

PRESS RELEASE  
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# Trailblazing sugar alternative sweeps up top prize at Altos' Tahona Society Competition 2025

Award-winning mixologist, pastry chef and budding entrepreneur Christina Mercado (USA) has been crowned the winner of the Altos Tahona Society Competition 2025 with C-Sweet: a groundbreaking sugar alternative syrups designed to transform the way bartenders and consumers create and enjoy cocktails.



From the left: Daniela Via, Christina Mercado and Carlos Andrés Ramírez

The fourth edition of Altos' pioneering sustainability-focused contest took place in Guadalajara, Mexico, from 8th -11th September, giving a global stage to 11 finalists from 9 markets including the US, Australia, Colombia, Canada, UK and Italy. Each competitor pitched their welfare-led initiative for the chance to win \$50,000 USD to create positive change in the bar industry and beyond. Reflecting the Tahona Society's sustainability pillars, the competition also achieved a milestone by neutralising 100% of the measured emissions from the week. This was made possible through a combination of direct actions, such as green purchases, efficient energy use, and shared transportation, along with

certified offset projects. We also implemented a comprehensive recycling plan to ensure 100% separation at source and recycling of glass waste.

The competition also afforded contestants and attendees a great networking opportunity. It featured guest bartending shifts from some of the World's 50 Best Bars, Katana Kitten (New York) and Café de Nadie (Mexico), as well as participation from industry leaders Iain McPherson (Panda & Sons), Christine Wiseman (Bar Lab Hospitality), Kate Boushel (Barroco Group) and Megs Miller (Salon de Agave).

C-Sweet dramatically reduces calorie content and glycaemic impact of syrups used in bar essentials, barista blends and other speciality beverages. For example, with C-Sweet's simple sugar syrup, a Classic Margarita with Altos Plata drops from 14.4g of sugar to just 1.5g, and from 256kcal to just 151kcal – without compromising taste.

With consumers demanding cleaner labels, healthier choices, and more responsible production, C-Sweet is a perfectly timed launch which meets the needs of a new generation seeking both human and environmental sustainability. Christina works exclusively with carbon neutral and carbon positive producers, aligning with Altos' sustainability values, while also delivering strong value thanks to its competitive price point (outperforming its closest competitor in simple syrups on value). "C-Sweet is about reimagining sweetness in beverages in a way that respects both people and the planet. It's about taking the next step towards a healthier future by reducing daily consumption of sugar – especially hidden sugars," says Christina Mercado. "Winning the Altos Tahona Society Competition gives me the opportunity to scale this vision. I want to bring healthier, more sustainable choices to bars, coffee shops, retailers and homes worldwide."

Christina's win follows several months of dedicated coaching from Valerie Kramis – a leading social entrepreneurship expert and founder of Agenda28 – which culminated in four days of in-person intensive workshops, mentorship and pitch presentations. The result was decided by a panel of leading industry experts including House of Tequila Managing Director Tim Croizat, Altos Co-Founder and Global Ambassador Dré Masso, Lush Life Founder Lindsey Johnson and Founders Coach and Angel Investor Lara Zimmerman. Recognising the exceptionally high standard of entries, additional prizes were awarded.

Christina Botero of Colombia was chosen as The Crowd Favourite, receiving a \$5,000 USD fund plus coaching to help bring Shaking Lives – a project designed to empower young people from vulnerable communities through hospitality training – to life. Meanwhile, Audrey

Hands and Lucia Gonzalez of Mexico were awarded The Coaching Prize for Brindemos Bienestar, a technology-driven digital initiative promoting wellbeing in hospitality. In addition, all participating finalists have been selected to join the Tahona Launch Pad, a new program designed to help high-potential projects successfully launch and create real-world impact.

Carlos Andrés Ramírez, Global Advocacy & PR Director at Pernod Ricard's House of Tequila, adds: "Through the Altos Tahona Society Competition we're inspired by bartenders pushing boundaries to create lasting impact in our industry and beyond. The

standard of projects this year has been truly exceptional, and C-Sweet stood out as a perfect example of innovation with purpose – combining health, sustainability and accessibility. We're excited to support Christina on the journey of scaling this vision and look forward to seeing C-Sweet make a real difference in the drinks industry both on- and off-premise."

Follow Christina's journey with C-Sweet over on @CSweetSyrups on Instagram and on <https://csweetsyrups.com>.

### **About The Tahona Society**

The Tahona Society is a prestigious global community dedicated to the world's most Tequila-passionate professional bartenders. Founded in 2009 by Altos Tequila and Worldwide Cocktail Club pioneers, the late Henry Besant and Dré Masso, the society has grown to encompass over 4,000 members from around the globe. Its mission is to unite bartenders and celebrate the rich culture of agave and tequila. Today, the Altos Tahona Society stands as the ultimate global bartending education program, built upon four key pillars: education, career opportunities, networking, and well-being. For further information about the Tahona Society, please visit <https://tahonasociety.com/>

### **About Altos Tequila**

Altos is a super-premium Tequila, made from 100% pure Agave and Tahona liquid, crafted in the heart of Los Altos, 2104 meters above sea level in the western state of Jalisco, in Mexico. Born from a collaboration between Olmeca's own Master Distiller Jesús Hernández and the internationally renowned UK bartenders, the late Henry Besant and Dré Masso, Altos is made in part using the 500-year-old traditional Tahona method, before being distilled in small copper pot stills. For further information, please visit <https://olmecaaltos.com/uk/>

### **About House of Tequila**

Pernod Ricard-owned House of Tequila is responsible for the brand management of the group's award-winning 'Made in Mexico' range of tequila and mezcal, comprising Olmeca, Altos, Aviön and Del Maguey. Its portfolio of Mexican spirits showcases the full spectrum of high-quality tequila production, and a laser focus on excellence and quality is the driving force behind the House's work. Using the finest ingredients, blended by experts, and with generations of experience and tradition behind its conception, the House of Tequila portfolio can be found in over 100 markets across the globe, including Mexico, USA, Australia, UK and more. For further information, please visit <https://www.houseoftequila.mx/>

### **About Pernod Ricard**

Pernod Ricard is a worldwide leader in the spirits and wine industry, blending traditional craftsmanship, state-of-the-art brand development, and global distribution technologies. Our prestigious portfolio of premium to luxury brands includes Absolut vodka, Ricard pastis, Ballantine's, Chivas Regal, Royal Salute, and The Glenlivet Scotch whiskies, Jameson Irish whiskey, Martell cognac, Havana Club rum, Beefeater gin, Malibu liqueur and Mumm and Perrier-Jouët champagnes. Our mission is to ensure the long-term growth of our brands with full respect for people and the environment while

empowering our employees around the world to be ambassadors of our purposeful, inclusive and responsible culture of authentic conviviality. Pernod Ricard's consolidated sales amounted to € 12,137 million in fiscal year FY23. Pernod Ricard is listed on Euronext (Ticker: RI; ISIN Code: FR0000120693) and is part of the CAC 40 and Eurostoxx 50 indices. For further information, please visit <https://www.pernod-ricard.com/en>

## About Agenda28

Agenda28 is a design firm specialized in social impact created at the Harvard Innovation Lab and currently based in New York City and Mexico City. We offer integral design services including social innovation strategy, product/service design, branding, content & media development, and editorial design. Our work focuses on helping social initiatives advance their missions through the use of human-centered approaches and social innovation methodologies. For further information, please visit <https://agenda28.com>

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