



Ayesha Curry in her Sweet July flagship store, located in Uptown.

Big Style

From big name celebrity ventures to the small shop on the corner, Oakland has a style that's unlike any other city. Here, a mighty collective of small businesses and residents fully embrace shopping small and supporting local. Check out a few of these spots for something that's as unique as Oakland.

Oakland Icons

Two renowned Oakland business owners on entrepreneurship, style, and supporting Black businesses.

BY LEEANNE JONES

Ayesha Curry and Sherri McMullen met in 2011, when Curry popped into McMullen's eponymous fashion boutique in Oakland. Today, Curry also owns a store just up the block from McMullen, Sweet July, and she and her husband (Golden State Warriors star Stephen Curry) are often styled by McMullen for photoshoots and events. The two women are a force in the Oakland retail scene — supporting other entrepreneurs, championing Black brands, and upping The Town's fashion game.

You both grew up out of state. When did you come to Oakland?

Sherri McMullen: I moved to Oakland two decades ago. I fell in love with the community and the spirit of the city and knew I wanted to have my business and raise my family here.

Ayesha Curry: We lived in Jack London from 2013 to 2014. I loved being able to walk along the pier and take [daughter] Riley over to Children's Fairyland!

Ayesha, your Oakland connection goes beyond the Warriors. You launched the Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation and opened Sweet July here. What do you love about the city?

AC: Oakland has such a vibrance and special sense of community. It's difficult to explain. It's more of an energy — people having each other's backs and stepping up for one another. It's similar to how I was brought up so it's always felt like home. As a creative person, I am in awe of all of the talent in Oakland: food, fashion, art, culture, music — you just can't beat it.

Sherri, your boutique, McMullen, opened in 2007 on Piedmont Avenue. Today, it's on Broadway. What has kept you in Oakland?

SM: Piedmont Avenue had businesses that were around for several years, and I thought it would be a great place to start mine. It was a small gem and we later moved to upper Grand Avenue — still very close to the original store but a larger space. I had always dreamt of having a flagship store in the heart of Oakland, and Uptown felt like the perfect place. I love that we have so many Black female-owned businesses all within a few blocks of one another.

How have the people of Oakland supported your businesses?

SM: I felt the love on day one. Our Oakland community has kept McMullen going for 15 years, and many clients have been shopping with us since the beginning. There is a commitment to support small businesses and make sure we are all okay. I felt that more than ever during 2020.

AC: It's not just that the community has each other's backs, but the authenticity of it. It comes from such a genuine place of wanting success for one another.

Both McMullen and Sweet July have an emphasis on Black women-owned brands. What does that kind of support mean to you and the community?

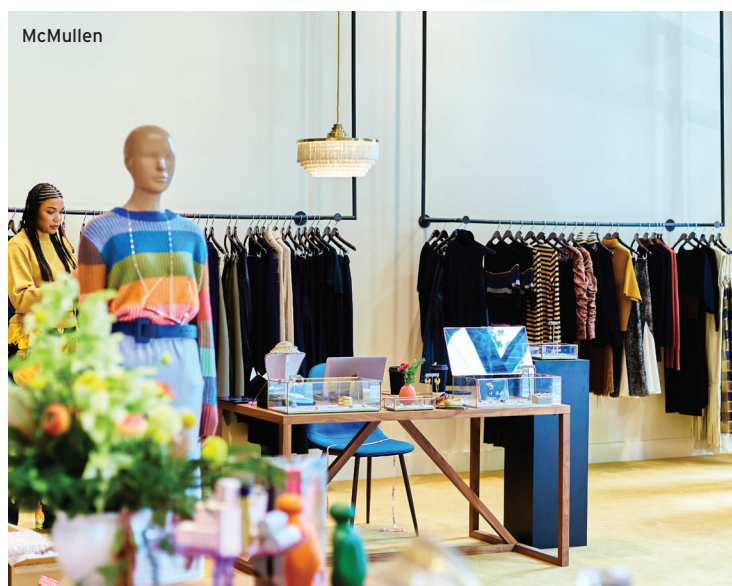
AC: The stats are staggering for how few businesses are owned by Black women in this country, but the good news is we also make up the fastest growing demographic of entrepreneurs. It's really special to be in a position to be able to start my business and hopefully blaze a trail for others, but there is definitely a responsibility for those of us in the business community to support each other. To be able to lean on one another and



Sherri McMullen



Sweet July



McMullen

"To be able to lean on one another and learn from each other's successes and failures means we'll collectively have a higher success rate." —Ayesha Curry

see many of us in positions to make decisions about what people should buy in retail stores. I feel very passionate about making space for Black and brown designers because, as we know, Black designers have less access to retailers, funding, and resources to move ahead. Black females are the fastest growing

learn from each other's successes and failures means we'll collectively have a higher success rate.

SM: Being a Black woman in the industry for years, I didn't

group — and yet, the least funded. I'm committed to making sure that changes.

What is a Black-owned brand that is exciting you right now — and sold in your stores?

AC: Clean African beauty brand 54 Thrones created by Christina Funke Tegbe. They create the most luxurious body butters and soaps inspired by their founder's Nigerian heritage. We've been able to watch (and in a small way contribute) to the brand's incredible growth, which has never gotten in the way of their mission or quality — quite a feat.

SM: Christopher John Rogers makes gorgeous dresses with volume and bold color and prints; Diotima makes cool pieces with crochet details; Harwell Godfrey makes fine

jewelry in the most amazing combinations; Stella Jean makes beautiful prints ... the list goes on and on.

What's next?

AC: We've got a few very special projects on the horizon — starting off with our Sweet July Skincare launch this year. It's a few years in the making, and I can't wait to share it with everyone.

SM: We are celebrating 15 years in business! We have so much to be thankful for, and I have been taking in every moment — especially this year. We had a pop up in L.A. and Detroit, and we opened a 10,000-square-foot distribution center to expand our e-commerce business. Within that space, we will be launching an incubator program to support young designers.