

JONES IS

A man with short dark hair, wearing a light pink button-down shirt and khaki pants, is balancing on a dark wine bottle. He has his arms outstretched to the sides and is smiling. The background is white with a large, faint, circular red wine stain graphic.

Alumnus follows food
and wine career path

BY ANNIE RHOADES

Feature photos courtesy of Scott Jones
Wine illustrations by iStock

(STILL) THIRSTY

What do wine, food and philanthropy have in common? For alumnus Scott Jones (BA 92), vice president of content and partnerships for eMeals, the three comprise his entire career.

“It’s not a linear [career] path,” Jones says. “There are many right turns, but I feel so fortunate to be able to use the gifts that I’ve been given to do what I love.”

A founding member of the Southern Foodways Alliance board, Jones relished his time at Ole Miss, which he spent studying magazine publishing under the direction of Samir Husni, retired UM professor of journalism, Hederman lecturer and director of the Magazine Innovation Center.

“I’m from Orlando, Florida, and had a couple of friends who attended Ole Miss,” he says. “I remember being told about a professor that I had to meet who taught magazine publishing. I ended up talking to Dr. Husni and realized there was no other place on the planet that I was going to go to school, when I could combine the fun of Ole Miss with the ability to study magazine publishing. That was all she wrote, and I was out the door and on my way.”

After graduating from Ole Miss, Jones and his wife, Deanna, relocated to Los Angeles to start a career in the motion picture business.

“I worked at a couple of movie studios on the motion picture development side, and my wife worked at Creative Artists Agency on the agency side,” he says. “I think a lot of it was driven by the fact that we were both from the South, and neither one of us had ever been west of the Mississippi at that point. So, we moved to Los Angeles and loved it.”

After 11 years and a self-described early “midlife crisis” in his 30s, Jones pleaded with his wife to relocate to New York to attend the Culinary Institute of America in pursuit of a culinary arts degree.



Deanna and Scott Jones

“While we were in LA, we were going out to restaurants with good wine and food, and I found myself spending a lot of time reading *The New York Times* Wednesday food sections,” he recalls. “I could feel this convergence of my interest in media and my interest in food and wine, and I started thinking about how I could align all of these things that I really loved.”

While completing the two-and-a-half-year culinary arts program at Hyde Park’s Culinary Institute, Jones began writing for *Food & Wine* magazine and even tried his hand at reviewing restaurants.

“I started writing more for food publications and did restaurant reviews for a local newspaper, which I hated because I couldn’t bring myself to write anything bad about anyone working as hard as someone works to run a restaurant,” he says. “After about a year, I decided to go and eat in these places and not review any more.”

During his time at the Culinary Institute, Jones’ passion for wine blossomed.

“They have a dedicated piece of the program where you go through a pretty intense wine education block,” he says. “That just threw the match on the wood that was already soaked with fire starter. As soon as I got in there, I thought this is amazing because it tied together so many of the things that I love such as history, food and geography.”

HEADING DOWN SOUTH

After residing in the city for a few years, Jones and his wife decided they wanted to move closer to home to start a family.

“We wanted to get back to the South where we were closer to our family and get a place with a yard and air conditioning,” he says. “We looked at a lot of options where my wife could continue to do what she was doing workwise and a place where I thought I might be able to use my media and food training.”

The two looked at opportunities in Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans before Jones received a call from Birmingham.

“I got a call from *Cooking Light* magazine in April 1999,” he says. “At



Jones tailgates in the Circle with his wife, Deanna, and daughters Tallulah and Augusta.

the time, Time Inc. had a massive presence in Birmingham with five or six magazines being published. There was a custom publishing division that was a big piece of Time Inc., so they recruited me to come down and consider a role at *Cooking Light*.”

Eager to leave the dirty piles of city snow, Jones accepted the interview to “enjoy the sunshine” and get away for a few days. But before leaving New York, he received a call from a senior editor with *Southern Living* magazine asking if he would be interested in interviewing with them as well during his visit.

“At the time I thought, I’m never going to move to Birmingham, and I’m never going to work at *Southern Living* — my grandma reads that magazine,” he laughs. “After I interviewed at *Cooking Light*, I knew immediately it was not the right fit for me and met with *Southern Living* and immediately knew that it was the perfect fit for me.”

In July 1999, the two moved to Birmingham where, unbeknownst to him, Jones became the first man in the 40-year history of *Southern Living* to work in the foods department.

He began an 11-year stint with the publication, serving as executive editor overseeing the food, entertainment and wine content for the magazine.

“We launched a TV show [while I was there], which really allowed me to use all of the things that I loved initially in magazine publishing and media in general,” he says.

JONES IS THIRSTY

Toward the end of his time with *Southern Living*, Jones leaned into his passion for wine and, more importantly, taught people about wine.

“As the executive editor, I did a lot of public events on behalf of *Southern*

Living,” Jones says. “I would travel to the Charleston Wine and Food Festival and other events and became more comfortable talking about wine and food in front of people. I realized that it was something that I fed off — that energy. So, I decided to spin out a little side hustle.”

Named by his two daughters, Augusta and Tallulah (BSME 22), Jones Is Thirsty was created in 2012 with a focus on providing “no-snobbery” wine education for the masses.

“My picture on [the website] is me pouring a bottle of wine over my head,” he says. “I had two objectives when I started it: One was to strip out all of the snobbery when it came to talking about wine and to really empower folks to be able to buy wine with confidence and to use Jones Is Thirsty as an avenue for all of the philanthropic work that is really important to me and remains a key driver to what I do.”

Jones uses his company to help raise money for organizations benefiting the community, both locally and nationally.

“I do a lot of events that help raise money for childhood education, pediatric cancer and [more recently] men’s prostate cancer,” he says. “That is a big one for me because I was diagnosed with

prostate cancer a year ago. I caught it early, and I have a good diagnosis.”

Jones travels across the country through his wine education work catering to any audience ranging from small private events in homes to large corporate events.

“Taking Jones Is Thirsty on the road has also allowed me to do a lot of travel and wine writing, which I really enjoy,” he says. “I love the whole world of wine. It’s exciting and fun and doesn’t have to be complicated.”

FUELING HIS PASSION

When he’s not busy with his passion project, Jones’ time is consumed with his “day job” at eMeals, an application that connects meal ideas to online grocery shopping for consumers, brands and retailers.

The company offers a platform that combines shoppable technology with a full-service content creation hub. An in-house team creates custom photo and video content for brands to use across the eMeals platform, retail media promotion, and their owned and operated channels.

“It’s been a blast because it allows me to do basically the same thing I was doing at *Southern Living* but now in a fully digital experience,” Jones says. “It’s caused me to retrain my brain to be digital first, focusing on all the things that go into acquiring a user digitally, which is radically different from the way we used to do it in print.

“I work with phenomenal data analysts, engineers and developers. I also work closely with a team of chefs, photographers, videographers and registered dietitians to create the content images and videos for eMeals.”

Forrest Collier, CEO of eMeals, quickly learned that he and his “detail-oriented and engaging” vice president of content and partnerships had a lot in common from their first meeting.

“Whether he’s discussing everyday wines, Asian food, adventure travel, SEC sports, pop culture, ancient history or almost any other topic, Scott shares his wealth of information in a way that’s always personable, interesting and enjoyable,” Collier says.

“With his unending thirst for knowledge, experience and opportunity, I’m confident that [he] will continue to be a valuable contributor to his work, community and, most importantly, his family.”

Jones approaches his jobs with equal enthusiasm as they both offer opportunities to help others improve their lives.

“I really enjoy that aspect of it, whether it’s helping them get meals on the table or it’s helping them have more confidence and not be intimidated when they buy wine,” he says.

“When I was at Ole Miss in the magazine publishing program, there was a term called ‘service journalism’ — making what you’re doing useful with the underpinnings of helping improve someone’s life. That’s what initially drew me to magazines from an early age and continues to do that now through wine.

“I’ve been working a long time, and I still can’t wait to get out of bed every morning and get to work. That’s what fuels my passion, knowing that I get a chance to do something that I love.”

Visit jonesisthirsty.com to learn more about Jones’ wine education company. ●



Jones uses his food and wine expertise as a judge at the annual Sutter Home Build a Better Burger contest.