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Tennessee
Whiskey Trail
Cocktail and
Culinary Focus

NORDIC
DISTILLERIES
ON THE RYES

Starlight Distillery

Christian and Blake Huber

QUAILS IN A BARREL
WINE GEESE

HUNTING FOR WHISKY'S MUSE
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JUNE, 2023

ISSUE 31

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Field of Dreams

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TN Whiskey Trail
Cocktail and Culinary Focus





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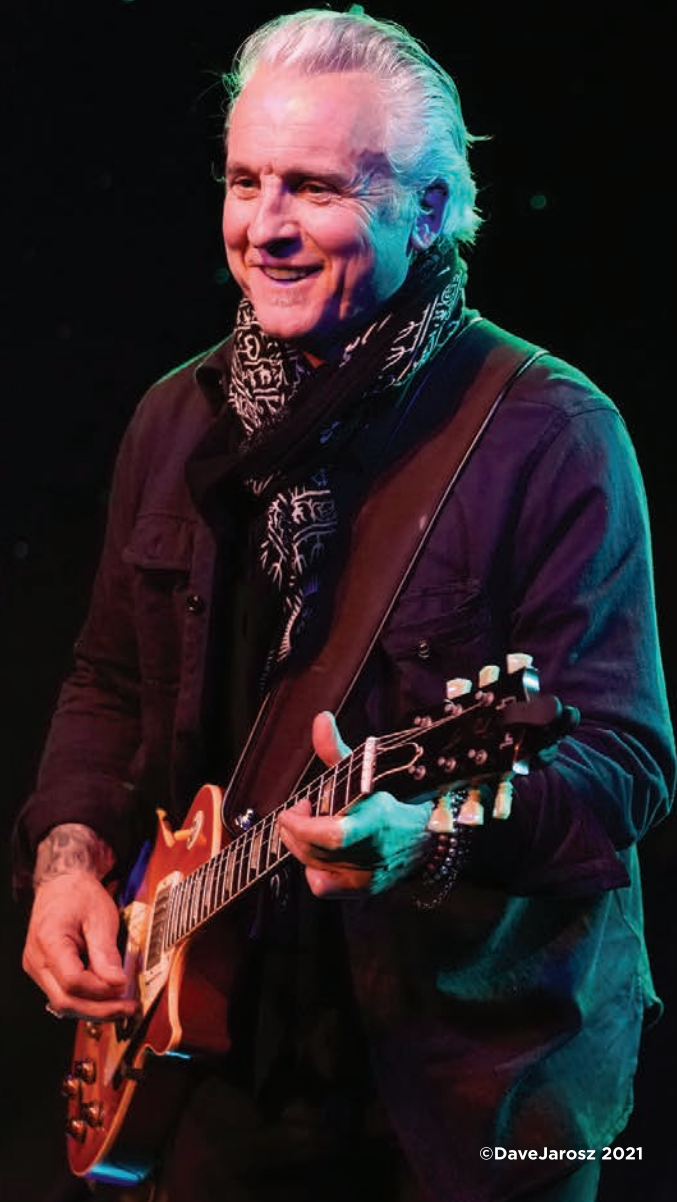
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WHISKY DISTILLERY



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EDITOR'S THOUGHTS

Summer Whisky

Time to relax



With time off and summer weather permitting, we begin our holidays. Whether it's boarding a plane for Europe, heading north to the lake or embracing the sweet comforts of home. It all comes with some stress. How do we occupy our time and not feel restless?

Time off is needed to recharge and refocus, but over doing it on that time off can create a need for more time off. I like being active, especially with my girls. They keep me fit and moving, but I also enjoy sitting still, relaxing, sipping a whisky and watching the view.

Our summer issue is the perfect companion, dockside, wedged between your plane seats or proudly displayed on your whisky table (formerly known as your coffee table). If your travels don't

take you far this summer, let the guide to food and drink down the Tennessee Whisky Trail be your vicarious voyage.

The story of Starlight Distillery is not to be missed. Reading about the Huber family history and their dedication to excellence to create their whiskey in our cover feature, will turn your lazy afternoon on end as you plan a new list of life goals to chase your whiskey dreams.

We have article after article to sink into and let you escape from your 'vacation stress'. Hide for a while in the aged, oaked and barreled tales of whisky life. The extravagant and varied notes of all the blends to try will centre you just where you need to be, pin point on a moment, that one sip to savour and hold.

Our writers have crafted the perfect summer experience to take back home, a souvenir of laughter and connection and a newfound interest in what's to come.

As for our Relish Whisky vacation - we compromise, as we often do. Oscillating like a summer fan between moving and sitting, sitting and moving, but always with a smile and a wave at the life before us.

Cheers.

Robert Windover
Editor/Publisher

RELISH
WHISKY

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TN Whiskey Trail

Cocktail and Culinary Focus

By Chris Chamberlain





Tennessee continues to be a culinary hotbed in the national food press, and many visitors make their dinner reservations before they even book their travel. Pairing wine with food is an age-old practice, but frankly, it's so 1992. Restaurants and bars across the state have realized that spirits can be the best pairing to showcase the true terroir of the state in the form of creative cocktails made with products from members of the Tennessee Whiskey Trail. Taste your way across the state and enjoy the best food and spirits Tennessee has to offer!

While many whiskey enthusiasts prefer to drink their spirits neat out of a snifter or in a glass with a rock or two, whiskey can be a transcendent part of a classic cocktail, along with other spirits produced by distilleries along the Trail. A proper cocktail is all about balance, making it an ideal pairing with food. Many Tennessee restaurants depend on contributions from members of the Tennessee Whiskey Trail to provide the base ingredients for drinks that complement their food. From fine dining establishments to down-home dining, there's certain to be a destination worth visiting no matter what part of Tennessee you're traveling in. Here are some of our favorites organized by region.

West Tennessee

Memphis

Memphis is home to two award-winning distilleries, *Old Dominick* and *Blue Note Distilling*, and their products are featured in restaurants and bars around their hometown. When Old Dominick produced their first barrel of Tennessee Whiskey in 2017, it became the first operating distillery in Memphis since the advent of Prohibition. In addition to whiskey, Old Dominick also produces a gin and a unique Honeybell Citrus Vodka with elements of sweet tangerine and bitter grapefruit that make it a fascinating ingredient for cocktails. Blue Note focuses on bourbons which are a fine base for an Old Fashioned.

At *Alchemy*, guests can pair a menu of elevated bar bites and hearty larger plates with several cocktails that use Old Dominick products as the base spirit. Doesn't a butternut squash and bacon pasta dish paired with a brown sugar-sweetened Memphis Old Fashioned sound like a delightful combo? *The Lobbyist* in the Chisca Building combines international flavors with local ingredients to create a global menu that reflects the country's melting pot of cultures. Among those indigenous ingredients are Old Dominick gin so you can think globally while drinking locally.

Hog & Hominy is another restaurant that combines Southern ingredients with international recipes, specifically the cuisine of Italy. James Beard-nominated chefs Andrew Ticer and Michael Hudman reach to their Italian heritage growing up cooking in the kitchen with their families to inspire a menu of flavorful plates, many of which benefit from a kiss of smoke and fire from their wood-fired pizza oven.

The talented bar staff at *Cameo* believes that the food should complement the cocktails, as opposed to the normal attitude toward pairing. Some people have taken to calling



mixologists “bar chefs,” and the description is certainly apt at *Cameo* where they come up with ingenious flavor combinations that inform the culinary choices of the kitchen.

IBIS is a two-story cocktail emporium that features your choice of experiences. Enjoy the view from the rooftop deck while sipping on a *Cairo*

Cosmo made with Old Dominick vodka and some bar snacks, or dine on a larger menu in the main dining room where you'll encounter generous large plates of salmon or braised short rib.

Finish the evening with a nightcap in the subterranean speakeasy. Try the *Sour Tower*, a sweet and tart cocktail featuring Blue Note Distilling's *Riverset Rye*.



Middle Tennessee

Tennessee's oldest and largest distilleries, *Jack Daniel's* and *Cascade Hollow Distilling Co.* (the home of George Dickel,) exert a great influence over menus across the state, and rightfully so. These two carried the flag of Tennessee whiskey for decades, and they have inspired the new generation of distillers to continue to push the industry forward. Distilleries have germinated all around Middle Tennessee, from Clarksville at the Kentucky state line to Prichard's in Kelso near the Alabama border. In between, spirits tourism fans can enjoy fabulous food and transcendent drinks at a multitude of restaurants around the region.

Nashville

Nashville is both the capital of the state and one of the South's major culinary capitals. Distilleries such as *Big*

Machine Distillery, *Corsair*, *Pennington Distilling Co.*, *Nashville Craft* and *Nelson's Green Brier* all have facilities within city limits and offer tastings and tours as part of their participation in the Tennessee Whiskey Trail. Nashville Barrel Co. has proven to be an award-winning powerhouse when it comes to choosing, finishing and blending unique spirits, and restaurant guests will find many of these distilleries featured prominently on Nashville menus.

The minute patrons step foot inside *Gertie's Bar at The 404 Kitchen*, it becomes immediately apparent that this is a serious whiskey bar. The entire back wall of the bar is packed with shelves heaving under the weight of hundreds of bottles that the bartenders use in inventive cocktails. While the menu changes seasonally, you might encounter a Picker's Vodka drink infused with exotic flavors or ask the bartender to shake you up a classic cocktail using your favorite spirit from the Tennessee Whiskey Trail, and they'll be happy to oblige. Then head upstairs to The 404

Kitchen for a dinner that is sure to stick to your ribs, especially the shareable 24-ounce tritip that takes 72 hours to cook low and slow. Don't forget to order a skillet of the kitchen's legendary warm baked cornbread with sorghum butter!

Sometimes people complain that high-proof whiskey "burns," but that's the least of your worries if you're enjoying it with Nashville's most famous local dish, hot chicken. The fiery fried fowl is available from chicken joints all over town, but only *Party Fowl* offers the chance to cool down with a slushy cocktail made using Old Dominick Vodka and frozen lemonade. Party Fowl offers hot chicken in many different presentations ranging from a half bird on the bone to tenders to tacos, all at heat levels ranging from tame to infernally spicy. You can even order Hot Chicken and Beignets, a clever take on traditional chicken & waffles. Paired with a Music City Mule made with your choice of flavors of Picker's Vodka from Pennington Distilling Co., that might make for a lovely brunch.

The overarching ethos at **Husk** has always been “if it doesn’t come from the South, it’s not coming through the door,” and this attitude extends from the kitchen to the bar where many Tennessee brands are featured on the spirits list, including some single barrels selected by the restaurant staff directly from the distilleries. Both the food and drink menu maintain a laser focus on celebrating the flavors of the South, often through modern versions of ancient techniques of fermentation and preservation. The resulting cuisine and cocktails represent a shrine to both the history and future of the region.

Corsair Distillery Offers tastings and tours at its two facilities in Nashville, and both also feature cocktail experiences to demonstrate how their products work as part of a mixed drink. More than just a sip out of a plastic cup, these cocktails are thoughtfully created by adroit mixologists to showcase some of the more unique spirits that Corsair produces.

One of Nashville’s oldest movie houses has been converted into a sultry restaurant called **Sinema**, oozing Hollywood-era glitz and glam. Bold colors dominate the design scheme of the main dining room downstairs, and the sexy upstairs lounge features one of the best whiskey and cocktail menus in town. Weekend brunches are particularly advantageous times to visit Sinema for all-you-can eat Southern breakfast classes served family-style at the table along with Bloody Marys and mimosas.

In the burgeoning 12 South neighborhood, **Josephine** is another great brunch spot or for a dinner featuring regional cuisine informed by chef Andrew Little’s Pennsylvania Dutch sensibilities and classic French techniques. A weekend morning meal at Josephine accompanied by a couple of cocktails from the talented bar staff is the perfect fuel for an afternoon of strolling the

sidewalks of 12 South and a little window shopping. (Or actual shopping. Bring your debit card!)

Franklin

Franklin frequently shows up on lists of the best small towns in America, and with its charming downtown and friendly vibe, that should be no surprise. In addition to spirits from **Leiper’s Fork Distillery** in the neighboring village that gives its name to the whiskey, Franklin bars and restaurants keep it local with a special emphasis on Tennessee spirits.

The Harpeth Hotel’s flagship restaurant in downtown Franklin is **1799 Kitchen & Cocktails**, a dining experience that very intentionally pays homage to the area’s whiskey culture. The main dining room is girded with white oak, creating the dramatic effect of dining inside a gigantic barrel and much of the decor is meant to symbolize different parts of the distilling process.

1799’s extensive list of spirits and cocktails features many Tennessee products, including Leiper’s Fork and **Company Distilling’s** Ghost Rail Gin made just down the road in Thompson’s Station. Regular patrons can even store bottles of their favorite liquors in storage lockers in the restaurant to ensure that there’s more to pour. The eclectic dinner menu ranges from traditional shrimp & grits to more exotic fare like a double-cut bone-in elk chop.

Chef Jason McConnell operates two of the most popular fine dining options in Franklin with his **Cork & Cow chophouse** and **Red Pony**, an upscale Southern restaurant. Both restaurants feature excellent cocktail programs with special emphasis on Tennessee products whenever appropriate. Cork & Cow also offers fantastic bargains during happy hour, so there’s plenty of reason to arrive early for your dinner reservation. During the 19th century, “O Be Joyful” was slang for homemade hooch, and

today it’s the name of a convivial whiskey pub in downtown Franklin. An entire section of the expansive whiskey list at O Be Joyful is dedicated to Tennessee products, so it’s almost certain that you’ll be able to find your favorite to sip neat or as part of a tasting flight. While the food at OBJ is typical pub grub, it’s high-quality and ideal for the environment.

Clarksville

Not everyone knows that Clarksville is the fifth-largest city in the state, but it still maintains a small-town feel. Home to two distilleries, Clarksville is rightly proud of the local spirits that appear on area menus. **Old Glory Distilling** demonstrated remarkable patience by waiting almost five years to release their first small batch Tennessee Whiskeys and bourbons, and their restraint was rewarded with some notable new products. They did fill the time while waiting for their brown spirits to mature by making some gin, vodka and moonshine products which are available to taste and



purchase at the distillery and as part of signature cocktails from the tasting bar.

Perhaps the best spot for cocktails in Clarksville is in the newly renovated historic post office. **The Mailroom** is a dramatic bit of architectural achievement with outdoor seating available and an impressive menu of cocktails. Both the drinks and eats lean toward the international as a nod to the mail going to and from soldiers at nearby Ft. Campbell who were stationed all over the world. The former federal building is an inspiration for a Federal Mule cocktail featuring vodka from Old Glory, and the distillery's products also show up in a few other signature drinks. The made-from-scratch food at The Mailroom is geographically diverse, with Latin American elements and Korean cuisine among the highlights.



South Central TN _____ Lynchburg

While they don't pour any spirits at **Miss Mary Bobo's Restaurant** in Lynchburg, the sweet tea is mighty fine and the family-style smorgasbord of classic Southern food is a "can't miss" experience when combined with a visit to the Jack Daniel's Distillery just a short stroll away. Hostesses sit with each table of assembled strangers who often become fast friends. The hostesses are always available to regale guests with stories of the town and Mr. Jack, and also to make sure that the platters of fried chicken and copious side dishes remain stocked.

Shelbyville _____

Due to open sometime soon at **Nearest Green Distillery**, **Humble Baron** will be a combination entertainment venue and restaurant which claims to be home to the world's longest bar. While we can't wait to see that, in the meantime visitors can tour the sprawling distillery property and learn all about the history of Nearest Green, the man who legendarily taught Jack Daniel how to make whiskey. Until Humble Baron opens, the **Barrel House BBQ** location is a pretty good substitute. Their grilled cheese sandwich on Texas toast with pulled pork and spicy BBQ sauce has been named the best in the state!

East Tennessee _____ Cookeville

While the sole distillery in Cookeville is a retail outpost of **Tennessee Legend Distillery** where guests can enjoy free samples of their spirits and purchase cocktails, the town still has a strong commitment to Tennessee products at local restaurants. **37 Cedar** has a menu that aims to please everyone with a wide variety of cuisine ranging from classic Southern comfort food to flatbreads,

salads, burgers, pasta and steak. With a menu that diverse, the cocktail program also has to stretch itself, and it does with clever drinks devised in-house by the bar team. A highlight of the bar menu is a section of custom Collins-style cocktails including a refreshing Tennessee Collins made using Corsair Gin.

Seven Senses is an attractive dining option in Cookeville's West Side Entertainment District where the talented kitchen team puts out a menu of seasonal Southern fare with little dashes of international influences to up the excitement. For example, just the concept of a bacon and cheese grit hushpuppy sounds prototypically Southern, but jazz it up with a European dijonnaise and an Asian sweet chili as dipping sauces, and you've got a global treat!

Cookeville residents and visitors alike are anxiously awaiting the opening of 1854 on the historic downtown square hopefully sometime later this summer. The cocktail lounge is named after the year that the land was purchased to establish Cookeville as the county seat, and soon the seats at 1854 will be filled with fans of elevated mixology enjoying inspired drinks.

Chattanooga _____

Although Chattanooga was a little late to the game after the state legislature opened up additional counties to legalized distilling back in 2009, once **Chattanooga Whiskey Company** convinced Hamilton County to vote in favor of permitting them to open up their experimental distillery in 2014, the city has quickly become a valued member of the state's spirits community. Specializing in what they call "Tennessee High Malts," Chattanooga Whiskey produces some very novel products thanks to their experimentation of different varieties of malted barley and other innovative techniques. Although their larger primary production facility is not open to public



an herbal cocktail made with Fernet and a walnut and sassafras liqueur. Rosecomb's tight menu of bar snacks still manages to show off the kitchen's creativity through just about a dozen choices. From deviled eggs and collard & artichoke dip to fried catfish and a solid burger, there's something for just about everyone.

The Social shares a kitchen with their sister restaurant next door, *Public House* so patrons have plenty of convenient options to eat and drink. At The Social, the focus is on craft cocktails, beer, wine and small plates, and they take their drinks quite seriously. Spirits from Knoxville's *PostModern Spirits*, *George Dickel* and *Chattanooga Whiskey* dot the cocktail menu, and happy hour deals are tough to beat.

Company is a speakeasy-style bar tucked surreptitiously away in the boutique Kinley Hotel on Market St. This cozy cocktail spot oozes atmosphere with a quiet library seating section, Edison bulbs lighting the attractive space and a brilliant copper-topped bar. Mixologists slide artful cocktails across that bar while jazz

cocktails at their quaint Experimental Distillery in the Southside Historic District.

They have been joined by *Gate II*, a micro-distillery located in the historic Chattanooga Choo Choo terminal building. Focusing on very small batch production of spirits like single malt whiskey, absinthe, gin, vodka, rum and straight whiskey, Gate II actually ages their spirits in a box car on the property. Visitors can experience their spirits as part of elegant cocktails at the bar and stroll the grounds of the Choo Choo while enjoying their drinks.

Upscale cocktail lounge *Stir* lives up to its name with an imaginative list of drinks, including a clever take on a traditional whiskey sour that features Chattanooga Whiskey plus

the unexpected addition of pineapple juice and miso paste. An exhaustive menu of Tennessee whiskeys means that guests can pretty much take a trip along the Tennessee Whiskey Trail without leaving their bar stool. Paired with an excellent raw bar and a selection of international entrees, Stir is a great representative of the best that Chattanooga has to offer.

Rosecomb is a hip new bar that reaches across the state to source Tennessee ingredients for some of their cocktails. The Zora & Kozzola is a fascinating balance of sweet and savory featuring Barrel-Rested Gin from Knoxville's PostModern Spirits along with sherry, sorghum, olives and onions, while *Nelson's Green Brier* is the star of the Walk in the Woods,



music plays softly in the background to heighten the mood. Bar patrons can also order tasting flights of rums, whiskeys, tequilas and amari along with small plates that can be combined to build an entire meal.

Easy Bistro is best known for the culinary talents of chef/owner Erik Niel who combines classic French techniques with Southern sensibilities to create a seafood-centric menu of bistro food. But don't sleep on the bar at Easy Bistro. (Seriously, don't sleep on the bar. You'll get kicked out!) The bartenders at Easy Bistro offer up new takes on classic cocktails alongside completely novel creations, many of which feature Tennessee spirits. Boasting a whiskey collection of more than 300 bottles, there's a great chance you'll discover a new favorite.

Peaceful Side of the Smokies/Blout Co. (Alcoa, Maryville, Townsend, Walland)

The voluminous wine and spirits list at **The Barn at Blackberry Farm** is as big as a phone book, assuming of course you remember what a phone book was. Suffice it to say that it stretches more than 250 pages including dozens of Tennessee whiskeys ranging from common to extremely rare. Trained mixologists artfully create refined cocktails using these exotic ingredients, or they'll gladly pour a flight of three spirits you've never tried before. The kitchen at The Barn has produced multiple James Beard Award nominees and winners for their hyper-local approach to seasonal cuisine, and a dinner in the warm and welcoming dining room at Blackberry Farm is always a memorable experience.

Chef Trevor Stockton is one of those talented culinarians who learned his chops in the kitchen at Blackberry

Farm, and he has brought his talents to **The Restaurant at RT Lodge** in Maryville. Veteran Blackberry visitors will probably recognize some of the philosophies that Stockton employs in his own kitchen with elevated versions of classic Southern dishes like pimento cheese, smoked trout dip, skillet fried chicken and pan-roasted fish. Chef Stockton also provides the upscale bar snacks for The Morningside Room, a new drinking and dining destination at RT Lodge. Both the main restaurant's bar and The Morningside Room offer full cocktail service to hotel guests and visitors.

In Townsend, **The Bar at the Bear at Dancing Bear Lodge and Appalachian Bistro** offers more than a dozen Tennessee whiskeys on their spirits menu, including selections from their neighbors at **Company Distilling**. They also feature difficult-to-find whiskeys that will probably never show up on the shelves of your neighborhood spirits store, so this might be your best chance to find one of those "white whales." The fun food menu features items like a charcuterie plate called an "Appalachian Lunchable," rainbow trout & grits and a sticky sorghum-glazed chicken.



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Knoxville

Chef/owner Joseph Lenn is another one of those Blackberry Farm alums who moved on to start his own restaurant after winning a Beard award. His dream project is *JC Holdway* where his commitment to using local ingredients extends beyond simply sourcing from farmers, ranchers and purveyors within a few miles of his Knoxville kitchen. He also makes sure that products from Knoxville distilleries *PostModern Spirits* and *Knox Whiskey Works* are available to pour alongside his soulful menu of Southern food, much of which is prepared using a wood-fired grill to connect with the heritage of open-fire cookery.

It would be easy for *Osteria Stella* and sister bar *Brother Wolf* to steer clear of Tennessee products for their bar menus, considering the Italian theme of both establishments and the preponderance of Negroni variations on both drink lists. However, they go the extra mile to source PostModern Spirits' Giniferous gin as the base for at least a couple of their drinks, most notably the Old City Negroni that also includes PostModern's bitter and fragrant Artemisia Amaro Liqueur. Quaffing a Negroni is a great way to stimulate your appetite for a meal of Italian small plates and pasta at either restaurant.

Peter Kern Library at the boutique Oliver Royale hotel used to be a closely-guarded secret in Knoxville, originally accessible by hotel guests through the lobby or by in-the-know locals through a camouflaged speakeasy entrance tucked away in an alley under a single red light bulb. Now that the secret is out, you may find a line down the alley to get in, but it's worth the wait to enjoy creative cocktails named after literary heroes in a clubby environment where patrons speak in soft tones and

concentrate on their drinks. Sharp-dressed mixologists precisely prepare the drinks, and the bourbon/whiskey list offers more than 150 options to choose from. Ask your bartender for a suggestion of which food items to order to complement your cocktail, or just go for the premium burger, which is never a bad choice.

Northeast Tennessee

True to the region's historical heritage as a hotbed of "backwoods distilling," many of the distilleries in Northeast Tennessee feature various versions of flavored moonshines, but most of them have been around long enough to also offer aged whiskey products. There is absolutely nothing wrong with dropping into any of the modern moonshiner stops along the Tennessee Whiskey Trail to enjoy a delicious taste of Apple Pie 'shine or experience the burn of some white lightning', but it's even better now that distilleries like *Ole Smoky*, *Sugarlands*, *TN Legend*, *Lost State*, *Old Forge* and others have diversified their offerings to include other spirits like bourbon, rye whiskey, gin, rum and vodka. It's also not hard to find a great meal in or near these distilleries, so be sure to include that in your travel plans.

Sevierville

The town of Sevierville is a little quieter than its more touristy neighbors of Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, but that doesn't mean visitors can't find plenty of fun there. Fuel up at *Graze Burgers* with a couple of delightfully elevated starter plates like crispy pork belly or fried green tomatoes with homemade pimento cheese and bacon jam. Be sure to save room for one of their epic burgers made using 100% all natural grass-fed beef topped with local veggies.



Wash it all down with a TN Fashioned featuring Chattanooga Whiskey and rhubarb bitters or a boozy milkshake that's a drink and a dessert at the same time.

Gatlinburg

Situated on the ridge overlooking downtown Gatlinburg, *The Greenbrier* offers some of the most upscale dining in town. In addition to an internationally-inspired menu of seafood and chophouse classics, the real highlight is The Greenbrier's extensive selection of prime quality dry-aged beef, pork and venison. Their unparalleled drink menu includes clever cocktails and a long list of rare spirits. The bar staff selects single barrels of whiskey to create one-of-a-kind cocktails that can't be found anywhere else.

Bristol

Bristol prides itself as "the birthplace of country music," and there's even *an entertaining and educational museum* in town that is dedicated to the famous 1927 Bristol Sessions that introduced rural hillbilly music to the rest of the country. Bristol is also an excellent drinking and dining destination thanks to spots like the *Stateline Bar & Grille*, *J Frank and Cootie Brown's*. *Delta Blues* considers itself the home of "Blues, Brews and BBQ," and they even cook with Lost State Distilling's Shelby Bourbon and Maple-flavored Whiskey as part of their delicious recipes. ♦



A large wooden barrel is the central focus, resting on metal racks in a dimly lit distillery. The barrel has a prominent compass rose logo painted on its head. Two white labels are attached to the barrel. The left label is from 'HUBER ORCHARDS, INC.' and includes the code '36BW', '22-0371', and 'STORAGE'. The right label is from 'STARLIGHT DISTILLERY' and includes '36 Barrel', 'Bottle 100%', 'BSP-IN-31', 'RCS38', and '22D06'. A person's arm in a blue sweater is visible on the left, holding a metal handle. The background shows more barrels and the structural elements of the distillery.

Starlight Distillery's Field of Dreams

By Blair Phillips

In the film *Field of Dreams*, voices tell farmer Ray Kinsella to rip up his corn fields and build a baseball diamond. His neighbours were sure Kinsella was a few cobs short of a bushel. In the township of Starlight, Indiana, Gerald and Carl T Huber ripped up their farm acreage in 1978 and planted grapes. No voices told them to do so, but as with Kinsella, the neighbours were baffled. American wine was in its infancy and had the reputation of sucking. No one in their right mind would venture into this unpredictable world. But as Indiana Hoosier's Coach Bob Knight said, "The key is not the 'will to win'... everybody has that. It is the will to prepare to win that is important." And this is precisely what the Hubers set out to do in their own field of dreams.

Act 1: Coming to America

Gerald and Carl's connection to the vine traces back to first-generation farmer Simon Huber. Simon spent his early years in Baden-Baden, Germany, working the land and developing his chops as a vintner in a region where vineyards intersect with orchards and distillers produce Germany's coveted eaux-de-vie and fruit brandies. When he immigrated to Indiana in 1843, his German aesthetic to waste nothing would see his fruit converted into wine and shared with the community.

In 1978, while most of America was still trying to figure out John Travolta's Saturday Night Fever dance moves, the Hubers, along with names like Bill Oliver, were getting down by advocating for Indiana's farm winery act, which opened the doors to planting vineyards and welcoming guests to a winery. Yes, the first wines blended from several grape varietals matched the palates of the time, but later vintages showed the Hubers had created a diamond in the rough.

"It was a challenging move," explains seventh-generation vintner and distiller Blake Huber. "The industry as a whole in the United States was very new. The focus was on Napa Valley in California. The value it added to the farm, sharing those traditions and continuing a legacy, made sense for us." Sensing that wine had a future, they set the stage for Act 2.

Act 2: Sixth Time's A Charm

Sixth-generation Greg and Ted Huber entered the world blessed with Huber foresight. The winemaking process creates by-products that most North American farmers consider excellent ingredients for compost. No one else in



the state considered converting those by-products into brandy and fruit spirits. Other than the Seagram's distillery in Lawrenceburg, officially, distilling didn't exist in Indiana. And those who did distill in the shadow of Seagram kept it quiet, hoping the wind would never carry the glorious aromas to the nose of the Indiana State Police. But

on the Huber farm in 1999, Ted and his brother Greg set out to distill leftover fruit into the shining star of Indiana's first craft distillery. The blood, sweat, and tears of overcoming government obstacles ended with tears of joy trickling from their gleaming Christian Carl pot still under Indiana's first artisan brandy permit.



"I remember vaguely when the still arrived,"

says seventh-generation vintner and distiller Christian Huber.

"I was six years old and remembered coming home from school and helping my dad (Ted Huber) hand write the bottle numbers on the tags."

In the mid-2000s, Ted was appointed to the American Distilling Institute, representing the brandy seat. The stars aligned when a friendship formed with the Johnny Appleseed of craft distilling, Dave Pickerell. "We grew up around people always talking about Bourbon," says Christian. "Dave and everyone in the room saw the potential in American Bourbon on the craft scale." This serendipitous meeting led Starlight down Bourbon's rabbit hole.

Act 3: From Wine to Bourbon

Christian and Blake didn't grow up in a typical family. Their parents raised them on European ideals where at a young age, they were tasting wines, whiskies, and brandies and developing a flavour library. "We were in the back rooms of the American Distilling Institute and walking through nosing whiskies with these masters and hearing them talk and smell," says Christian. For homework, they hung out with Dave Pickerell and listened to bedtime stories about what was happening in a spirit's flavour profile and how flavours interact.

The Hubers put on their bureaucratic dance shoes again, this time for grain distilling. When that act passed in 2013, Dave Pickerell hooked up the family with distilling legend Lisa Wicker to make whiskey. Dave, Lisa and Ted were the early champions of the first mashbills putting the farm's values into production values. The heart of it will always be sustainable agriculture and imbuing Starlight Whiskies with a sense of place. Although Starlight Township is a geographic stone's throw from the Ohio River and Louisville, Kentucky, this wasn't Kentucky Bourbon; it was Indiana Bourbon. And they are happy about that.

The Hubers started humbly, beginning with a couple of barrels. This has grown over the past decade to 1,500 barrels a year, a rate that allows them to remain true to their core values and not get overwhelmed while constantly fine-tuning their processes.

Indiana in a Bottle

The process starts in the fields where they grow sweet Lancaster white corn, Hopi blue corn, Bloody Butcher, five different non-gmo yellow corn varieties,



and rye. "Yield is measured in barrels per acre and not bushels per acre," says Christian. Other farms provide malted barley and wheat for the sweet mash fermentations. Sweet mash is a process that drifts from Bourbon's traditional sour mash backset and instead builds the mash from scratch, every batch with fresh ingredients.

They are wine people at heart, so rather than open-top fermenters, they are closed to outside elements such as wild yeast. After seven days, the mash is double distilled in a 500-gallon Vendome pot still and put away to age. The mash and the distillate's flavour profile dictates the cooperage the whiskey will age in.

Making brandy gave them access to many different barrels and built up a Presidential library of barrel types. Blake and Christian don't dance around the topic of finishing and fight against the stigma that finishing is throwing whiskey into a barrel to cover up its faults. To them, a range of barrels is about increasing their blending toolbox. It's to build flavour rather than re-invent processes considered innovative decades ago.

"We see finishing as a way to take a great blend and showcase those flavours, then layer on complexity, depth and complementation," says Blake. "We produce port-style wines on the farm, so it also becomes sustainable to reuse those barrels." This is a farm distillery and not a casino, so the crap shoot of firing a tank of whiskey into a random assortment of barrels doesn't happen here. Instead, they make individual

blends for the casks the whiskey will age. "The whiskey going into a Bordeaux cask is very different than the whiskey going into a port cask," says Christian. "We never want to compromise the Bourbon by dominating it with non-whiskey flavours."

Like French winemaking, blending plays a critical role in the process. For example, in Bordeaux, it's about bringing





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together different components to make a beautiful blend. The Hubers apply the nuances of blending wine to whiskey. Going out and individually pulling out different sections of barrels, blending them with other barrels to compose a house style that pulls together rich layers of complexity. With one sip, you'll realize that if you want a baseball team, you build a baseball diamond. But if you're going to showcase delicious Indiana whiskey, blend it, and they will come.

Tasting Reviews

Carl T. Huber's Signature Indiana Straight Bourbon Whiskey (Batch 0228)

This sweet mash Bourbon is a blend of Starlight's 3-grain mashbill (60% corn, 20% rye and 20% malted barley) and 4-grain mashbill (51% corn, 20% rye, 20% malted barley and 9% wheat) aged in new American oak for four years. Starlight blends ten to twenty barrels for each batch.

Blake Huber maintains the house style in this blend. Classic caramel, vanilla and corn cobs on the nose complement cooked fruits and malt with cinnamon-charged spices. Fruit dusted with brown sugar, center the palate with mild oak tannins that drift into chest-warming rye spices. Carl T. Huber is a classic drinking style bourbon that starts sweet and fruity, then sticks a dry landing with plenty of palate-cleansing citrus zest. Bottled at 46%.

Carl T. Huber's Bottled-In-Bond Indiana Straight Bourbon Whiskey (Batch B2205)

Starlight's Ted Huber blended this single-season sweet mash bourbon that was double distilled and aged for at least



four years in the farm's old rickhouse. The blend includes six to eight barrels of whiskey aged at least four years and then bottled at 50%.

This whiskey has baskets of ripe fruit, where an uncluttered nose features black cherry, sweet almond, buttery vanilla connected with caramel and a thump of oak. Patience teases toasted oak accents with floral finesse. Bottled-In-Bond's nose sails to the palate along with mild pipe tobacco, spicy roast mixed nuts and traditional baking spices cleansed by a bright orange zest. Dry

oak and a flurry of mouth-kicking spices keep the finish firmly centred.

Carl T. Huber's Cigar Batch Bourbon Whiskey (Barrel No. 22-2595-2)

Starlight ages this Bourbon for four years, then finishes it in Amburana barrels for an unspecified amount of time. This authentic Brazilian hardwood is sourced from an ecological Brazilian cooperage. Christian Huber has pulled a gem for the distillery's barrel library for this bottling. This Cigar Batch is bottled at 55.25%.

Cinnamon Toast Crunch cereal with a dose of extra cinnamon dominates the nose, layered with wet coffee grounds and brightened by an earthy Far East herbal note. Thick on the palate builds the whiskey's round character with caramel, unlit tobacco and exotic wood. The nose shifts with a burst of Christmas spices producing a waxy honeyed sweetness on the palate before the finish envelopes the experience with traditional oak layered with that wall-to-wall herbal profile. Polarizing and unforgettable. ♦



Nordic Distilleries on the Ryes

By Reece Sims

In 2017, in celebration of the country's century of independence, the Finnish public voted for rye bread to be the official food of Finland. Looking south, barely a day goes by without the Danes consuming at least one portion of *rugbrød*, a very dense, dark rye bread made with wholemeal rye flour. And even the Swedes use the saying *att ha råg i ryggen*, which roughly translates to having 'rye in the back' to describe someone who has guts, is strong, or possesses good moral character.







This all goes to say that rye has historically and in modernity, played a significant role in many European countries, especially in the Nordics and central Europe. For centuries, it has served as a staple grain in a variety of dishes and a reliable source of sustenance, particularly in regions with colder climates where other grains struggle to thrive. More than that, it has shaped traditions and cultural identities within these nations.

Despite playing a pivotal role in society, rye whisky production is just starting to come to prominence in Europe.

Whereas Canada and the United States have built much of their whisky reputations on producing internationally renowned ryes, European distilleries have only been ‘on the ryes’ for the past decade or so. However, in this short time, a handful of leading distilleries have been able to showcase what makes European rye whisky distinctive from that of North American styles.

A New Kind of Single Malt

‘Single malt’ has become synonymous with malted barley due to the way in

which the term is defined by law in Scotland and Ireland. However, it’s possible for most grains to be malted, it just hasn’t been a common avenue that distilleries have ventured down until recently.

While rye malt possesses its own unique standard of identity in the US, only a few distilleries have released a malted rye whisky; the majority of distilleries opt to use unmalted rye for their expressions. The same goes for Canada, where unmalted rye is preferred for rye whisky production. In Europe, on the other hand, we are seeing a number of distilleries releasing single rye malt expressions.

Some say that they get their best ideas in the shower, but when it comes to the owners of Kyrö Distillery, inspiration struck in a sweat room. Back in 2012, a group of friends sipped a bottle of American rye whiskey in a sauna and lamented the lack of Finnish distilleries producing local rye whisky. Unlike most instances where drunken banter from the night prior is a distant and often idiosyncratic memory, the idea to start a distillery still appealed. Within two years, owners Miika Lipiäinen, Mikko Koskinen, Kalle Valkonen, Miko Heinilä, and Jouni Ritala had acquired an old dairy farm located in Isokyrö, renovated it, imported a still and laid down their first batch of whisky.

Today, their flagship expression Kyrö Rye Malt Whisky, is made (as the name suggests) with one hundred percent malted rye and has received international acclaim including a Gold medal at IWSC in 2020.

Similarly, receiving a gold medal at the San Francisco Spirits Competition in 2020 for their Floor Malted Rye Whisky, Stauning Distillery, located in a remote village in the west of Denmark, started from humble beginnings.

In the early 2000’s a group of nine friends, inspired by a yearning to recreate an old Ardbeg bottling,

opened Denmark’s first whisky distillery. Launched in 2005, Stauning Distillery has evolved from a small, craft distillery operating out of a refurbished abattoir using altered meat grinders to mill grist, into a globally recognized force, now housed in a purpose-built architectural marvel of a distillery.

The barley and rye Stauning Distillery uses are sourced from farms within a few kilometers of the distillery and floor malted on site.

What is distinctive about both Kyrö and Stauning’s malted rye expressions, are a softer, more elegant spice, accentuated floral and fruit notes, and a subtle toffee sweetness. In addition, on the palate, both are creamier and less astringent in comparison to an unmalted rye whisky. Taking that toffee sweetness to the next level, Stork Club’s Rye Malt Whiskey, which is produced by Spree-wood Distillers located just south of Berlin in Schlepzig, Germany, uses three different types of malted rye, including a caramel malt and chocolate malt which progress that toffee note into cocoa territory.





Stirring the Pot

When making rye whisky in the United States, it is commonplace for distilleries to use column stills for production. In Canada, many distilleries producing rye will use a combination of column and pot distilled whiskies which are blended together after maturation to achieve a specific flavour profile. However, in both cases, the majority of the distillate comes from column distillation.

For Nordic distilleries like Kyrö and Stauning, using pot stills for their rye is another key marker in creating a distinctively European flavour profile. Stauning Distillery in particular, chooses to use fire-heated instead

of steam-heated pot stills, the latter of which have become the norm for single malt distilleries.

Fire-heated stills use direct heat from a flame to heat the wash, while steam-heated stills use steam to heat the wash indirectly. This direct fire heating can create caramelization and charring of the sugars, or a burnt, sulphuric note, ultimately leading to deeper, more complex flavours in the resulting spirit.

Up in Smoke

Interestingly, Kyrö, Stauning, and Stork Club all create smoky rye whiskies, but each expression employs different methods, intensities, and ingredients by

which to impart smoke.

Kyrö is currently developing a more extensive range of smoky rye expressions with their first release exploring an alder smoked rye. As described by the distillery, “alder wood tends to produce aromas that are reminiscent of campfire smoke, smoked ham, and the forest” providing new layers of complexity to contrast the fruit and floral notes from the malted rye.

Stauning Distillery smokes their malt over locally sourced peat and heather for two of their core expressions. However, in their case, they’re peating malted barley not rye. That being said, KAOS Triple Malt Whisky, uses a combination of floor malted barley, smoked malt, and malted rye to create a multidimensional expression. Each nosing and sip provides the senses with a newly discovered tasting note. It’s something that you’ll want to keep coming back to out of sheer curiosity and perhaps as the name suggests, a bit of chaos on the nose and palate.

Whereas Kyrö and Stauning Distillery have used different methods to smoke their malts, Spreewood Distillers finished a significant proportion of the Stork Club Smoky Rye Whiskey in an ex-Laphroaig cask to impart some underlying savoury and campfire notes to the expression.

All-in-all, from smoking to malting to pot distilling rye, it’s evident that European distilleries are creating a mark in this growing whisky niche. The unique combination of these techniques are just a few elements that have led to a distinct flavour profile that sets European rye whiskies apart from their American and Canadian counterparts.

With the continued growth of the industry, commitment to representing the cultural significance of rye, and use of local ingredients, it’s an exciting time for rye whisky enthusiasts to wait for what’s next on the ho-rye-zon. ♦

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Quails in a Barrel

By Blair Phillips

An extinct volcano called Mount Boucherie in West Kelowna, British Columbia, recently caught the attention of Green Spot Irish Whiskey. The mountain is named for Isadore Boucherie, an early settler in the region. Boucherie may sound as Irish as a box of Lucky Charms cereal, but the people who make Green Spot at Middleton Distillery weren't looking to go mountain climbing.

Instead, a world-class winery called Quails' Gate, nestled on the mountain's south-eastern slope, caught their attention. They hoped Quails' Gate would collaborate with them for the 2023 edition of their Wine Geese Series by supplying Green Spot with wine barrels.

The Wine Geese Series commemorates the wine world's Irish connection and its historical role. It pays tribute to the Irish families known as "Wine Geese," who flew Ireland's coop and launched wineries worldwide. The Quails' Gate release follows previous collaborations with the revered wineries of Bordeaux's Château Leoville-Barton and California's Chateau Montelena. Teaming with Green Spot brings the whiskey's heritage together with another Irish family to inspire a special edition whiskey.

Quails' Gate's story dates back to 1908 when Richard Stewart Sr. emigrated to Canada from Ireland. Richard was born in Hortland County, Kildare, a few hours north of the Middleton

Distillery, where Green Spot is made. Before emigrating, Richard worked in horticulture for Lord Guinness at the majestic Ashford estate. At the early age of thirteen, the head gardeners at Ashford took Richard under their wing, teaching him the science and art of growing fruits, vegetables, flowers and ornamental plants.

Richard practiced his trade across the estate's forty acres of greenhouses for twelve years. At one point, he accompanied a small group of workers to reforest a Guinness-owned Norwegian property. But as he matured, the paradise he created for the Guinness family made him long for his own paradise. Inspired by the travel stories that his older brother



William brought home from a two-year trip to Canada, Richard migrated to the Okanagan Valley and landed in his Utopia.

Richard and William started the Stewart Brothers Nursery in 1911 on a small piece of land in the Glenmore Valley. Thanks to Richard's horticultural talents, Okanagan's fruit tree population grew by 85,000 trees. Over the years, Richard's son, Dick, inherited the Stewart green thumb and transitioned from growing fruit trees to planting vineyards. In 1989, Quails' Gate Winery became a family affair when Dick's eldest son Ben and his wife, Ruth, produced the winery's first vintage.



During the pandemic, rather than dusting off board games, bingeing on Netflix or learning how to bake bread, the whiskey makers at the Middleton distillery were preparing for their next Wine Geese project. When they found a reference to the Irish connection at Quails' Gate, they contacted Ben's brother, Tony Stewart, and the project began. The Quails' wine barrels flew to Ireland, and Middleton selected the Pinot Noir barrels out of the skein.

"Quails' Gate has consistently produced one of the most elegant Pinot Noirs in the Okanagan Valley," attests spirits writer and educator Charlene Rooke.

Mount Boucherie may have been dormant for 50 million years, but Boucherie's soil compensates for this underachievement. It produces grapes for a wine that erupts with flavour. Middleton selected the Pinot Noir barrels for their residual soft tannins, which provide the palate with a silk-sweet texture and dried fruits that harmonize with Green Spot's signature flavours of classic orchard fruits, spice and toasted oak.

After ageing the whiskey in American oak and ex-sherry casks, they mature it in the Stewart's Pinot Noir casks for sixteen months. The whiskey's

sophisticated spices on the nose are dialled back compared to the standard Green Spot expression. Vanilla notes spring forward with Green Spot's signature orchard fruits assimilated under this whiskey's malty umbrella. The spices on the creamy palate snap, crackle and pop with a gusto balanced by sweet grains and dried fruits.

Seasoned toasted oak and gorgeous spices extend through the finish. The marriage between these two families is fitting, given that Green Spot travelled to the flavours of Canada and found the same Utopia that Richard Stewart Sr. discovered in 1908. ♦





Angel's Envy Master Distiller Owen Martin

By Maggie Kimberl

On October 17, 2022, Owen Martin became the Master Distiller of Angel's Envy Distillery in Louisville, Kentucky. He was the first person appointed to that position since the co-Founder, Lincoln Henderson, passed away in 2013. Martin brings a wealth of technical information and industry experience to the job. He began his career in beverage alcohol in a Kansas City brewery, and most recently was Head Distiller at Stranahan's in Colorado. Relish & Whisky Magazine recently caught up with Martin to learn more about his journey to the Kentucky Bourbon Industry.



MK: *Where did your journey to distilling begin?*

OM: My journey began in Kansas City, where I'd been pursuing a mechanical engineering degree and bottling part-time at a local brewery. I had no interest in a desk job, and I had this realization that there were "alternative" industries that had engineering applications – so I began looking into pursuing a more formal brewing education after graduation. That led me to Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, Scotland, where I enrolled in their Master's program in brewing and distilling science. It didn't take long for me to switch my focus to distillation after learning more about the craft and discovering the great whiskey bars of Edinburgh. I moved back stateside after graduation and have been working in American whiskey ever since.

MK: *What is one major similarity and one major difference between brewing and distilling?*

OM: To make a great product in either industry, fermentation needs to be

done with a sensory focus and not purely for alcohol production. Yeast strains and fermentation practices have such a huge impact on flavor and aroma in both brewing and distilling. It's something that the craft brewing industry talks about and experiments with often, and it's now becoming more widely recognized and understood by whiskey fans as well. This increased consumer awareness has led even the biggest distillers to play around and try new things in the space, and I find that super exciting.

On the flip side of that topic, it's always fun to blow brewers' minds talking about flavor development in whiskey. In beer, esters are flavor compounds that are formed during fermentation (think of that banana note in your favorite Hefeweizen). However, in whiskey, esters are not only formed during fermentation, but can also develop in the barrel over the course of its maturation. Funkier, open-top bourbon fermenters, rarely seen in beer, can lay the groundwork for fruity and floral characteristics that will later be created in the barrel.

MK: *Are there any differences in distilling in Colorado and Kentucky?*

OM: At the most basic level, the ingredients have an impact. As we all know, corn is king in Kentucky – whereas in Colorado, you see more single malt whiskeys due to the high volume of barley grown in the Rocky Mountain region. There are also differences in practice; due to the relatively small size of most Colorado distilleries, there's a much higher proportion of pot stills, with only a few column stills in the state. With the scale and history of bourbon in Kentucky, the opposite is true here. Each system has its own advantages, but those largely depend on the overall goals, ingredients and volume.

MK: *Are there any differences in whiskey maturation between Colorado and Kentucky?*

OM: Absolutely. I'd say this is one of the most impactful areas where the two diverge. The elevation and dry climate in Colorado mean that barrels almost universally increase in proof as they age – even in warehouses with humidity control – because a higher proportion of water is pulled from the barrels to try and equalize with the dry environment. Scotland, for example, sees the opposite – the cool, very humid environment allows the alcohol to more readily escape as the barrels mature.

The Kentucky climate is uniquely situated between the two. It has higher humidity, but the distinct seasons and temperature swings can lead to more variation within barrel warehouses – so barrels at the top of a rickhouse might increase in proof, while those at the bottom levels might decrease. Kentucky distillers can then choose to blend between those different profiles or keep them separated for more distinct product lines.

MK: *What was your first day on the job at Angel's Envy like?*

OM: It's been a complete whirlwind since getting here, but I certainly spent as much time as I could with each production department in the first days and weeks. Whether it was rolling barrels with our warehousing team, filling bottles on the single barrel packaging line or just talking shop about our mashing, fermentation and distillation systems — it was hugely important to me to put in the time to get to know everyone well, earn and maintain their trust, and let them know that I have their backs.

MK: *What is your favorite aspect of working in a distillery?*

OM: I enjoy working with a team to make something tangible and of high quality. A great bottle of whiskey like Angel's Envy can make someone feel appreciated, bring people together, spur conversation or help someone celebrate

an occasion. I get to work with all the different folks who bring that bottle to life — the people that mash, distill, cut, barrel, age, blend, taste and package it, and with those that keep the place running and envision our future every day. What's not to like?

I also love that Angel's Envy's facility in downtown Louisville is both a working distillery and a visitor center — so guests get to see our production process up close and can strike up a conversation with me or other team members throughout the distillery. I feel really lucky that I get the chance to interact with our guests every single day.

MK: *Do you have any plans to try different cask finishes at Angel's Envy?*

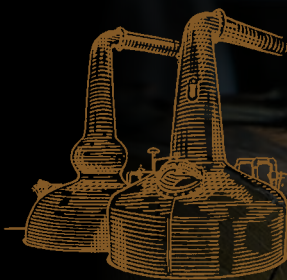
OM: Without a doubt. Throughout my career, I've built up a nice little mental library of finishing barrels and the qualities they bring to the table — it's exciting to think about and experiment with the ways they can impact bourbon

and rye mash bills. We obviously do a great job with port finishing and using other fortified wine barrels on a more specialty basis — and I think there's still a huge amount of room to play with both wine and spirits finishing barrels.

MK: *Given the chance, would you make an American Single Malt Whisky at Angel's Envy?*

OM: I'm excited about and already working on R&D for Angel's Envy, and I truly don't think anything — playing with new cask finishes, grains, fermentation and maturation techniques — is off the table for us. To me, creating whiskey at Angel's Envy means examining an extremely heritage-rich category through unexpected lenses — we always want to be pushing boundaries and striving to uncover what's next for American whiskey. My goal is to take that innovative mindset and be really intentional about trialing things, and I'm looking forward to bringing some unique and special whiskeys to market in the future.





COTSWOLDS SINGLE MALT WHISKY

The Cotswolds Distillery began production at its idyllic North Cotswolds site in 2014, under the guidance of renowned industry experts Harry Cockburn & the late Dr Jim Swan. They laid down their first casks of Single Malt in September of that year, and have since filled just over 5000 casks of various types.

The first whisky ever to be distilled in the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Cotswolds Single Malt Whisky is a rich and fruity single malt. It has been bottled non-chill filtered and at its natural colour, at 46% ABV.

Since then the whisky has gone on to win numerous awards including Whisky Magazines 'Icons of whisky' in 2018.

Made from 100% locally grown, floor-malted barley, the distillers have used long fermentations, unusual yeast strains and innovative distillation cuts to achieve a spirit that is smooth, fruity and balanced.

It has been matured in first-fill ex-Bourbon casks from Kentucky and reconditioned shaved, toasted and re-charred (STR) red wine casks, giving it an incredible maturity and depth of flavour in a young whisky.

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MK: *What does a typical day as Master Distiller look like for you?*

OM: At the distillery, my time is primarily spent working on the liquid and meeting with various members of the team. I check in with our distillery operators every day, and I'm working with our blending team regularly to ideate, discuss and evaluate different potential innovations. I'm also regularly working on procuring, shipping and managing the filling schedule for our finishing casks. I try to get out to our barrel warehouses once a week, where I typically work on our single barrel program, pull and assess various samples or do inventory. Occasionally I'll also do a tasting tour or event in the evening. It can be hectic, but it keeps things interesting!

MK: *As someone with a Master's Degree in brewing and distilling, do you believe that you need to have a technical background to become a Master Distiller today?*

OM: No, not particularly. Learning in a classroom isn't for everyone, and I certainly don't think it should determine your success in a distillery. In my Master's program, there was a mix of people who were just entering the industry and people who were there to deepen their understanding after having worked in the field for a long time — but ultimately, we were all driven by passion, not by the desire to be a Master Brewer or Distiller. Learning by doing, whether its fermentation, blending or plant management, is often the best and only way to achieve mastery. And it's exciting that each company's Master Distiller can bring a different spin to the position, especially because it lacks a formal definition. ♦





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Distilling Company (page 49) – 15 min; Merridale Cidery & Distillery (page 55) – 15 min

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Hunting for Whisky's Muse

By Blair Phillips

Okanagan Craft Spirits Distillery is “on the one” when elevating local fruits and grains into dazzling distilled spirits. The distillery set the tempo for British Columbia’s distilling renaissance with a creative philosophy that began two decades ago. Distillery CEO Tyler Dyck regards each spirit as a flavour time capsule that tells a story with emotions and memories to evoke an experience.

TWH

In parallel with Okanagan's prolific creativity, The Trews drummer and singer-songwriter Chris Gormley has created nectar for the soul with music. When the Pandemic hit, Okanagan's whisky continued to age on the oak stage, but The Trews' live performances paused. But not Gormley's muse. His passion for the whisky experience opened doors to another story – a brand new song and an Okanagan whisky called The Whisky Hunter: Nectar of the Gods.

"I have a thing called Whisky Hunter that I started right at the start of Covid," says Gormley. "I was grounded from touring with The Trews. I had newborn twins and needed something to do, so I started reviewing whiskies. I reached out to a couple of distilleries and Tyler was one of the first to support my pairing whisky with music. We bonded through whisky and music and discussed different ideas for three years."

The duo spent countless hours sharing stories that fired up their frontal cortexes. "This whisky release grew from talking with Chris about different whiskies and the creative process," says Dyck. "When we got into the drinks and the calls went longer, it was more about the artistic process. Being an audiophile myself, I appreciate where Chris is coming from. I heavily respect it and have always wondered where the creative element happens in music, and then Chris asked me where ideas come from on the whisky-making side."

During one session, the conversation about Okanagan Distillery's Bourbon-style whiskies turned into the pair exploring the time before Bourbon and part of the story that sparked its creation. They learned that rum was the first to impact the American colonies significantly. Long after the British Monarchy was restored in 1660, the

Throne decided in 1733 to tax sugar, molasses and rum imported from non-British colonies into America. If the rum came from a British Colony, the tax was waived. Peeved, the American colonies turned a deaf ear and ignored the tax. But the taxation acts kept coming, and protests grew larger until 1773 when King George III passed the tea act, and the colonists reacted to the taxation tyranny by dumping shiploads of tea into the sea. (Rum boats were spared.) The Monarchy reacted, and with growing tensions, the American Revolutionary War broke out in 1775.

One sympathizer for the American colonies was Bernardo de Gálvez, the governor of the Spanish territory of Louisiana. During the revolution, Gálvez coordinated attacks against the British, preventing British movement from the south and west. To simplify a complex history, Gálvez helped America achieve independence. And independence was one of many pieces in a melting pot that set the stage for rum to lose its crown to Bourbon.





With this story specifically, I was interested in seeing what other inspirations were going on around the time," explains Dyck. They looked up where Gálvez was from and discovered it was the same region as the Alvear bodega, a sherry house that pre-dates the American Revolution and still makes some of Spain's best Pedro Ximénez sherry. "Maybe there is something of a story about Gálvez's homeland and the cultural revolution that happened in the southern United States that led to Bourbon. Could that be an inspiration for a feeling of music?" Coincidentally, the Okanagan distillery had recently acquired an Alvear Pedro Ximénez cask. Bursting with inspiration, Dyck searched his whisky stocks to find an appropriate whisky to double-wood with the sherry cask.

Six growing seasons ago, there was a glitch at the malting house that malts their barley. The batch overcooked into a deep porter-style malt – a fortunate error. 54% corn and 46% of the deep malted barley produced a whisky with a decadent profile like a twenty-tonne German chocolate forest cake with a

sizable malt essence on the olfactory side. After going into the Alvear PX Sherry Cask, the double wood ageing process overlaid decadent fruity notes. It is an experience!

The Birth of Double-Oaked Groove

The sherry is sweet, fruity and nectar-like. Still, when the flavours of that barrel, called the devil's cut, are allowed to melt into Okanagan's whisky, the combination revolutionizes the sum of the parts into the nectar of the gods. And that double wood marriage was taken by Gorley and put to song. "While we talked about the history, I was inspired by Tyler's artistic approach to making spirits. The day after our conversation, I had a song finished. I sat on it for a week, went back, and it wasn't good enough. I reviewed the notes again, sampled the whisky, and started from scratch. It was just a culmination of all this talk about whisky and what we can do with it by combining his world with mine."

The pair's creative aesthetic mashed together like distilling's version of Gilbert and Sullivan. "It's not necessarily a taste that I'm going for. It's an experience. I'm tasting the whisky, and with all the tasting notes, it tastes like a G chord because that is the key the song "Nectar of the Gods" is in," explains Gormley. "The whisky tastes like our conversations and the history lesson I got from Tyler. When I went into the studio, I took whatever inspiration from the liquid, and I finished the acoustic song on the ukulele with my producer playing ukulele, vocals and backups. We listened and realized it wasn't finished. And now that I look back, I got to do my own double wood ageing process. That night I got on the drums and laid down crazy tribal rock n roll drums, electric bass, more backups and played some keyboards."

Like the whisky, the song has a natural flow. It converts the whisky's back story into harmonics from the pounding drums and grunts – a call to revolution – to a strong vocal melody in the chorus that releases tension, shifts with ease and pulls you into the experience. Free from restrictive conventions. Free from tasting like everything else. The creative process had come full circle, and Okanagan's nectar of the gods will set your palate free. ♦





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Japanese Home Cooking

Chihiro Masui & Hanaé Kaédé

Photography by Annabelle Schachmes



Japanese Home Cooking

By Chihiro Masui & Hanaé Kaédé

This adapted excerpt was taken from Japanese Home Cooking by Chihiro Masui,
Photos by Annabelle Schmachmes, with permission from Firefly Books Ltd.

Salmon Teriyaki

Teriyaki, which in Japanese means “shiny grill,” is a method of pan-frying that lightly caramelizes the seasoning liquid. Fatty fish or meat such as salmon, duck or steak are all suitable for teriyaki.

INGREDIENTS FOR 4

- 4 fresh salmon fillets
- 2 tbsp (30 ml) soy sauce
- 3 tbsp (45 ml) sake
- 1 tbsp (15 ml) mirin
- 1 tbsp (15 ml) sake
- 1 tbsp (12 g) sugar
- flour
- 1/3 leek (optional)
- 1 tbsp (15 ml) vegetable oil
- salt

a) Mix the soy sauce, mirin, sake and sugar.

b) Sprinkle the salmon with a pinch of salt and dust with flour.

c) Heat the vegetable oil in a frying pan.

d) Sauté the salmon on both sides.

e) Pour the soy sauce mixture into the pan.

f) Over high heat, reduce the liquid until it begins to caramelize.

g) Turn the salmon to cover both sides with the sauce as the liquid continues to reduce (lower the heat if it begins to burn or brown too fast).

h) The salmon is done when the liquid is almost entirely gone. Remove the fish to serving plates and quickly fry the sliced leek in the same pan. Serve hot.





Simmered Beef with Potatoes

In 1868 Japan opened its doors to the world, after more than two centuries of isolation. It was a great revelation to us, the Japanese, to learn how the world had changed while we had stayed quiet in our little corner of the Pacific. Admiral Togo, traveling in England, enjoyed beef stew and brought the recipe home with him. Once it had arrived on our island it was adapted to local tastes, and soon became a classic favorite of Japanese home cooking under the name niku jaga (beef with potatoes).

INGREDIENTS FOR 4

- 18 ounces (500 g) potatoes (danshaku is the preferred variety)
- 1 onion
- 7 ounces (200 g) well-marbled beef, sliced very thin
- 2 carrots
- 8 green beans
- 2 tbsp (30 ml) vegetable oil
- 3 tbsp (45 ml) sake
- 2 1/2 tbsp (30 g) sugar
- 1 tbsp (15 ml) mirin
- 3 tbsp (45 ml) soy sauce
- salt

1. Peel the potatoes and cut them up in large chunks. Cook them in boiling salted water.
2. Peel the onion and slice in thick rounds.
3. Peel the carrot and cut it in large pieces.
4. Blanch the green beans in boiling salted water for 1 or 2 minute, then plunge immediately in a bowl of cold water to stop the cooking and preserve their attractive green color. Drain them and cut them in 2 or 3 pieces.

5. Heat the oil in a large pot or saucepan and sauté the beef for 1 or 2 minutes over medium heat. When it is just cooked add the potatoes, the carrots and the onion, in that order, and continue cooking, stirring constantly to prevent sticking, for 3 or 4 minutes.

6. When the onion is transparent, pour in 2 1/2 cups (600 ml) of water and the sake. Place an otoshi buta directly over the ingredients. Bring to boiling, then add the sugar and the mirin.

7. When the liquid has reduced by half (it will take 7 or 8 minutes), add the soy sauce and cook for another 5 minutes or more. Stir the pot from time to time, continuing the cooking until almost all of the liquid is gone. Add the green beans and serve.

Notes: Japanese beef — the fashionable wagyu that is prized in fine restaurants around the world — is extremely fatty, but marbled: the fat is distributed uniformly through the meat. It is a kind of beef that is especially suited to Japanese dishes, because the fat content allows it to be cooked in wafer-thin slices without drying out. If you are used to cooking with leaner beef, some adjustment of the cooking time will be necessary to avoid dry meat. If Japanese-style marbled beef is not available, cutting the meat in cubes instead of slices will help to keep it moist and tender.

The danshaku potato is a variety cultivated in Hokkaido and preferred in Japan, but you can use any potato suitable for mashing. ♦

JESSE PARKER

Master Blender with DOC SWINSON'S

Washington State has a colourful past with Prohibition, which began in 1916. Today, Doc Swinson's uses that era's charisma to make whiskies with a colourful future. We spoke with Jesse to see where he's headed with new expressions and what makes blending special.





RW-Let's start by telling our readers about Doc Swinson's, where the name comes from, who is behind the scenes and why we should try the whiskey.

JP-The Doc Swinson's name is an ode to the prohibition era practice of prescribing whiskey as medicine. Washington was one of the early adopters of prohibition, as well as one of the early adopters of prescribing whiskey, particularly among some of the more colorful founders of the State, and Seattle in particular. We thought the name evoked some of the adventurous,

trailblazing, rebel rousing character that the Pacific Northwest was built on.

1. There are four of us who started this endeavor with the help of our primary financial backers. Our backers were from another industry and retiring, their CFO, Chris Cearnas was a lot younger and when they asked if he wanted to start a company, he replied, whiskey!

2. The second to be brought on was me, Jesse Parker, a young and ambitious distiller trying to carve a spot in the history of American craft distillation at the age of 21, running one of the first farm to glass distilleries in

Washington state.

3. Steve Main, Doc Swinson's head of sales, with bigger than life ambitions is the mastermind behind Doc Swinson's move across North America, now in 26 states, Canada, Europe, and Japan since our first bottle came off the bottling line.

4. Keith Seidel, from corporate America to a small whiskey company, a key to our central nervous system, he helps reign in the chaos and oversee production.

5. The production and sales team of 5 more talented individuals, for without them there would be no bottles of Doc Swinson's to be shared.

Why you should try our whiskey

Focusing on blending the best combination of our barrels, we bend the definitions of American whiskey, pushing the scope of both straight bourbon and rye, as well as blazing the trail of possibilities of finished whiskey, bringing complimentary flavors and textures not seen in American whiskey before. Whether you enjoy straight bourbons with bold and smooth flavors, or are adventurous, you'll find a bottle or several you will like of Doc Swinson's.

RW-What sets Doc Swinson's whiskey apart from other whiskeys?

JP-The devil is in the details and when we set out to produce a blend we have an INTENTION behind that blend, we do not release it until we have hit that mark. Mash bills, yeast, barrels, climate, and time all make up the building blocks of our whiskeys, each with their own expressions. When working on a blend, we sample each stage of each barrel to decide how it is developing, how we may want to manipulate it and how it will affect the final blend. In addition, Doc Swinson's is a pioneer, really pushing the finished bourbon and rye whiskey



category, winning over 100 highly regarded awards for our finished bourbon and rye whiskeys in just 36 months. At the core of Doc Swinson's is the drive to find exceptional flavor and textural combinations and share those with people.

RW-How did you come to be using a Scottish approach to making whiskey?

JP-I actually use a number of techniques found in Scotch, Cognac, rum, and sherry blending. I cut my teeth distilling and blending brandies in my early 20's, my initial studies were diving deep into these techniques used in the old world, techniques that have been used for upwards of 600 years. I believed adapting these techniques to American whiskey would prove to enhance the process and refine the whiskey, after all it's hard to argue with hundreds of years of technique! Each of our whiskeys use processing methods found in these different industries, intentionally picked for each whiskey to enhance/refine it.

RW-The legend of Jesse Parker tells us you started your career at 21, distilling Gin. What made you jump to whiskey?

JP-My early 20's was dedicated to clear spirits, I was distilling apple brandy, vodka and gin when I was 21. I was good at clear spirits. By 22, I won a large international gin competition. I had found some recognition in my industry and by 23, I had figured out much of what I could in clear spirits at that time, so the next logical step was to tackle brown spirits.

RW-What are some of the things you do differently than most American distillers?

JP-Focus on maturation and balance of texture and flavor. Most American

whiskey producers focus primarily on the distillation and less on maturation as it's commodity production. We can be surgical in our efforts. In addition, we focus heavily on finding complimentary flavor profiles though building personal relationships with producers of other spirits and wines so that we can better understand the provenance of the barrels we use in our finished whiskeys. This connection to as many parts of our production across the world, creates a community and network we can learn from.

RW-Do you have a favourite release or expression? What makes it special to you?

JP-I get this question a lot and I always answer it the same; this would be like picking your favorite child. I am intentional about each and every whiskey, honing in on the profiles I find to be best suited together. I learn from each blend, and use this knowledge on each subsequent release. But with that being said, I do get excited about new releases, profiles I have never worked with before. It's like being Indiana Jones,

“
Listen to others' opinions,
but dont let them consume your
thoughts on how to do it.





something surprising and exhilarating around every corner. For our most recent release I would say “BOSSA NOVA” our bourbon finished in Brazilian Amburana wood, it is a wild one for sure, bringing loads of vanilla and cinnamon to the bourbon. It’s so completely different to anything I have worked with before, only needing days in the barrel vs months or years like many of Doc Swinson’s other finishes. One close to home to me is the bourbon finished in Garryana oak called “GARRYANA”. It’s a native oak tree to the Pacific Northwest, rarely made into barrels, but it showcases the richness of what the Pacific Northwest has to offer. These oaks graced the very islands where I was born and raised, so it has a certain *je ne sais quoi* to it that reminds me of the place I live.

usually happens from 4-8 years and rye often a little younger. After this the whiskeys can get disjointed, go far off and even be acrid in older ages. You’d better have an in-tune blender that understands the differences and how to match them up well. We purposely state “bottled when ready” on our bottles as that’s what matters most, flavor, balance, texture, not the year slapped on the label. After all, you are drinking the whiskey!

RW-You have mentioned what goes into the bottle is a reflection of your mood and what inspires you. Can you give an example of what the inspiration was for the Exploration Cask Series?

JP-I believe that most people think blending is all talking about flavors and

RW-What have you encountered that would be considered a faux pas when drinking whiskey?

JP-Age statements, yes, they are useful, we use them on some of Doc Swinson’s whiskeys as we like to be transparent with our products, but really, old doesn’t mean good, especially in bourbon. I find people often treat American bourbon and rye similarly to Scotch when it comes to age and you really shouldn’t. Yes, they are both whisk(e)y, but they are made nearly completely differently with variations on inputs, distillation, barrels and climate. The sweet spot for bourbon

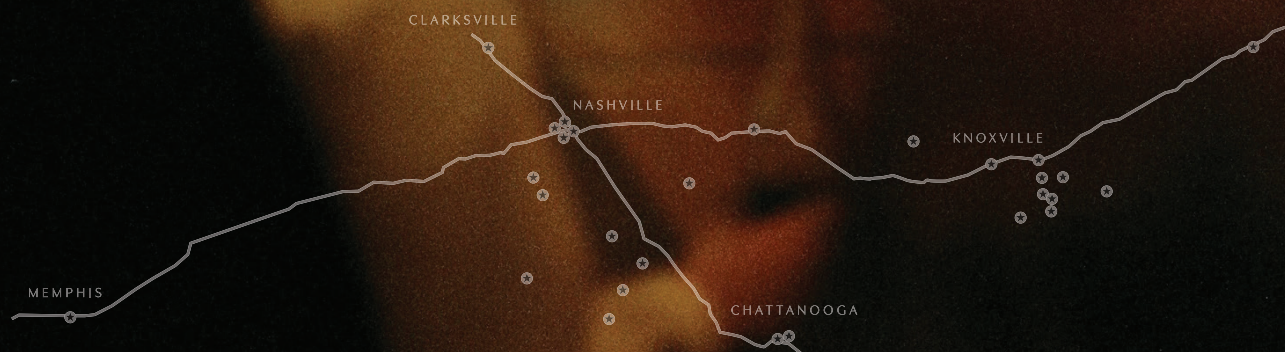
textures and that’s not wrong, those are what everyone in the end gets to experience, it’s easy to grasp but there is a whole other side to it. If you are simply blending without emotion, without feeling or connection then your blends will reflect this and you see this a lot in the industry, products that fall flat that could have been really good. This is no different than being a chef, a painter, a sculptor; our experiences, our surroundings, our memories, and moods all come together to create that blend and when you hit those perfect notes, you know, and that is reflected on to the consumer.

RW-You have some incredible releases. What advice would you share with someone looking to start out on the path of becoming a whiskey blender?

JP-I have a lot to learn, a lot more to experience, I am 32 years old and I can only imagine where I’ll be in the next 10 years. Keep in mind I was taught by a community of people from within the industry as well as from outside of it, from my own self perseverance and discovery. Trust me, there’s plenty of roadblocks and self-doubt, after all, no great pursuit comes easy. With that being said, there’s a few things that I would recommend as an aspiring blender/distiller;

- 1) Have intention behind the blends
- 2) Be flexible and experiment, odd flavors can develop well in time.
- 3) Listen to others’ opinions, but don’t let them consume your thoughts on how to do it.
- 4) To start your journey, grab a few bottles of whiskey or rum and blend them up at home, I think you’ll be pleasantly surprised with what you can create. ♦

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