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**By Ashley Vanni**  
**San Francisco Informer**

I approached the door to the Swedish House on Market with an open heart, an open mind and an open palette. When attending tastings, my reality cannot always keep up with my will to try new flavors, textures and depths.

As a sufferer of severe food allergies to tree nuts (all nuts except peanuts which are a legume), I am usually quite limited when it comes to tastings ... food and beverages in general. What seems silly or picky, even high maintenance to most is a matter of living and breathing for me.

So I can say from the bottom of my heart, I truly was AMAZED beyond belief at the sensitivity, positivity, knowledge and zest for life some of the booth

representatives, brand managers and even owners (of the participating exhibitors) showed to me.

Not only was I informed of all ingredients in each sample (from kola nut, to coconut, to nutmeg, to orange oils) prior to consuming, each representative was personable and so polite. Some made light humor, some were empathetic, and some could also relate! One representative, Jeanna, has a severe peanut allergy. To my delight she had already scoped out the room with appetizers and shared her pointers of navigating the assortment.

Hand crafted "TomR's Tonic" concentrated affair (tonic mixer) was a hoot! The taste of the tonic was just as bold, colorful and authentic as Tom himself. Owned by Tom Richter and John Heckenlaible (who jokes he goes by John Smith because no one can pronounce his last name – comedians with a great sense of humor), Richter proceeded to tell me about how the tonic came to be. Passionate about flavor and quality, talented Tom began making the product straight out of his kitchen. Great product and a dynamic personality, the home business has grown quickly in New Jersey and east coast and has now carried over to western territories. In all honesty, I thought his booth was Silicon Valley based (iPad demo set up on the table, and, yes, I was drawn to it). He was not hit by Hurricane Sandy, but some of his business neighbors were affected. In New Jersey, neighbors are family. He will be participating in a charity benefit this weekend for those in the industry affected by Hurricane Sandy. Follow Tom at [www.tomrstonic.com](http://www.tomrstonic.com). The product is also tree nut free. Winner!



Tom Richter and John Heckenlaible of "TomR's Tonic"

Thirdly, I was most impressed with cocktail garnish booth "Lounge Attire" ([www.loungeattire.com](http://www.loungeattire.com)). Fem owned and operated, the Cranberry Cocktail Garnish was tart, refreshing, sweet, and unique. I can see this garnish in trendy scenes in San Francisco, weddings and events in Napa, and at chic restaurants in Los Angeles. Diverse, bright, and classic I enjoyed talking business with owner Natalie Foss. I look forward to seeing more of her product in the press, because she

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Lounge Attire representative with owner Natalie Foss

is a star.

Overall, I enjoyed my experience with the Indie Spirits Expo. Sensitive to food allergies and intolerances, it is the perfect event to socialize with friends and colleagues and network within the industry, free of worries and consequences such a restricted diet presents. One Happy blogger here.

So my fellow San Franciscan foodies and foodies with allergies; never let your unique palette prevent you from experiencing simple pleasures in life.

Manja!

Distillers, Brand Owners and Importers who make it possible for a unique tasting experience

Vodkas

Tequila

Rum

Cognac

Mezcal

For Future events with Independent Spirits Expo go to [www.indiespiritsexpo.com](http://www.indiespiritsexpo.com).



### Ashley Vanni

Ashley Vanni began her journey as a self healing yogini and through dietetics, alternative medicines and Chi Gong.

A Los Gatos native, Ashley enjoys travel and has lived in a few cities – Los Angeles, Austin, and San Francisco.

With a background in merchandising, Ashley has always enjoyed the creative arts. She explored her writing talent first at the tender age of 6, where she won first place at the Young Authors Fair Award.

Currently, she is focused in developing her health and wellness blog designed to assist people in the 20-35 year age demographic who suffer from severe food allergies and sensitivities. Her goal is to create more awareness while empowering individuals to connect to both their own path to healing and to find support in their local communities.

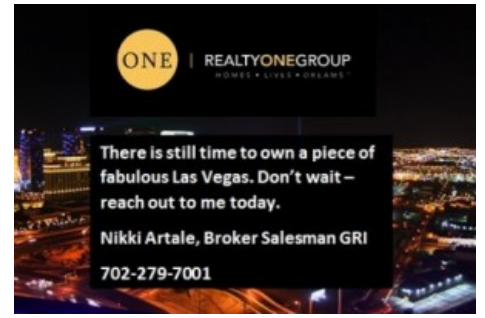
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