagine their respective industries and reinvent our future economy.

Regional award winners will be announced on June 22, 2023, at The Beverly Hills Hotel. These winners will be considered for the Entrepreneur Of The Year National Awards, which will be presented in November at the annual Strategic Growth Forum®, the country’s most prestigious gathering of CEOs, high-growth entrepreneurs

and C-suite executives representing global market leaders and professional investment fund managers. The overall National winner will then move on to represent the US at the World Entrepreneur Of The Year® competition in June 2024.

The success of the program relies on the efforts of our independent panel of judges. The panel comprises past Entrepreneur Of The Year Award recipients and civic and community leaders who devote significant effort to review and deliberate the merits of each nominee.

We also would like to thank this year’s sponsors. Our Presenting sponsors are PNC Bank, SAP America and the Kauffman Foundation. In Greater Los Angeles, regional Platinum sponsors include Cresa, Edelman, Marsh and Tangram Interiors, and regional Gold sponsors include Big Picture, Cooley, C-Suite Media and *Los Angeles Business Journal*.

Congratulations again to our amazing finalists this year; we applaud your bold ambitions!

Sincerely,

**Scott A. Porter, Bridget Ahern,
Rachel Russell and Becca Kinsey
Ernst & Young LLP**

We present to you 36 bona fide trailblazers. Congratulations to this year’s remarkable and inspirational finalists, who were selected by an independent panel of judges based on their demonstration of long-term value through entrepreneurial spirit, purpose, growth and impact, among other core contributions and attributes. Regional award winners will be announced at the event on June 22 at The Beverly Hills Hotel.

John Boiler, Glenn Cole, Evin Shutt 72andSunny 24	Lauren Wang The Flex Co. 27	Srin Vishwanath OPN Healthcare 29
Mauricio Umansky The Agency 24	Ben Eachus Flowspace. 27	Candace Nelson, Charles Nelson Pizzana 30
Jared Goodner, Sanjit Mahanti, Prashant Samant Akido 24	Jing Gao Fly by Jing 27	Mark Groden Skyrise. 30
Paulette Pantoja Blu Digital Group 24	John Terzian, Brian Toll The h.wood Group 28	Kent Yu T3 Micro 30
Jon Elliott Bluebeam 26	Ben Jones Haus Labs by Lady Gaga. 28	Amy Liu Tower 28 Beauty 30
Matt Danna Boulevard 26	Henry Hernandez Inter-Con Security. 28	Ryan Bartlett, Nick Ventura, Matthew Winnick True Classic. 31
Brian Ree DAILYLOOK 26	Julia Hunter Jenni Kayne. 28	Seema Bansal, Sunny Chadha Venus et Fleur. 31
Nate Patena DrinkPAK. 26	Rolando Pozos La Amapola 29	Nick Mathers Wish You Were Here Group. 31
Eric Friedrichsen Emburse 27	Sarah Chung Park Landing International . 29	
	Teddy Fong Million Dollar Baby Co. 29	

GREATER LOS ANGELES
ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR
2 0 2 3
FINALISTS

Meet the Greater Los Angeles judges

The credibility and success of the Entrepreneur Of The Year® program are largely attributable to the insight, independence and prestige of our judges. Thank you for serving on the panel.

ey.com/us/eoygreaterla

2023 Greater Los Angeles judges panel



Jay Lee

Co-Founder and Co-Chair of the Board
AuditBoard
2019 Regional Winner



Simon Anderson

Founder and CEO
Mission Cloud
2022 Regional Winner



Richard Jun

Co-Founder and Former Managing Director
BAM Ventures



Dulari Amin

Founder
Synergy Ventures



Scott Cohen

Co-Founder
byte
2021 Regional Winner



Laura Held

Partner
Shamrock Capital



Katie Warner Johnson

Co-Founder and CEO
Carbon38
EY Entrepreneurial Winning Women™
Class of 2016



Jennifer Yen

CEO
Purlisse Beauty + YENSA Beauty
EY Entrepreneurial Winning Women™
Class of 2018



Tracy Holland

Founder
Inner Fifth + Goodwill Brands
2017 Regional Winner



Chris Edwards

CEO
The Third Floor
2022 Regional Winner


**EY Entrepreneur
Of The Year®**

2023 FINALISTS



JOHN BOILER, GLENN COLE and EVIN SHUTT

72ANDSUNNY
Playa Vista

72andSunny was born in 2004 from the passion and drive of two creative partners, John Boiler and Glenn Cole, as the first of many successful entrepreneurial ventures. Boiler and Cole met in

Amsterdam, where they were both working for one of the hottest ad agencies in the US, Wieden+Kennedy. Creating some of the most famous Nike ads of all time gave them a taste of “compulsive, creative self-expression” that has built the foundation of their work with 72andSunny today. In 2002, sensing that they were meant for more, Boiler and Cole set off to Los Angeles to test their luck as freelance directors, ready to put their optimism and desire to impact both their industry and culture more broadly to the test.

Before moving, Boiler and his wife decided to visit the city, bringing their recently purchased Bugaboo, a Dutch children’s stroller, with them. They were literally stopped in the streets by Los Angeles locals begging to know where they got their fancy baby wheels, and just like that Boiler had the idea that started it all. He had found their first client. Operating under the name of “John and Glenn,” the dynamic duo pitched a proposal to Bugaboo Strollers, offering to put their creativity to use for \$10,000 a month. They didn’t take a salary, and instead hired their very first employee, Evin Shutt.

Through growing 72andSunny, the leadership team has become experts at building services to address emerging needs across the marketing landscape. In 2020, Boiler, Cole and Shutt saw the need for “quick content production at scale,” and developed Hecho Studios to capitalize on this opportunity. Through their work with Fortune 50 clients, they saw the rapidly increasing need to “integrate social impact as part of the core business proposition,” and created Brand Citizens as a vehicle to channel their desire for positive change through the most successful organizations in the world. As of January 2023, both entities are now growing and flourishing independently of 72andSunny, led by entrepreneurs whom Boiler, Cole and Shutt have helped grow and mentor.



MAURICIO UMANSKY

THE AGENCY
Beverly Hills

As a young adult with two kids and a wife, Mauricio Umansky was living paycheck to paycheck when his wife suggested that he follow his dream and obtain his real estate license, given how much he loved real estate. From that point on, Umansky set a goal for himself as a broker that he would never decline in sales year over year. As he continued to accomplish this goal, he became a household broker before rethinking his ultimate career goal of wanting

to build his own company.

With a wealth of sales experience, deep industry knowledge and a burning desire to succeed, The Agency was founded with the goal of disrupting the industry in which Umansky had made his mark. Umansky wanted to break away from the thought of simply selling someone a piece of property. The purpose of The Agency is not to sell a luxury house or condo but to sell someone a lifestyle and the ability to be a part of the community where they would like to live.

A few years after the founding of The Agency and during its high-growth period, new online brokerage firms entered the luxury market as disrupters, showcasing sophisticated technology. These main competitors were funded by hundreds of millions of private equity and venture-capital backed money and were able to use that funding to hire top agents in the market, including those who worked for The Agency. To date, The Agency has more than 70 office locations in eight countries and continues to plan for further growth into new markets.



JARED GOODNER, SANJIT MAHANTI and PRASHANT SAMANT

AKIDO
Los Angeles

As a volunteer during his summers growing up, Prashant Samant served the most vulnerable citizens in his community. While assisting these

patients with his parents (who were both doctors), Samant was exposed to the systemic inequity of health care: the contrast in quality of care between those he was assisting and what he views as his privileged healthcare experience. This left a lasting impression on Samant and laid the groundwork for what would eventually become Akido.

Samant and Jared Goodner’s entrepreneurial journey started in college during their freshman year at Washington University in St. Louis. The duo envisioned building “social enterprises, companies that leveraged market forces but spearheaded a social mission,” all out of their dorm rooms. Although not all their projects were successful, this experience only fueled their passion for entrepreneurship and taught them the importance of perseverance in the face of adversity, a skill that continues to ring true today. In 2014, the duo joined Digital-Health Lab, USC’s first innovation lab focused on developing institutional and public health digital solutions and health care information technology innovation. There, they spearheaded efforts to reimagine the health care industry, which caught the attention of Sanjit Mahanti, then chief business development officer at Keck Medicine of USC. Mahanti had grown frustrated with “innovation inertia” and the overly complex data collection and access system. He soon realized that Samant’s and Goodner’s passion project to rebuild the health care industry through data-driven technological innovation and preventive-based care was something he could not only get behind, but also assist by providing valuable experience and credibility.

By combining its proprietary technology, powered by innovative population and patient-level data, with an early-stage proactive and preventive care mindset, Akido aims to provide cheaper, higher-quality and more personalized health care experiences for all, starting with those in the most vulnerable communities.



PAULETTE PANTOJA

BLU DIGITAL GROUP
Burbank

Raised by a single mother and having survived the loss of her childhood home strengthened a deep, personal resolve not only to survive, but to thrive on this journey, which eventually brought Paulette Pantoja to film school at UCLA. While studying film production, Pantoja taught herself HTML so that she could support herself through college. Discovering the joy of home entertainment helped her define the practical parameters of her dream — her niche —

synthesizing her creative passions, formative childhood memories of the shows and movies that offered escape from reality, and the technical aspects of distribution and content monetization.

While at Panasonic, Pantoja uncovered a major opportunity to solve a slew of inefficiencies in the Blu-ray disc quality assurance process. Without any initial outside investment, she gave notice and proceeded to build the foundation for her dream. In December 2007, Paulette started Blu Digital Group as a Blu-ray testing facility, based in her apartment and funded by her personal credit cards. She patented her cloud-based quality assurance management system in 2011. Responding to the industry’s stubborn wariness of cloud technology, for its novelty and unproven security capabilities, Blu Digital Group implemented a suite of security protocols that included digital rights management, watermarking, two-factor authentication, TPN and MPAA certification, and IP-based access management.

By 2020, Blu Digital Group was poised for success as cloud-based technology became an absolute necessity to conduct business as usual in a completely upended, pandemic-era remote work environment. Now, Blu Digital licenses its software as a service technology to the industry giants, including The Walt Disney Company, and offers quality assurance to Warner Bros., Fox and other studios. Today, Pantoja’s work continues to bring joy and comfort into our homes, by way of home entertainment, offering the art and science of motion pictures as a salve to even the most challenging of life circumstances. While Blu Digital Group was founded as a Blu-ray quality assurance provider, it has since evolved into an industry trailblazer, owing to Pantoja’s passion for home entertainment and cutting-edge innovation. Her patented software helps clients gain control and visibility over the digital media supply chain through cloud-based, automated technology and proprietary workflows.

**JON ELLIOTT****BLUEBEAM**
Pasadena

Jon Elliott started out in an industry vastly different from his current position — pre-career, straight out of high school, he toured the country as a rock musician, opening for acts such as Jimmy Eat World and Death Cab for Cutie. While life on the road was exciting and Elliott loved the creative aspect of writing and performing, he realized that the time spent away from his wife and the repetitiveness of playing the same songs over and over necessitated a career pivot. In an early demonstration of his entrepreneurial

spirit, Elliott identified a necessary change in his life and took the risk to pursue a major career change.

After reaching out to a friend, Elliott joined a small startup and was an essential part of the team that helped grow the business from \$3 million to \$85 million in revenue. Eventually the business was sold to Avid, a company specializing in audio, music and video editing software. Thus began Elliott's corporate journey. With only a high school degree, Elliott became an essential part of the corporate structure of Avid, teaching himself the ins and outs of corporate policy and finance. Despite dedicating around 60 to 70 hours a week toward his role at Avid, Elliott pushed himself to simultaneously attend college, earning an undergraduate degree and an MBA, an example of the dedication that he has for constant self-improvement. After a stint at Yamaha, Elliott took on the role of COO at Bluebeam.

Elliott was quickly promoted to CEO, and under his leadership Bluebeam completely transformed. One area of transformation was in its corporate structure. Elliott utilized his analytical prowess and identified what the leadership team needed to look like and which competencies would lead the company forward. Elliott completely disrupted Bluebeam's existing business model by transforming it from software meant for a one-time sale to a full software as a service (SaaS) business with a cloud-and data-centric product portfolio sold via subscription packages. Elliott's investment in cloud capability has resulted in thousands of users purchasing and using these new subscription packages, ensuring that Bluebeam will continue to grow.

**MATT DANNA****BOULEVARD**
Los Angeles

As product engineers, Matt Danna and his good friend Sean Stavropoulos had a love for technology-driven solutions, combined with a millennial sense of creativity. They discovered a problem and they couldn't "unsee it." There was a lack of adequate technology within the self-care industry. Danna became obsessed with understanding how self-care businesses across Los Angeles managed bookings and was surprised to learn that the vast majority of salons had technology in place that could support

online bookings, but were not leveraging the technology since it did not have the appropriate business logic to optimize scheduling.

During the inception of Boulevard, the unlikely entrepreneurs (aka student researchers) spent evenings and weekends identifying specific challenges within the booking process. They listed those activities that could be quantified and optimized. The central solution called for a "knapsack packing algorithm," where one packs as many items as possible into a knapsack as efficiently as possible. The co-founders learned the algorithm in school and used it to create business logic to optimize booking and overlay it on a calendar with additional features. They solved for tracking new and returning customers, customer "no show" missed appointments, customer timeliness, actual service time and downtime. They then stacked "packed" client appointments to reduce and remove gaps in scheduling. This increased efficiency and profitability for salon owners and professionals; it also made scheduling easy and freed time for front desk employees.

In May 2016, Boulevard took on its first customer, a two-person salon based in New York. The team worked on-site for weeks to ensure a smooth booking system cutover, real-time feature functionality improvements, and enhanced scheduling and operations for the customer. The first customer system implementation was free, whereas the learning opportunity was invaluable. While adding customers and raising funding, Danna attended hundreds of investor meetings where he heard "no" countless times. The first cash injection was an accelerator for \$200,000, and the first seed investor was Bonfire Ventures with \$1.75 million in cash. Through perseverance and entrepreneurial spirit, Boulevard has raised more than \$130 million in growth funding, including a \$70 million Series C round in August 2022 after meeting with more than 60 funds.

**BRIAN REE****DAILYLOOK**
Los Angeles

As the co-founder and CEO of DAILYLOOK, Brian Ree started his business after "finding it challenging to style [himself] like the magazine style editorials and learned it was even more challenging for women given the vast assortment of apparel." What started as a one-page website that offered one outfit suggestion per day has now turned into a revenue-generating company that focuses on creating personalized outfits for women to try at home.

Ree credits the success of his business that "has been human driven since day one" to his strong passion of helping others find their true fashion selves.

Ree describes himself as being a serial entrepreneur ever since high school and throughout college, where he first tried to dabble in the e-commerce market by developing an online platform for his friend's jewelry business. His drive to be at the forefront of the e-commerce market led him to be involved in various projects, ranging from creating online educational newsletters to blogging spaces. It wasn't until 2011 when he garnered his interest in "offering a compelling value proposition" in the fashion industry, leading to the creation of DAILYLOOK. Throughout the journey of leading DAILYLOOK, Ree has faced multiple operational challenges, such as undercapitalization and negative unit economics. However, with each obstacle thrown his way, Ree has remained steadfast in his vision of building a premium experience that is used to empower and elevate customers' personal styles. Currently, more than half of sales come from the company's own portfolio of DAILYLOOK private label brands, giving it control over planning, quality and product life cycles, which is an advantage against its competitors.

Central to this work for Ree is his strong desire to differentiate the company by striving to deliver "a brand experience that is memorable and makes people feel empowered. It has to be an emotional connection, not a transaction." In 2023, the company expanded into the plus-size category, making its sizing all inclusive. In early 2022, DAILYLOOK merged with Adore Me, a business with a similar business model that specializes in lingerie and intimates, which was in turn acquired by Victoria's Secret in an all-cash acquisition later during the same year.

**NATE PATENA****DRINKPAK**
Santa Clarita

If there's an opportunity to do something faster or smarter, Nate Patena is compelled to try. He first set foot on a college campus at age 15 — after finishing high school at 14 — wearing a three-piece suit. After a handful of years, he was about to finish his MBA and master's degree in Public Policy at Pepperdine. It was 2010 and the economy was still reeling from the recession. Amid this uncertainty, Pepperdine professor and then Patagonia CEO Michael Crooke urged

Patena to help out a "kooky former Wall Street banker" who was "brewing fermented tea in a kitchen sink." Six short years later and as COO, Patena had grown the company into KeVita and facilitated its sale to PepsiCo in 2016 for \$240 million. Patena had found his calling. He next grew Core Nutrition from no revenue to more than \$100 million annually before its sale to Keurig Dr Pepper for \$525 million just two years later. Once again, he went in search of his next venture.

Years of experience in the beverage industry had shown him firsthand the many pitfalls of third-party beverage manufacturing — poor quality standards, limited capacity and aversion to flexibility, to name just a few. In early 2020, Patena approached his private equity partners, who reaped significant returns from their KeVita and Core Nutrition investments, with an idea to revolutionize canned beverage contract manufacturing. Without hesitating, they jumped at the idea given Patena's track record and ability to scale companies. In March 2020, as the global pandemic hit the world, Patena launched DrinkPAK as a 3.0 solution to each of these pitfalls. DrinkPAK was founded with the aim of being the most technologically advanced and innovative beverage contract manufacturer in the world.

Today, with 1 million square feet of production and warehousing space and some of the fastest lines in the country, DrinkPAK provides procurement support, complex batching and processing, filling, packaging, on-site storage and distribution. From serving the largest, most sophisticated brands to high-growth, new and emerging brands, DrinkPAK is committed to customer service through technology, flexibility and talent.



ERIC FRIEDRICHSEN

EMBURSE
Los Angeles

Eric Friedrichsen joined the legacy Emburse’s board of directors in January 2019 and worked closely with leaders at their controlling company, K1 Investment Management, to make strategic acquisition decisions of other expense management companies. Through this series of acquisitions, Friedrichsen helped K1 build a portfolio of software as a service (SaaS) solutions that offered different, yet complementary services. At the time, many of

the companies acquired by K1 operated separately from one another and would often compete for the same customers, which led to low morale and conflicts in managing these businesses. Friedrichsen saw the potential synergies among these companies, and convinced K1 to merge them under an entirely new structure. While this newly formed company decided to keep the original Emburse name, Friedrichsen formed an organization that is truly unique from the legacy Emburse company. He became CEO of Emburse in January 2020.

Unexpectedly, Friedrichsen had to grapple with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as a brand-new CEO. Fortunately, Friedrichsen had already envisioned redeveloping Emburse’s product strategy during his time as a board member. When he first became CEO, less than 5% of customers owned more than just Emburse’s expense management solution. Friedrichsen recognized this as an opportunity to grow the business through its existing customer base and heavily invested in developing its supporting service offerings. By the time COVID-19 shut down offices across the world and nearly eliminated business travel, Emburse had a wide array of well-developed product offerings beyond those related to business travel. Friedrichsen’s ability to build trust in both Emburse’s employees and customers, paired with the diversification of Emburse’s product line, allowed the company to retain 95% of its customer base and avoid layoffs throughout the pandemic.

Constructed with a people-first mindset, Emburse provides SaaS solutions that automate manual, time-consuming tasks related to expense management and AP processing so its users can spend their time on what (or who) matters most. Recognizing the wide range of needs across companies of all sizes, Friedrichsen strategically created flexible products that can be customized to meet the exact needs of each customer.



BEN EACHUS

FLOWSPACE
Los Angeles

Ben Eachus founded FlowSpace six years ago; before that he ran a distribution fulfillment center for McMaster-Carr, a company with a catalog of more than 500,000 products that provided one-day shipping deliveries. Then he joined The Honest Company as one of the earliest employees in the supply chain team. At that time, the company was running the operation using Excel, so he decided to figure out the best way to run the distribution operations by asking

the questions “which software should we use?” and “which warehouses should we use?” The Honest Company was growing rapidly and constantly running out of warehouse space, so he regularly needed to find more space that didn’t require long-term contracts. He contacted a real estate broker and asked for his help with locating warehouse space; however, the broker told Eachus that the best way was to walk around neighborhoods and see who had space available. This was 2016 and Eachus thought, “There must be a better way to digitalize the process and have an Airbnb model to outsource space.”

Transitioning from being an employee at The Honest Company to being an entrepreneur, as Eachus says, was a “terrifying situation. You go from being used to getting a paycheck to being the CEO of a company that doesn’t exist.” To prepare for this transition, Eachus and his six-month pregnant wife Airbnb’d a room at their house for extra cash; eventually, they moved in with his in-laws to get the business off the ground. In 2016, Eachus and a friend, currently his partner and CTO, created the website prototype and, with his wife, began sending out fliers and signed 50 warehouse partners.

Today, FlowSpace empowers brands of all sizes to grow their businesses and to meet their customers’ post-purchase expectations by offering integrated fulfillment services and an e-commerce command center through the company’s Omniflow software. Currently, the company has more than 130 warehouses and is planning to expand its services soon to Canada and Mexico.



LAUREN WANG

THE FLEX CO.
Venice

The Flex Co. has reinvented the menstruation market for anyone, anywhere. Lauren Wang, the founder and CEO, has demonstrated true grit in creating the company. Wang’s adolescent years transformed her into becoming the intelligent, resilient and transparent leader she is today. She grew up in Georgia and started working at a young age to support her family. At 15 years old, she taught herself how to build websites and began getting paid for them.

By the time she was 19, she landed a full-time job at IBM while going to school full time at a community college and then transferred to Georgia State University where she received a full-ride scholarship and earned a degree in Marketing. Before the age of 25, Wang had already worked for IBM, Coca-Cola and Autodesk but she kept running into her own menstrual issues: yeast infections. These are issues that are rarely talked about among women or men. Wang became the menstruation guru and started having dinner parties in her apartment that ultimately led to the birth of The Flex Co.

In 2015, Wang purchased a failing business and used the prototype to create the Flex Disc. Thus, The Flex Co. was born. Now, the company creates and sells various period care products, such as Flex Cup, Flex Reusable Disc, Flex Plant+ Disc, Softdisc and Softcup, with seven new products on the way for 2023. These current products are all FDA registered and range from one-time-use products to reusable discs for multiple uses and plant-based products to offer individuals a comfortable period. These products are the sustainable alternative to tampons and allow mess-free sex while you are on your period. The vision behind creating these products is so individuals can live more of their life and have periods be a non-issue.

Thanks to the company’s omnichannel business strategy, The Flex Co.’s products can be purchased online directly from its website or in 30,000 retail stores such as Target, CVS and Walmart, allowing 95% of the US population to have access to Flex.



JING GAO

FLY BY JING
Los Angeles

Fly By Jing is an expression of founder Jing Gao’s quest to find her roots and accept her identity. Growing up in various cities across the world, Gao struggled with finding her true home. Chinese by birth and world explorer by family trade, Gao had an early sense of contrast, of difference in her own experience and palate but also how the rest of the world interpreted and considered the Chinese culinary traditions her family carried with them. The spices, ingredients and care she knew well in Chinese culture didn’t exist anywhere else.

In 2008, after a lifetime in the West, Gao was inspired to return to Chengdu, the city of her birth, and home to her grandparents. Studying under master chefs in the region, Gao learned technique, delved into the 5,000-year heritage of Chinese food and flavor, and strived to find her own unique palate to bring to the world. Under the guidance of the chefs in the region and inspired by the hole-in-the-wall “fly restaurants” (aptly described in Shanghai as attracting people like flies), Gao knew it was time to take the leap with developing her own restaurant. Baoism, a fast-casual restaurant that celebrated all the various regions of Chinese cuisine, was an instant success.

Seizing an additional market opportunity and building on her Chengdu ingredients knowledge, Gao decided to move to Los Angeles to launch Fly By Jing as a direct-to-consumer brand, becoming fully funded from Kickstarter on day one. One bumpy year later, the first jars of Fly By Jing Sichuan Chili Crisp, Zhong Sauce and Mala Spice Mix arrived in the US, and her Los Angeles-based company was officially born. Today, Fly By Jing is a line of pantry staples inspired by the highest-quality ingredients and legendary flavors of Chengdu. Its gourmet sauces, oils, vinaigrettes and spices expand palates and minds, connecting real food, real people and real moments that bring the community together to discover something spicy, oddly satisfying and slightly savory. These products are not traditional but are unique and personal to Gao, telling and spreading her story with every jar.


**EY Entrepreneur
Of The Year®**
2023 FINALISTS

**JOHN TERZIAN
and BRIAN TOLL**
THE H.WOOD GROUP
West Hollywood

Despite being an unusual mix, the one thing that links a burlesque cat, the Travis Scott Meal at McDonald's, a Magic Johnson documentary and a members-only club is The h.wood Group. Over the past 15 years, co-founders John Terzian

and Brian Toll have been integral in the creation and success of numerous high-end restaurants and nightclubs that have redefined the industry standard for entertainment and hospitality. However, the road to success was not always easy, especially for two young twenty-somethings.

SoCal natives, Terzian and Toll always knew they wanted to be in entertainment. Toll's first job out of college was working at Beverly Hills' Endeavor Talent Agency where he quickly realized he much preferred his side gig as a promoter hosting parties at the hottest clubs across Hollywood. In 2006, he approached close college friend Terzian, who was working for DJ AM at club LAX in Hollywood, to own and develop their first venture. However, the duo underestimated what it took to own and operate a club rather than just promoting parties and filling rooms. After a little over two years of too many comped tables, noise complaints, visits from the LAPD and finally a revoked valet permit, their club was declared a public nuisance and forced to close its doors.

Despite the abrupt end of two Hollywood clubs, 2012 marked a turning point for The h.wood Group as it introduced Bootsy Bellows and SHOREbar. This time around, Terzian and Toll learned from their mistakes and built a team well versed in hospitality operations, established strict ground rules about guaranteed minimums and limited comps that translated into profit. From there, the group branched out into the restaurant scene with Delilah and The Nice Guy ultimately gaining international recognition and demand across the world. With 11 venues in Los Angeles, three across the country and six new ones on the horizon, The h.wood Group is rapidly expanding thanks to its multi-concept portfolio uniquely positioned to cater to different markets. This growth is guided by the brand's core values – distinct design, exceptional service and palpable atmosphere.


HENRY HERNANDEZ
INTER-CON SECURITY
Pasadena

Inter-Con Security began from the ambition of a U.S. Army veteran and retired LAPD detective lieutenant and his wife to build a new type of security company. Now, 50 years later, under its third generation of Hernandez family leadership and continuous perseverance, Inter-Con has recently been named the fifth-largest security company in North America by revenue, making it one of the largest security companies. Inter-Con is a global provider

of high-touch security solutions to clients globally as it works to become the world's leading provider of premier security services. It continues to find ways to revolutionize the security space as it recently underwent a multiyear strategic and technological transformation.

Inter-Con was founded in 1973 by retired Los Angeles Police Department Detective Hank Hernandez and his wife, Bertha, at their kitchen table in Los Angeles. They invested their life savings into their vision of building a security company that would distinguish itself by providing security services to clients whose threat profiles exceeded the capabilities of traditional "guarding" companies. With NASA as its first client, Inter-Con quickly established itself as the preferred security provider to the US federal government. Hank and Bertha's son, Rick Hernandez, took over leadership of the company in 1986 and strategically expanded its operations globally through new contracts with the US Department of State and various large multinational corporations. Rick also worked with the US government in Mexico to create the Department of State's first Local Guard Force program, which has served as a global model for other Local Guard Force programs.

Now going strong on its 50th year of providing its security services, Rick's son Henry serves as the president and CEO. Henry left his successful law career and has dedicated himself to fulfilling his executive role. Inter-Con continues to persevere, and it employs more than 35,000 employees across three continents (North and South America, Africa and Europe). As CEO, Henry brings his unique law background and innovation to the solutions that are helping Inter-Con lead in the security world and brings success to the broader Inter-Con family, which includes all the employees and his family who work there.


BEN JONES
HAUS LABS BY LADY GAGA
El Segundo

Ben Jones began his career in the gaming industry, moving to Manhattan Beach in 1995 to work as a recruiter for a video game company. He realized early on that he had a knack for recruiting, sales and connecting people with great opportunities. This ability charged his career forward as he began selling PlayStation teams to businesses. In 2001, Jones joined one of the first mobile gaming businesses, JAMDAT, which ignited his budding passion for the startup

world. He made the courageous decision to join The Honest Company and took control of the entire marketing budget across its personal care, baby and beauty products. In this role, he had a front-row view of the disruption happening in the beauty category. After almost two years, he felt the itch to lead his own venture, so he left The Honest Company to find his next step. The one missing piece he needed to find: a visionary business partner.

Haus Labs by Lady Gaga came together when Jones joined forces with talented artist and creative visionary, Lady Gaga. Their goal: to bring inclusivity, custom curation and disruption to the color cosmetics industry that hadn't seen innovation in years. After a quick start in 2018, followed by a momentous pivot two years later to better align the company to its mission, Haus Labs by Lady Gaga is a soaring success story. Haus Labs by Lady Gaga is a clean, cruelty-free and vegan makeup brand consisting of high-tech, high-pigment, high-performance products infused with proprietary skin-loving ingredients, in sustainable packaging. With the incredibly positive launch of this foundation, it is the first cosmetics company to demonstrate a successful brand pivot.

Through its mission for inclusivity, the brand celebrates all ages, shapes, sizes, colors, genders, identities and skill sets. The company's products are sold at HausLabs.com and more than 500 Sephora stores throughout North America. Haus Labs continues to propel its impact beyond the beauty community by supporting the Born This Way Foundation, with a focus on improving the mental health of young people. The company has ambitious plans to continue to "push the needle" in the beauty industry through its transformative "Clean Artistry" products.


JULIA HUNTER
JENNI KAYNE
Los Angeles

Julia Hunter is deeply passionate about building brands. She began her career working in the mergers and acquisitions branch of an investment bank in San Francisco, where she quickly learned the ins and outs of financial forecasting and planning. After some time, Hunter realized her desire was to be involved in a consumer-facing industry, where she could have influence and impact on a consumer brand. Hunter joined LVMH and later J.Crew to learn how to

better serve customers while focusing on growing a consumer products business. She saw Jenni Kayne's home on the cover of *Architectural Digest* years ago and was deeply inspired with how she married home decor and fashion together. It was fate that when Hunter and her husband decided to move to Los Angeles, she saw an opening at Jenni Kayne for the senior director of strategic planning.

Hunter joined the company when it was an 11-year-old business that was struggling to scale. She brought a transformative, refreshed strategic vision; a data-focused financial capability; and an innovative spirit. Her vision led to her becoming CEO within two years and transforming Jenni Kayne into a business that is revolutionizing the luxury home, apparel and skin-care space. Recognizing the need to shrink the business before it could grow, Hunter removed categories, closed down its wholesale channel and shut low-performing stores. She restructured the team; invested in content, marketing and digital capabilities; and built a cross-department key performance indicator strategy, while restructuring debt. She created the concept of a "hero" product, a product that generates more than \$1 million in sales and can be symbolic of the brand.

Through intentional design, curation and an all-encompassing lifestyle that's inspiring and authentic, Jenni Kayne has created a new form of luxury that's inviting and uniquely Californian. Jenni Kayne's mission to empower women to live their best lives can be found in every fold of the business, such as Hunter's passion for helping women to build wealth and the brand's focus on establishing equity opportunities for team members.



ROLANDO POZOS

LA AMAPOLA
Santa Fe Springs

La Amapola is a Hispanic grocery store and a brand of natural food products, specializing in non-GMO corn products, including masa, tamales and tortillas, and other specialty food offerings. The company sells its products through three Amapola Deli & Market stores and is preparing to distribute its signature corn products (and more) to third-party retailers in 2023. Prior to purchasing La Amapola, Rolando Pozos worked for Bank of America as the vice president

of mergers and acquisitions for the West Coast of the US. This role required him to serve as an advisor for numerous private business owners, whom he often noticed were not operating their business as effectively as they could. Eventually, Pozos decided he could no longer sit idly on the sidelines. He knew that he had learned enough from the mistakes of others to avoid making them himself, and those experiences, coupled with business acumen, were enough to push him to answer the door when opportunity came knocking.

The previous owner of Amapola Deli & Market was one of Pozos' clients when he was at Bank of America. Pozos had a vision of the then-struggling grocer becoming a consumer products company for the Hispanic market at its core; i.e., not primarily a Hispanic grocery store chain. He recognized Amapola Deli & Market as his opportunity to liberate a sleeping (consumer products) giant from the shackles of its suppressive management and propagate his vision of the beauty and flavor of Hispanic and Mexican culture.

In 2021 Pozos left his prestigious position at Bank of America and decided to purchase Amapola Deli & Market and its trademark AMAPOLA from his former client. He began to leverage his connections in Mexico to create a supply chain of authentic Hispanic goods that would meet La Amapola's new standards of quality (i.e., organic, non-GMO products), while also maintaining the level of affordability that he knew many of his consumers were relying on. This enabled La Amapola to thrive in a Southern California market that is already saturated by an abundance of options for Hispanic foods and has led to the improved lives of not only those still employed at La Amapola, but the consumers who enjoy the La Amapola brand as well.



SARAH CHUNG PARK

LANDING INTERNATIONAL
Los Angeles

As a first-generation immigrant from Korea, Sarah Park's journey to success has been shaped by her experiences and unwavering determination. During her freshman year in college, she took a job at a startup that went public during her senior year, igniting her passion for the startup environment and exposing her to a range of experiences. Despite her success, Sarah struggled to integrate into American culture due to English being her second language. Her

journey highlights the challenges of being a first-generation immigrant and overcoming cultural barriers to achieve success. Despite these challenges, Park's resilience, grit and fortitude have driven her to create her own legacy and make a lasting impact.

Park had created multiple businesses before her latest, Landing International, including tech-based solutions and the distribution and sale of US beauty products overseas. It seems like a logical path that Landing International brings those two together naturally where she has created an app-based tool to help indie brands, many of which are BIPOC founders, launch in major retailers, enabling the success of their products through Landing's tools and programs.

Landing International is now a thriving B2B technology company that provides data solutions that create greater transparency to enable beauty retail sales. As one of *Fast Company's* Most Innovative Companies in Beauty, Landing International supports greater opportunity in beauty retail by championing indie brands by BIPOC founders. Park has become known as the indie brand guru but she calls herself the "wing woman" for up-and-coming brands. The purpose behind Landing International is helping brands and their founders "land." Most indie brands don't last on retail shelves longer than three years and 80% of brands fail. She is driven by the greater purpose of helping independent brands access large retailers and enabling sustained long-term success through her technology and data insights. The company's core values — integrity, innovation and intelligence — help Park and her team of 18 to lead, delegate and infuse trust into their growing team. Since 2014, Landing's team has helped more than 200 brands enter retail stores.



TEDDY FONG

MILLION DOLLAR BABY CO.
Pico Rivera

Million Dollar Baby Co. (MDB) was founded in 1990 by Daniel Fong, Teddy Fong's father. After immigrating to America, Daniel wanted to start a recession-proof business that also used his connections with a factory of furniture makers in Taiwan. At the time, Daniel was selling MDB's one product — the Jenny Lind crib — by driving door to door to mom-and-pop stores across the country. By 2002, the company had grown to an operation of 25

people. However, MDB's growth had plateaued until Teddy Fong joined the team in 2006, after completing his undergraduate degree at Harvard.

Fong's vision was to create a design-centric brand that customers could trust both in terms of safety and quality. Over the years, MDB developed seven distinct brands that varied in aesthetics and price point to appeal to a large range of customers. Today, Fong and MDB invest heavily on creating new innovative designs for the products and building of the brand. The company has four in-house designers who are well prepared to not only adapt to new market trends but also develop new industry-disrupting designs. For instance, the company has patented a "convertible" crib design that converts into eight distinct stages as an infant grows over time. The company is also looking to expand into new verticals such as collaboration with technology companies to install baby monitors into its products and the bedding market.

Fong also recognizes other opportunities for future growth of his business. In the following year, he plans to open two Babyletto brick-and-mortar stores in Los Angeles. Currently, there are only two locations in the Los Angeles area where consumers can touch and feel cribs before making their purchase. Fong understands that there are different ways customers shop, and there is currently demand in the market that is not being met. Furthermore, a brick-and-mortar store will allow customers to easily return or repair damaged products as well as further enhance Babyletto's brand image. Through his plans to innovate MDB's products, expand new product lines and evolve its brands, Teddy Fong has demonstrated that he has an ambitious path forward for the company.



SRIN VISHWANATH

OPN HEALTHCARE
Glendale

Srin Vishwanath started his entrepreneurial leadership in an "accidental" manner by recognizing a niche business opportunity through his broad experience gained while working on business development in organizations earlier in his career, such as City of Hope and HCA Healthcare. He developed a deep interest in the oncology physician networks and started to share the same passion in their value-based care mission. Vishwanath knew the value

of his business plan and founded OPN Healthcare, which he has now been successfully running for more than 20 years.

OPN Healthcare is a tech-enabled health care management company that specializes in oncology care. The company receives fixed payments on a per member, per month basis for defined oncology services for a population to which it must deliver oncology care in a cost-efficient manner. The company has developed technology that is data driven to offer administrative solutions providing better care and cost delivery, and is a catalyst to help align players within the oncology health care system. The platform allows the integration and connection of physicians, workflows and payers. Through technology, the company has developed innovative physician engagement models to move cancer care from a volume to a value model, focused on delivering higher accessibility, reducing costs and providing higher quality of care.

Vishwanath is a true believer in his mission to serve cancer patients the right way while taking care of the providers' needs to allow them to focus on what they do the best — providing care. He also has been able to lead the company for the last 20 years and be successful during multiple crises by evolving and adapting his services to the oncology physician and payers community. His vision has remained consistent in regard to his focus on value-based care since the creation of the company. As of today, what started as a rejected business idea is providing world-class oncology services to more than 1.8 million patients, employing more than 150 talented individuals and resolving various issues of hundreds of network providers and physicians.


**CANDACE NELSON
and CHARLES NELSON**
PIZZANA
Los Angeles

Candace and Charles Nelson first met as coworkers at an investment banking firm, spending long nights putting investment decks together — a far cry from the vibrant entrepreneurial world they now live in. After the economic

downturn that led to a recessionary economy in the early 2000s and the life-altering events of 9/11, Candace gained a new perspective on life and quit her job to attend pastry school with dreams of pursuing her passion for baking. Charles took a risk by following Candace to help her start a cupcake business from her kitchen. Although an eatery centered on cupcakes was unusual, Candace believed in the product she was working to make and focused her efforts on the cupcakes themselves, which ended up serving them well via their now-iconic Sprinkles brand.

By the time Sprinkles made it big and was sold to a private equity firm, Candace and Charles were ready to take some time off. However, their entrepreneurial spirit only took a rest for a very short while; the pair could not resist biting into another opportunity when they attended a pizza party at a friend's home and struck up a conversation that would ultimately change the life of Daniele Uditi, an aspiring pizza chef from Italy. Candace and Charles could not deny that there was something special about this pizza and the man who baked it; they saw another opportunity to create an entire dining concept around a spectacular product and knew they had to pursue this pizza.

Candace and Charles quickly launched into this next endeavor — from creating a menu with Uditi based on his original pizzas that caught their attention, to strategizing the perfect location to launch the first restaurant in Brentwood. Pizzana is now known for its signature crust, its innovative pizza concepts (Cacio e Pepe is a fan favorite) and its lively restaurant ambience that breaks away from traditional Italian restaurant themes. With four locations in Los Angeles (and one in Texas, with planned growth as well in California), Pizzana found a niche and made a name for pizza in a city that is not traditionally known for its pizza offerings.


KENT YU
T3 MICRO
El Segundo

Kent Yu, the founder of T3 Micro and son of two hairdressers, disrupted the hairstyling market by introducing a premium brand that revolutionized the industry. More than a decade ago, he had a brilliant idea while watching his girlfriend (now wife) getting ready: why did she have to settle for a low-quality hairdryer when all her other beauty products were high performance and luxurious? This inspired Yu to create a faster, quieter and lighter hair tool that

would enhance the user experience. He was driven by the question, “Why hasn’t anyone made a better hair dryer yet?” and this motivated him to start T3 Micro and build his empire. One year later, the game-changing T3 Featherweight was launched.

Yu found his first entry into the market by selling his hairstyling tools through magazines and boutiques. He focused on creating sleek packaging to emphasize the simplicity and elegance of his brand. With the help of a publicist and support from famous hairdressers, the T3 Featherweight hair dryer quickly gained recognition and became the first electrical hair product sold in Sephora stores. As T3 Micro’s popularity grew, so did the demand for its products, leading to quality control issues and malfunctioning products. Yu knew it was time to expand his team and bring in experts to help resolve the issues. He hired Paul Pofcher, who still works with Kent today as the president, and through his willingness to let go of control and seek help, T3 Micro was able to resolve the quality control issues and maintain some of the lowest defective rates in the industry.

T3 Micro is now a leading premium hairstyling tool company that has revolutionized the industry with its innovative products. From hair dryers and brushes to straightening and curling irons, T3 Micro has set the bar for all future premium hairstyling tools. The company’s vision is to inspire your creativity and transform your hair with the latest next-generation technology, so you can achieve the gorgeous hair you’ve always wanted. Yu’s innovative idea, coupled with his ability to adapt and seek help when necessary, has led T3 Micro to become a leading brand in the industry.


MARK GRODEN
SKYRYSE
El Segundo

Mark Groden is the founder and CEO of Skyrise. At only 32 years old, Groden is committed to solving many of the global transportation problems through the development of Skyrise, a goal that he’s had since childhood when he was eager to figure out a way to see his grandfather more often. He started Skyrise while he was studying for his PhD at the University of Michigan. He observed people building aircraft and helicopters but noticed they were hard to

fly and had limited utility — for example, they cannot fly through cloud cover or other inclement weather conditions due to the high probability of pilot error.

Groden’s steadfast belief in Skyrise and its vision for a brighter future for air travel never wavered. His perseverance, devotion to his vision, confidence in his abilities and ability to pivot have served him well. Now, Skyrise has developed a highly automated flight control system to bring commercial-level safety to general aviation through simple and intuitive touchscreen flight technology, removing the complexity of learning to fly and making it safe and easy for anyone to become a pilot. The platform is uniform for all cockpits and includes only 36 parts compared with 329 parts in the current aircraft setup. A touchscreen serves as the main interface and details all key inputs, such as the planned flight path, altitude and weather conditions. This makes flights as efficient as possible by directing pilots to the fastest, safest routes. Skyrise has achieved 100% means of compliance with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and is currently awaiting final certification, which it expects to happen in the next 12 months, a key differentiator for the company in relation to competitors creating new hardware and aircraft that doesn’t align to existing FAA standards.

Skyrise currently has a headcount of 100 to 130, with plans to hire 30 more in the next 12 to 18 months, and ultimately more once it reaches FAA certification. Skyrise recruits people from all over the world, and everyone has unique backgrounds and specializations aligned to the company’s mission. In the last seven years, Skyrise has brought on some of the brightest engineering minds in aerospace.


AMY LIU
TOWER 28 BEAUTY
Los Angeles

Amy Liu’s journey as an entrepreneur began at an early age. Growing up as a daughter of an entrepreneur and business owner, Liu admired her father’s passion for his business in commercial development. He always conveyed that becoming an entrepreneur was more of a necessity rather than a choice being a Taiwanese immigrant in Minnesota in the ‘70s. Liu finished undergrad and went into consulting — a safer choice and expected route for

a second-generation Asian American. However, she realized she wanted to pivot her career. She continued her education at USC to pursue an MBA with a concentration in entrepreneurship. After graduating, she had a successful career as an executive at several high-end beauty companies, such as Smashbox, Kate Somerville and Josie Maran.

For her next move, Liu wanted to bring beauty products to the market for all skin types and tones while being clean, sustainable and accessible to all. Balancing a growing family and mortgage, and being naturally risk averse, Liu was unsure how to start things. Then, in a chance lunch, a business school colleague encouraged her to take the leap and pursue her dream of launching her own company. He even offered her seed funding to get started. From there, Liu was able to secure funding of \$500,000 within 30 days, all from friends, former colleagues and former business partners. Tower 28 Beauty was born.

Liu quickly landed Tower 28 Beauty products on Sephora shelves, an unheard-of feat in the industry. Today, Tower 28 Beauty is one of the featured brands on CLEAN at Sephora. What sets Liu’s journey apart is the importance she placed on building her reputation through 15 years of relationship building, proving that success in entrepreneurship is about delivering on your word and building a solid foundation of trust and credibility, while staying true to the vision of offering clean, sustainable and accessible beauty products for all skin types and tones. Even though Liu secured the first round of funding in just 30 days, it took 15 years of hard work and relationship building across all aspects of the beauty business.



**RYAN BARTLETT,
NICK VENTURA and
MATTHEW WINNICK**

TRUE CLASSIC
Calabasas

Ryan Bartlett was looking for a new opportunity to make an impact. He was already an established entrepreneur, fresh off winding down his marketing agency, SEO Direct, to focus his

energy and expertise on a problem that the average person faces. While looking for new opportunities, Bartlett realized there was a problem right in his very own closet — his wardrobe consisted of overpriced, unshapely T-shirts. He quickly realized that there was an unmet need within the men’s apparel space as the existing brands were not investing the time to design a product specifically tailored to fit a man’s body in all the right places. Bartlett wasted no time and started sketching out an idea for a bamboo shirt company. He designed a website, filed IP and came up with the name of the company — True Classic.

The day before Bartlett planned to launch the True Classic website, he realized he was in over his head and needed help bringing his vision to life. He reached out to friend Matthew Winnick, who had a background in finance and was also in the middle of a career crossroads. After hearing Bartlett’s idea, Winnick knew they needed to bring in somebody with experience in the fashion industry and Nick Ventura immediately came to mind. Having spent the last decade founding, running and eventually selling Venley, an NCAA apparel business, Ventura was the missing piece needed.

The three newly acquainted business partners fondly recall the nights spent together going through ideas on a whiteboard in Bartlett’s Southern California office, hungry to serve customers in a way that leaves a positive impact. The three co-founders set to work perfecting the basic men’s T-shirt. Today, True Classic is a direct-to-consumer menswear brand offering a collection of elevated men’s basics, including T-shirts, polos, chinos, activewear and other essentials. In an industry full of overpriced, ill-fitting apparel, True Classic delivers premium quality products, intentionally designed to complement its customers’ diverse silhouettes — all while giving back to local communities in need. Created by a visionary, a designer and a realist, True Classic proves teamwork really does make the dream work.



**SEEMA BANSAL
and SUNNY CHADHA**

VENUS ET FLEUR
Los Angeles

Seema Bansal and Sunny Chadha have created a wave in the floral industry with their magnificent roses that are not only gorgeous but also long-lasting. It all started with a Valentine’s gift from Chadha to his then-girlfriend, now wife Bansal. Chadha spent

a significant amount of time customizing his vision for the perfect Valentine’s floral arrangement for Bansal; however, the ultimate result did not blossom into reality like he had hoped. Millions of flowers are sent via shipping methods throughout the world, and more often than not, a loved one receives flowers that are half wilted upon arrival, packaged in a flimsy box, with no cohesive arrangement of any kind. Yet the consumer keeps feeding the broken system and accepting failure as the best that is available.

The couple’s roots are grounded in the entrepreneurial world, and they realized there was a gaping hole in the luxury floral market. There was a huge discrepancy between what companies were marketing and what consumers were getting. They decided to fill that void by starting their business back in 2015 in the New York area. Bansal executed her creative floral strengths on the arrangements, and Chadha executed his operational strengths on the delivery routes — roles that although scaled quite considerably, still hold true to this day. As they grew, they focused on their supply chain, flying to Ecuador to meet with the local farms to build a reliable supply chain and get answers on how to make their roses last longer. While in Ecuador, they worked with the biochemists on-site on the preservation process, making the rose petals softer, keeping the texture and maintaining the scent. The eternity rose was born — roses that last an entire year without any water.

The wilted flower problem was solved and Venus et Fleur became the first floral company to deliver flower arrangements internationally. Venus et Fleur is a premier bespoke eternity rose and mixed floral atelier that intersects the romantic tradition of sending flowers with exceptionally stylish design. The company specializes in luxurious, customizable precision arrangements of everlasting flowers that come styled in Parisian keepsake boxes lasting for more than an entire year.



NICK MATHERS

WISH YOU WERE HERE GROUP
Los Angeles

Nick Mathers is the founder and CEO of Wish You Were Here Group (WYWHG). The restaurant group specializes in curated and individualized dining and social spaces throughout top locations in the United States and worldwide. Supported by the money he earned working as a childhood commercial actor, Mathers built his first property close to the beaches of Australia in his early 20s. Striking gold, he got offers on the property and soon sold it for profit. At

23 years old, he traveled to New York City. There, he envisioned a café that was not just for serving coffee but one that also brought the feel and ambiance of Australian beaches. Ruby’s materialized as a bustling social café in Lower Manhattan. The success of this venture and the ones that came after it demonstrated Mathers’ ability to capture what his customers will enjoy and create spaces to satisfy them.

The early 2000s brought on rapid expansion of the company’s properties and its concepts. The economic downturn of 2007 brought on the need for Mathers to expand his knowledge on the back end of the business, which was instrumental in helping the company navigate the pandemic. Mathers made sure to work with the landlords of each of his restaurants and worked out a deal that would allow them to continue operations and avoid layoffs. The company’s success is evidenced by the 10 operating restaurant locations within the WYWHG portfolio, the numerous management deals with hotels and brands, and more upcoming projects — including its soon-to-open Élephante locations in Laguna Beach, California and Scottsdale, Arizona, and the recently opened pop-up in Seoul, South Korea.

Mathers’ eye for detail and unique sense of style take inspiration from a mix of cultures and create an approachable luxury that is sought after by crowds of patrons and celebrities alike. Jimmy Kimmel was so inspired by the relaxed vibe of Mathers’ West Hollywood location, Eveleigh, that he hired him to oversee the design of his home. Many restaurants create great food. But walk into a WYWHG establishment, and you will notice the unmistakable style and details that make every location an experience.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2023
ENTREPRENEUR
OF THE YEAR®
FINALISTS**

**And the winners are...
visit ey.com/us/eoygreaterla
on June 23 to learn who they are!**