



NATION

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From 'there's got to be an easier way' to the Baby Barista

It was during a 3 a.m. feeding session, holding a crying baby in one arm while trying to prepare a bottle with the other, that Cara Armstrong had her a-ha moment:

"I just glanced up at my coffee maker and I had an epiphany. I said, 'How can I have a coffee in under 30 seconds, Mia has to wait about 15 minutes for her

bottle to be fully assembled?' " Armstrong said in "California by Design: Innovations," a new show that looks at the Golden State's design leaders. "It was in that moment that the idea for Baby Barista was born."

The Baby Barista, which looks a bit like a sleek Keurig, is the result of years of sweat and effort by Armstrong and her team. It prepares carefully measured and mixed, temperature-controlled formula at the touch of a button. It's not quite to market yet, but will be soon.

To take Armstrong's dream to reality, she worked with RKS Design, a Thousand Oaks-design firm started by former Xerox executive Ravi Sawhney. It's expected to cost between \$200 and \$300, but could be lower if it's combined with a subscription for formula packs.

I talked via email with Sawhney and Mike Elam, RKS' director of product development, about the process for getting Baby Barista off the ground. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: When you first heard of the project, what most excited you?

A (M.E.):As the parent of a young child at the time, memories of what it was like to feed a newborn were still very fresh in my mind. I knew that if we could get it right, and design a product that really addressed the needs of new parents, it was going to be a product with huge potential. And I love a challenge like that!



Q: What are some of Baby Barista's unique features? For instance, I understand you can get the bottle started from your phone, without leaving your bed, which sounds pretty cool to me.

A (M.E.): Making a bottle through the app was a nice little add-on! But the great thing about having an app is we can do things like set up bottle preferences for multiple kids – to make sure they're all getting the right bottle – and track feeding patterns and nutrition, creating information that can be reviewed with your pediatrician.

Q: What aspects did you feel were important to include?

A (M.E.): In our research, we found things like speed, reliability, ease of cleaning and simple interface were the most important drivers for parents. So we really focused on how we could keep the system as simple and bullet-proof as possible, even creating a dumbed-down interface for when you're leaving the feeding to a family member or babysitter.

Q: What is different about the formula Baby Barista produces, compared to microwaving (which is what I used to do when I babysat, eeks), stovetop preparation or just mixing with water and shaking?

A (M.E.): The alternative methods you describe leave two major threats to baby health: poor nutrition and scalding with hot liquids. Cara saw these issues all too often as an ER nurse. Baby Barista is designed to give the perfect bottle, every time. What's more, Baby Barista can make you a bottle in less than 30 seconds, saving hours a day of prep and clean up for new parents (and babysitters!).

Q: How is Baby Barista different from other products on the market, like Baby Brezza?

A (M.E.): The key differentiator between Baby Barista and products like Baby Brezza is our use of liquid formula concentrate as opposed to powdered formula. Because powdered formula sucks up moisture from the air, powdered formula machines can suffer from clogging – particularly in more humid climates – which in turn can result in incorrect formula concentration, and poor baby nutrition.

We wanted to create a product that really focused on trackable nutrition and baby health, and to do that, we needed a more robust and reliable form of formula concentrate.

Q: Cara talks about this a-ha moment she had in her kitchen one day at 3 a.m. What do you say to people like her who have a moment, in terms of how to start when it comes to bringing a dream to reality?

A (R.K): Starting a new venture can seem overwhelming but can also be a rewarding experience. Finding a team that can help bring your vision to life is critical, and it is essential to understand that while inspiration is the catalyst, there is a lot of work that goes into turning the dream into a reality. Also, it is vital to understand the product-market fit, which is something that we help entrepreneurs do. We are here to help move you through design.

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