

# That Girl: Gabriella Zavatti of ZAVVA Shots

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This week's *That Girl* is the super stylish **Gabriella Zavatti**, creator of **ZAVVA Shots** – whose fab liqueur 'shots with a twist' you see on 7-Eleven and supermarket shelves all around town! With flavours inspired by Hong Kong (including the herbal kick of Jade Bomb and the butterscotch & cream sweet treat of China White), we love how Gabriella brought something fun, creative and unique to the local drinks scene.

We get Gabriella's tips on starting your own business, find out how her love of style influenced ZAVVA Shots, hear about her favourite places in Hong Kong and uncover her must-visit travel destinations (and where to shop once you're there!).



**Fill us in on your background and where you grew up. How did you/your family end up in Hong Kong?**

I am half Australian and half Italian, but grew up in HK. My family moved here when I was two, and like most people, intended to stay

for just a few years but then never left! I studied English Literature & History at the University of Melbourne, Australia and came back after graduation intending to do a year of work experience before leaving again to do a Masters. In that year, I interned at Chanel, Dior and finally at the HK Trade Development Council where I was fortunate enough to work with a really awesome team on HK Fashion Week. I guess it was a combination of influences from my travels, exposure to fresh ideas in Australia and having my heart in HK that fostered this intense energy to launch ZAVVA Shots.



***Where do you live? How have you made your home your own?***

I live near the Southside of the island – it's close enough to get into the city in 15 minutes, but far away enough to have fresh air and tranquility. I view it as my little escape, a place of refuge. I think my room in particular really represents this – I played around with different textures, but kept the palette neutral. There's nothing better than coming home after a crazy day, and getting some downtime with an unopened crisp fresh magazine and a cup of Earl Grey.

I work (and play) so much in Central that I really like having some distance from where I live... plus it makes it much easier to resist the temptations of spontaneous Soho post-work drinks!



***How would you describe your personal style? How does it evolve and change?***

As I get older, I have definitely become more attuned to what suits me and what doesn't. It's fun to experiment with what's 'in' at the moment, but I think it's important to develop a strong sense of what you like and understand what works for your body type. Right now, I am trying to buy more timeless pieces – good quality classics that transcend seasons. I love playing with different textures and structured pieces and veer towards masculine cuts, but add feminine touches with accessories. I recently started a blog with my friend Natalie called [The Duality](#); its name represents not only how we showcase our different styles, but also the dual nature of our wardrobes – going from work to play, and day to night.

My mum and godmother have also built up an incredible and unique collection of clothing and accessories over the years, so I wear a lot of vintage pieces from them, often tweaked and altered to make them my own. Both spent many years living in Cairo in the 1980s, so a lot of their 'hand-me-downs' came from the local Egyptian bazaars and craftsmen!





***Where do you shop in Hong Kong? Any secret finds you can let us in on?***

I'm not a big shopper in HK, mostly swinging by Zara, COS and some of the local boutiques around Soho and Causeway Bay. I've been waiting for years for COS to get here so I'm happy it finally made it onto HK turf! When my budget permits, I particularly like Alexander Wang, 3.1 Phillip Lim and Helmut Lang for their strong cuts and masculine designs done in a graceful way.

I tend to do most of my shopping abroad. I like buying 'feature' pieces when I travel and have more time to explore the various boutiques and local designers a city has to offer. I love coming back home with some key items indicative of a particular country – my wardrobe is like an extension of my travels!

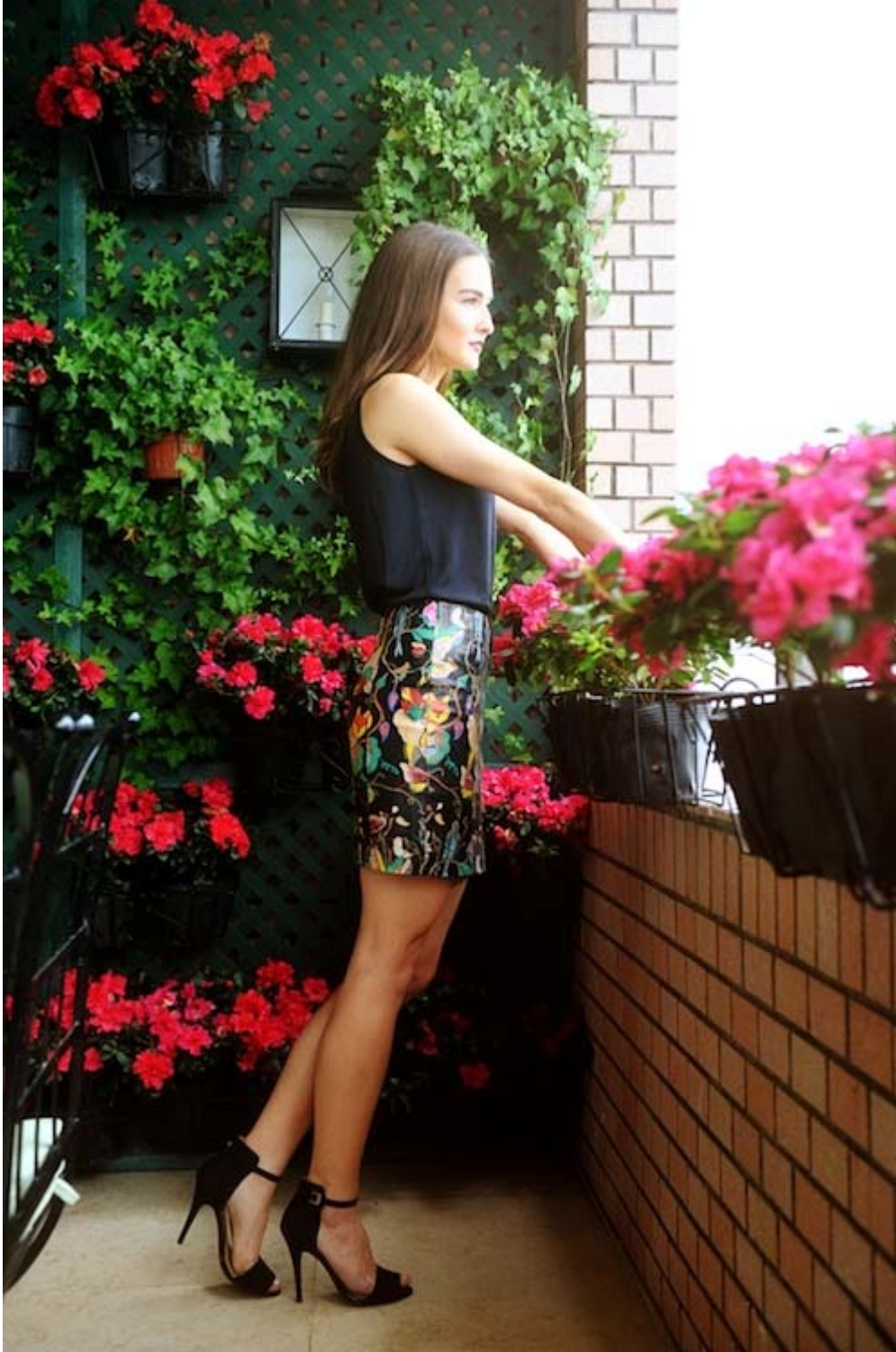


***What are your must-have beauty products? Where do you go for your pampering needs?***

Dry shampoo is a lifesaver – every woman should have a can! I'm also a huge fan of Elizabeth Arden's 8 Hour Cream, which my mum

put me onto; I have it in my bedside drawer and always carry it when I travel. I wear sunscreen every day on my face – I recommend elta MD skincare SPF41 because it's super light, making it great for daily use. I'm a big fan of letting my skin breathe, so on days when I don't want to wear any coverage, I always opt for a bold lipstick.

For my hair, I've been going to Sophie for cuts and Liam for colour at **Toni & Guy** for many years; I trust them fully, so I just sit back, relax and let them work their magic. I am a huge fan of Chinese Reflexology, and whenever I feel my body is stressed, I head to Chi Sing in Wellington Street for foot reflexology and an acupressure massage.



***What is your favourite thing to do at the weekend?***

I like being active and making the most of the outdoors, like **going on a hike with friends** or a **trip to the beach**. We recently did a wakeboarding trip into China, which was fantastic. It consisted of two full days of all-day boarding, sleeping in basic huts, cooking food in an outdoor traditional Chinese kitchen and some heartfelt karaoke! There are so many places to explore that are only 1-2 hours away



and yet feel like a different world. I also appreciate a good **junk trip**, particularly in the heart of the summer, with a good mix of people and a stopover for lunch on one of the islands.



***What's your favourite place in Hong Kong?***

That's a tough one! I feel peaceful chilling by the Tai Tam Reservoir, which brings me back to my childhood when we used to rent paddle boats to feed the turtles. In the city, I really like Star Street on a weekend – there are some great coffee shops and cafés that have sprung up over the years. I also love, as clichéd as it is, the Star Ferry.



***What inspired you to start ZAVVA? How did you come up with the idea?***

I always pursued entrepreneurial ideas growing up. When I was 8, I sketched books and books of designs that I was determined to turn into a clothing line when I grew up – I even devised my own brand name! My first taste of 'business' was when I was 16; I saved all my pocket money to rent a stall at a bazaar, selling jewellery I had sourced from around the world. Much to my parents' surprise, I not only covered the cost of the rental table, but made more profit than I (and they) ever imagined!



I always had this burning desire to develop my ideas and passions into a business. When I was working at the HKTDC, I was really inspired by the energy and creativity I saw from some of the young designers, so I started to properly explore the different ideas I had. Living in Australia exposed me to a whole array of new products and concepts, a lot of which had yet to be introduced to HK. When I moved back, I noticed that HK's beverage market had remained somewhat unchanged from when I left. There were still a lot of long bottled drinks and beers available in retail stores, but we wanted to introduce something that embodied HK – small, compact and with a kick... Hence ZAVVA was born.

It started off as a late-night brainstorming session with energy and creativity flying everywhere... to finally becoming a true HK brand on the shelves in many 7-Eleven stores and supermarkets. I love thinking back to that stage, when we had nothing to go on but passion, adrenaline, excitement and a whole lot of optimism – it was infectious!



***How does the drinks scene in HK compare to the rest of the world?***

HK does street drinking perfectly! It is very rare to see people of various ages and professions scattered around 7-Eleven stores in other countries, but HK gets it so right! I like this balance – the ability to go from a casual pre-drink with friends outside a 7-Eleven, to then venturing to a bar or club with an array of sophisticated cocktails. It's social, it's unpretentious and it's very inclusive. This is what we wanted to tap into with ZAVVA Shots.



***Do you have any tips for other girls wanting to start their own business?***

Define your goal clearly very early on. It's so important to ask questions, pick someone's brain who has been there and listen to people's feedback – and don't be afraid to change your path, even if it wasn't what you initially intended. Knowledge is power. Flexibility is also crucial – to be able to respond quickly to unplanned events... and there are so many! Finally, don't get over-emotional – try to stay as objective as possible. That's easier said than done, especially after your blood, sweat and tears have gone into building something. I think it is important to have a 'rock', a person outside of your endeavours who you can go to for clarity or objectivity when you feel clouded by your own work. People often think owning your own business is glamorous, but it's far from it! You have to be ready to pull your sleeves up and work long hours. When we were launching ZAVVA, there were times when I am sure our friends thought we went MIA because we were so pre-occupied with the business, often working into the wee hours of the night.





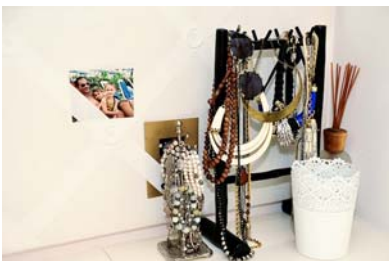
***How has your love of style influenced ZAVVA?***

I had a strong sense from the start of what I wanted the ZAVVA brand to look like – streamlined, clean and bold, which is definitely influenced by my fashion preferences. This is shaped by my travels abroad, the literature, blogs and magazines that I read, and also the various inspiring people that I meet along the way. I think you can see from my blog similarities between the design of ZAVVA and what I lean towards in fashion!



***What are your favourite travel destinations?***

Berlin, Paris and Copenhagen are my favourite cities in Europe to spend time in; they always seem to find their way into my travel plans! In Asia, I love Bangkok and Tokyo. I've been to Bangkok many times, but on my last trip I managed to explore the Chatuchak markets for the first time – with 15,000 stalls, it's incredible. I was on a hunt for silks to make clothes, and oddly enough, silver bowls (they make great indoor plant-pots for orchids!). In Tokyo, I like Cat Street and some of the side streets off Omotesando at the back of Harajuku. There are so many great vintage stores and independent boutiques there.





***We've heard you have a knack for spotting great fabric and making your own pieces. Any tips for other novice DIYers?***

Always go for good quality fabrics. I try to stray away from materials that crush badly, as that will limit your use of it. Envision your wardrobe and start with something you could see working with a few items you wear a lot. It's easy to get carried away in fabric stores and wind up picking patterns so far from what you normally wear, that you don't ever wear it! Western Market has some good quality fabrics, and it's a good starting point if you're a bit daunted to take on Sham Shui Po.



***What do you think makes HK unique?***

For me, HK has this infectious energy. There's the fast-paced beat of Central, but then there's a gentler side – whether it's HK's nature (hiking, camping, watersports) or even just exploring a district you've never been to and weaving in-between old buildings, shop fronts, and markets. HK is multifaceted and multicultural. It has a modern sparkle, intertwined with a strong cultural tradition and reminders of the past, which I love. Even on my most familiar routes, I still discover 'new' indicators of the past.



***What is the best advice you've been given and why?***

There's never a better time than now! If you want to do something, make it happen – I found that when launching ZAVVA. I think it's easy for us to get into the habit of saying "I'll do it later" or push back that dream because you think you don't have time... And then before you know it, you never got round to it. I recently read a good quote which is pretty apt and reaffirms this; "Time is what we most want, but what we use worst". You are in control of your own goals, so why wait?

***All photos in the That Girl article above were taken by the hugely talented Sabrina Sikora of [Sabrina Sikora Photography](#) – get in touch with her at [sabrinasikora@gmail.com](mailto:sabrinasikora@gmail.com).***

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*Rach*

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