

Prohibition is over

Story & photos by Tracy Beard

Visit four local craft distilleries — in Stevenson, Battle Ground, Vancouver, and Tenino — for some delicious spirits

More than 100 years ago the United States banned producing, importing and selling alcoholic beverages. Prohibition lasted for 13 years, from 1920 to 1933. Making moonshine and distilling spirits at home became a popular but illegal pastime during that timeframe. The penalty at one point was one year and one day in jail. Today the rules have changed. Permits are required and individual states make up most of the regulations. Join me on a virtual tour through four local craft distilleries where you can purchase old-fashioned corn-based moonshine, whiskey, bourbon, vodka, gin, sweet cordials, sipping vinegars and much more.

Skunk Brothers Spirits

Scott Donoho's grandfather had a reputation for making moonshine and racing fast cars. Scott and his brother grew up fascinated with his grandfather's persona. "Dukes of Hazard" and "M*A*S*H" were Scott's favorite TV shows. As a youngster, he and a friend dabbled with making moonshine; and as he got older, he and his brother got more serious about the endeavor. One day, they decided their family moonshine recipe made from corn, water and yeast was good enough to sell, and they started the paperwork to make things legal.

The ball began to roll, and today Scott is the owner and distiller at Skunk Brothers Spirits, located along the Columbia River in Stevenson, Washington. "Over the last few years," Scott said, "We have gone from a small-scale, garage-style distillery to a larger scale operation. We are constantly playing Tetris now, trying to pack everything into the shop. We are currently heading into our eighth year."

Skunk Brothers Spirits currently produces 15 different products. The high-end bourbon Whiskey Road—made with a blend of Washington-grown corn, white wheat, malted barley, a little bit of rye and peated malt, is aged for three years in white oak casks and has a smooth scotch-like smokey flavor. The traditional moonshine recipe is still a big hit, and the cinnamon corn whiskey made with conventional moonshine is one of the biggest sellers. The sweet cordials run the gamut in flavors from apple pie and cherry to chocolate made with cocoa bean husks instead of cocoa butter. The husks give the cordial a smoother flavor without the bitterness; it tastes like a tootsie roll.

Scott sources his ingredients as locally as possible and maintains a practice of being ecologically friendly. His two main stills are named Archie — the stripping still, named for Scott's grandfather who liked to make the spirits and Earl — the refining still, named for his grandmother, who enjoyed drinking them.

Call 360-213-3420 for tasting hours



Battle Crest Distillery

The Schefer family produces farm distilled spirits in Battle Ground, Washington. The family roots originate in Germany, where Jim's ancestors boast more than 500 years of farming history. Jim oversees the operations. His wife Audrey, the administrative officer, manages the graphics development for labels and advertising and uses her background in finance to keep things running smoothly. Their daughter, Susan, is the lead distiller, and she has refined her palate over the last three years and gets full credit for creating the Kanada Foster's Coffee Ridge. This coffee liqueur has become a public favorite.

Each spirit developed at Battle Crest Distillery comes with an interesting backstory on the label. Jim and Susan use corn, rye, wheat and barley to



make their spirits. Jim is very excited about the "Irish" whiskey he currently has in barrels. Technically, it is not "Irish" whiskey because it is not made in Ireland, just as "Champagne" can only be labeled Champagne if it is from that specific region of France. Still, his whiskey is made in the Irish style with malted and unmalted barley, whereas American whiskey is crafted with corn, rye or wheat.



The WinterFire Bourbon Whiskey, made with cinnamon, brown sugar and orange, is not syrupy but has a delightful flavor and a nice bite. The Petticoat Courage is a traditional rye whiskey with autumn spices and a smooth sweet finish, and the Edmond John Henry is a straight bourbon whiskey made with

more than 51% corn. Battle Crest Distillery also produces a sweet, corn vodka with a velvety finish. Call 907-350-4952 for a private tour and tasting.

Quartz Mountain Distillers

My daughter Brittney and son-in-law Jordan joined me on my tour of Quartz Mountain Distillers in Vancouver, Washington, with owners Randy and Debi Kyle. Randy said, "I don't drink much, but when I do, I like to drink the good stuff. I can't afford it, so I figured out that I'd just have to make it." He began selling quality spirits at Quartz Mountain Distillers in 2020.

Randy makes a variety of flavored vodkas: vanilla creme, vanilla, vanilla café creme, orange creme, butterscotch, raspberry habanero, huckleberry pie, peanut butter and more. When we arrived, he had just finished a batch of clementine-flavored vodka. My favorite was the unfiltered vodka.

Randy also makes gin. He has a Navy Strength Gin that is delicious. The botanicals are perfectly spiced, and the juniper is not piney. Most gin runs about 40% alcohol by volume (ABV) or 80 proof, whereas Navy Strength comes in at 57% ABV or 114 proof. This was so that back in the day when it was stored

from page 12

below deck next to the gunpowder, if it spilled onto it, the gin would not dilute the powder and prevent it from going off when it was lit.

Many distillers make “Apple Pie.” Randy makes his Apple Shine, which can be used to create “Apple Pie”, a delicious beverage with apple pie flavors, alcohol made from 190 proof grain alcohol or “everclear,” and apple cider. Another favorite is Quartz Mountain Cask Strength two-year bourbon. Call 360-904-5627 for tasting hours.

Sandstone Distillery

John and Justin Bourdon own and operate Sandstone Distillery in Tenino, Washington. Although this distillery is off the beaten path, out of the approximate 100 distilleries in Washington state, it ranks 17th in tasting room sales. Sandstone offers a formal tasting experience with a tour. Guests choose between the four clear spirit flight including samples of their ready-to-pour cocktails or the amber spirit



flight with the cocktails. Flights are accompanied by complimentary bottled water, light snacks and chocolates for \$15 per person and a tour of the distillery.

John said, “Our unaged white whiskey has won a double gold medal in the Seattle international competition for five years in a row. We also made a bacon bourbon whiskey for this event. The whiskey is just weird, but it was such a hit we kept making it. Once the grains that make the whiskey are spent, they are fed back to the pigs, technically going back into the bacon. It is the circle of life for this whiskey. It is fantastic cooked



with an egg; the bacon flavor just distills right into the egg. It also makes a great Bloody Mary.”

The equipment used at Sandstone is unique. Everything has been altered, rebuilt and refurbished. John and Justin are former truckers



and learned that to make money on the road, they needed to know how to make repairs along the way. That experience served them well.

When they began Sandstone Distillery, they acquired all kinds of containers and materials. By watching YouTube videos and through much trial and error, they have built a successful distillery with special equipment and distinctive stills that are effective, consistent and irreplaceable.

Co-owner Jenni began Wild Heart Sipping Vinegars to add to the distillery’s signature craft cocktails. Cider vinegar is said to have several health benefits, but many find the taste off-putting. I must say, having tried Jenni’s flavored vinegars, I am sold. I love the mango orange chili pepper flavor and the pear cardamon rosemary. With numerous flavors to choose from, these were great buys either to add to my health regimen or to flavor a new beverage.

Call 360-264-1901 to book a tasting.

...

Tracy Beard writes about luxury and adventure travel, traditional and trendy fine dining and libations for regional, national and international magazines. She is in her seventh year as CRR’s “Out & About” columnist. She lives in Longview, Wash.



By Tracy Beard

PROVISIONS

ALONG THE TRAIL



Farro Salad with Lemon Thyme Dressing

- 1 cup cooked farro, cooked according to package directions and cooled
- 1/2 cup tomato, chopped
- 1/2 cup cucumber, seeded and chopped
- 1/2 cup canned garbanzo beans, rinsed
- 4 Tbl. crumbled goat cheese
- 1 Tbl toasted slivered almonds

Arrange on a platter or individual plates, drizzle with dressing to taste.

Dressing

- Place in a food processor, mix until emulsified:*
- 2/3 cup extra virgin olive
 - 1/3 cup fresh lemon juice
 - 2 tablespoons fresh thyme
 - 3 tablespoons honey
 - 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
 - Salt and pepper to taste

Whiskey Sour

- 2 ounces bourbon – use your favorite or try something new from one of the above local places
- 1 ounce fresh lemon juice
- 3/4 ounce simple syrup
- 1 egg white
- Ice
- 1 maraschino cherry
- Orange wedges
- Bitters

Place the bourbon, lemon juice, simple syrup and egg white in a cocktail shaker. Seal the shaker and shake vigorously for 10 seconds. Add the ice and shake again for 7 to 10 more seconds to chill. Strain the cocktail through a fine-mesh strainer into a coupe glass. Garnish with drops of bitters and the cherry and orange wedges.

