

The

# IMPROPER BOSTONIAN

APRIL 25-MAY 8, 2012

Metro Boston's Bootlegged Guide  
to Entertainment, Culture and a Ramos Gin Fizz

**BUZZ  
WORTHY**  
*Massachusetts'  
Craft Distillery  
Boom*

**+  
SPEAKEASY  
STYLES**

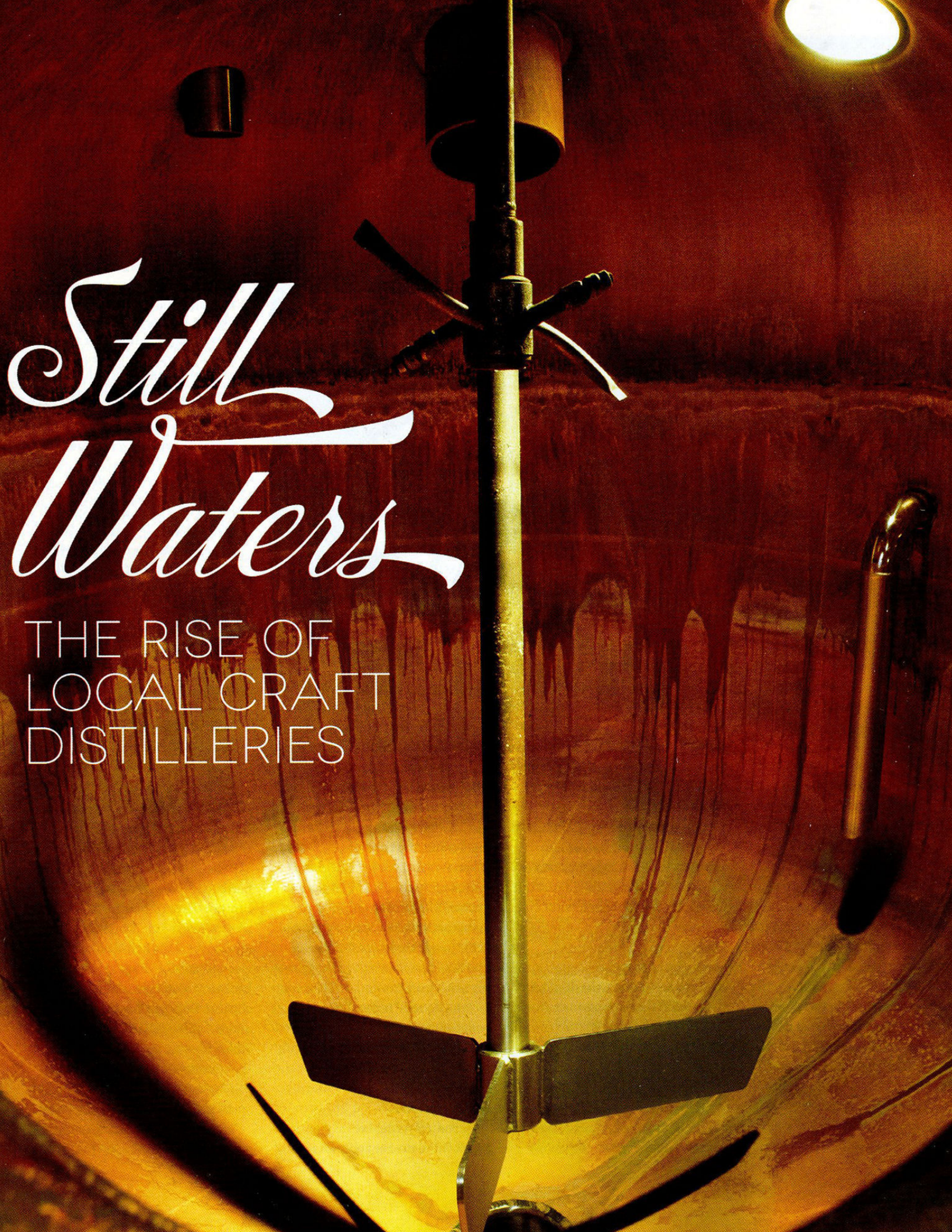
**Welcome  
to the  
Great  
Improper  
Bartending  
Competition**

# COCKTAILWAR!

FEATURING  
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PUBLIC HOUSE

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# *Still Waters*

THE RISE OF  
LOCAL CRAFT  
DISTILLERIES

*Not long ago,*

**no one would've used the word "craft" to describe something as standardized as liquor. In the postwar years, industrial booze producers like Bacardi, Seagram's and Smirnoff dictated how rum, whiskey, gin and vodka were supposed to taste and, thanks to the likes of August Busch and Adolph Coors, the same thing was true of beer. It was the beer drinkers who revolted first. "Handcrafted" became a buzzword while microbreweries sprouted like mold spores in a half-full bottle of Miller left on a window ledge. Cocktail connoisseurs have been late adapters, but "craft spirits," locally produced by small-batch distillers, are increasingly popular, largely due to loosened federal laws allowing outside investment in new liquor producers. Berkshire Mountain Distillers in western Massachusetts and the Triple Eight Distillery on Nantucket are two local success stories. More recently, at least four new distilleries have opened in and around Boston.**

*By Jonathan Soroff*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
ADAM DETOUR

# Privateer Rum

IPSWICH

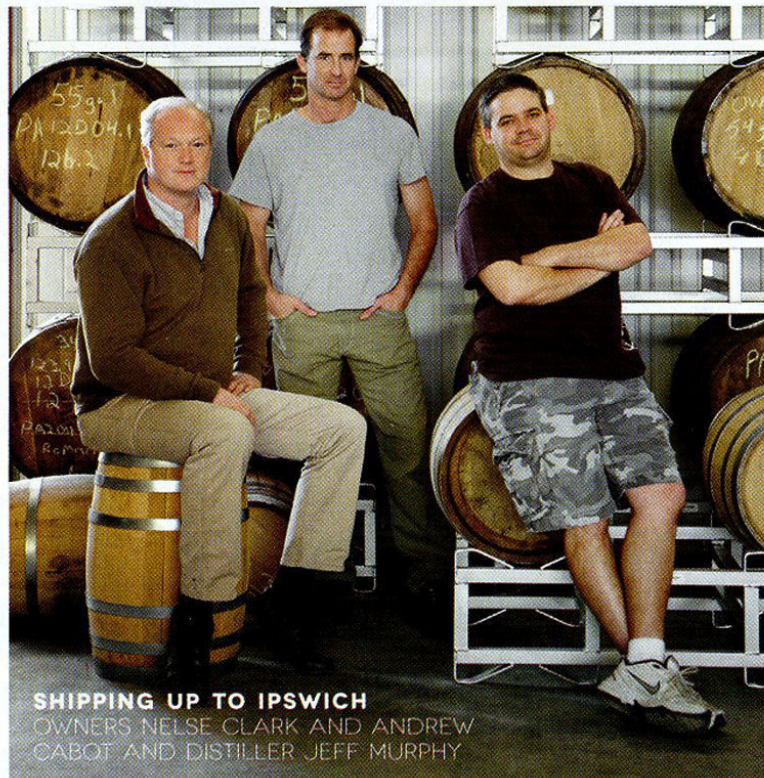
As the old rhyme goes:

*So this is dear old Boston,  
The home of the bean and the cod,  
Where Lowells speak only to  
Cabots,  
And Cabots speak only to God.*

While many Boston Brahmin families have quietly rested on their laurels for generations, the Cabots have never ceased being useful. For instance, the carbon black in everything from your car tires to the ink in your printer may well be produced by the Cabot Corporation. From this industrious background comes Andrew Cabot, the founder of Privateer Rum on Cape Ann.

The name Privateer is a nod to an 18th-century ancestor, another Andrew Cabot, who—in addition to owning 25 ships that were legally sanctioned to attack foreign vessels during wartime—was a rum distiller. His present-day namesake, who worked in the tech industry and education, was doing some genealogical research on his colonial ancestor when he unearthed a 1777 advertisement for a rum distillery pirate Cabot tried to sell in Beverly. Considering this, the present-day Cabot saw an opportunity. In a market saturated by booze that tastes like cloves and caramel or coconut suntan lotion, he recognized a niche for a more refined spirit, the very antithesis of Captain Morgan.

“I wanted to create something you’d enjoy sipping on the rocks, the way you do whiskey, or some of the better rums you find in the Caribbean,” he says. “In the 1980s, you saw vodka explode in popularity. In the ’90s, it was bourbon, and the 2000s, gin and tequila. We felt there was headroom in the



**SHIPPING UP TO IPSWICH**  
OWNERS NELSE CLARK AND ANDREW CABOT AND DISTILLER JEFF MURPHY



**STILL LIFE**  
PRIVATEER'S  
TASTING AREA

rum category. Not that our goal is to produce huge quantities. Just a very high-quality rum.”

His partner and childhood friend, Nelse Clark, a former restaurant and bar owner, adds, “When we started, a bartender friend of mine said that in 25 years, he’s never had a request for a white rum straight.”

They set out to change that. Together with a team of comrades, Cabot and Clark created the Privateer distillery in an industrial park in Ipswich. While the real estate might not be as picturesque as the waterfront operation his ancestor co-owned, it’s large enough to contain their raw ingredients (cane juice, molasses and brown sugar), their equipment (a fermentor, still, attenuation tank, oak casks for aging, etc.), a small reference library about distilling and Revolutionary privateering, and, of course, a bar. The distillery is decked with nautical touches, including working cannon port-holes and artifacts that have been salvaged from the sea.

All distilleries have essentially the same equipment, and the process is basic chemistry: the raw ingredient is blended with yeast in a mash tank, transferred to a fermentation tank where the yeast eats up the sugars until the mixture is between 8 and 9 percent alcohol, and then run through a giant *Willy Wonka*-looking copper machine called a still. An elaborate evaporator, the still brings the alcohol content up to the desired percentage (which is dictated by law for different types of liquor). That’s pretty much how you make booze.

It’s the still where skill comes into play. The secret lies in a process known as “cutting,” in which the rum maker removes the “head” and “tail”—i.e. the unwanted (and even toxic) stuff from the beginning and end

of the process—and leave the “heart”—the liquid gold that’s then aged in oak barrels to become the finished product. This is the essence of the distiller’s art, and through trial and error, the Privateer crew have created a spirit with a flavor profile unlike most other rums: clean, complex and anything but sweet.

As the 18th-century Andrew Cabot might’ve said, “Yo, ho, ho.” We’ll have a bottle of that.

## Turkey Shore Distillers IPSWICH

Across town, in a similar industrial park and working in a comparable setup, childhood friends and Ipswich natives Mat Perry and Evan Parker run Old Ipswich Rum. Like Cabot, Perry was a

teacher (high school history). While on a sabbatical five years ago, he took an interest in the local food scene in Hanover, N.H. Realizing that the same enthusiasm could apply to spirits, Perry decided to concoct one.

So he pitched the idea to Parker, a former clam farmer and one of the Ipswich area’s first aquaculturists. Their excitement grew when they learned that from 1770 to 1836 a distillery operated on the street where they grew up, Turkey Shore Road. The barrels of molasses were shipped up the Ipswich River, and, it turned out, unloaded on a wharf that had been located right in Perry’s backyard. The idea seemed destined.

“Our ethos is to try and recreate an old New England rum,” Perry says.

To educate themselves, they did coursework in Chicago at the

Siebel Institute (the Harvard of brewing) and took a course from a rum maker in Denver.

“We read books, watched videos on YouTube and experimented in a two-and-a-half gallon stove-top still. We made a lot of crap.” Eventually, they hit on the two products they now sell: Old Ipswich White Cap and Tavern Style. The former has a more neutral flavor, while the latter is similar to the finer light brown rums from the islands, like Anguilla’s Pyrat or Jamaica’s Appleton Estate. This month, the American Distilling Institute named it the best micro-distilled rum in the country, while White Cap won bronze in the clear category.

Their two-story operation is decorated with touches such as rusty farm implements, an anchor, and an old Johnson

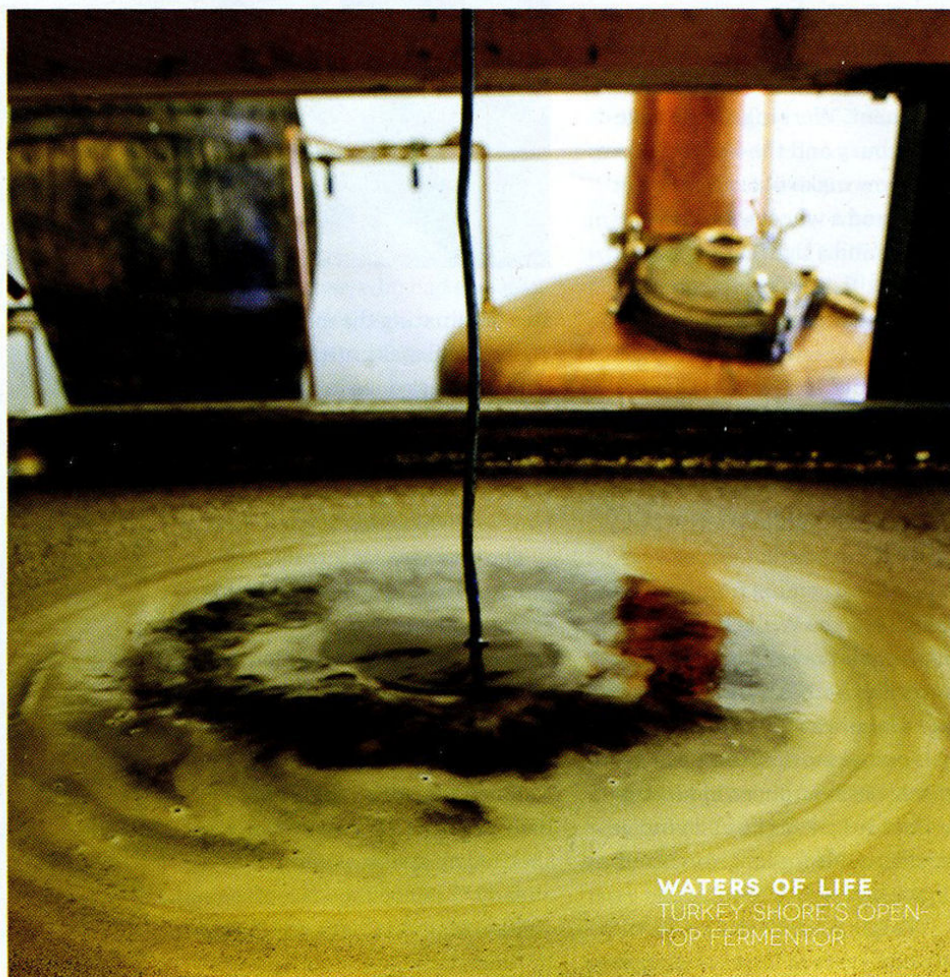
outboard motor, and their fermentation tanks are named after the different distillers—“John Heard,” “G.W. Heard”—who made rum in their hometown. Ingenious details like a custom-made carbon filtration system (essentially a giant jerry-rigged Brita filter) and fish-tank heaters as fermentation-tank warmers give the place an endearingly mom-and-pop feel.

But the rum speaks for itself and the distillers’ passion for creating something aficionados will enjoy. Upstairs, in their tiny office/tasting room, Perry offers a sip of a “seasonal” rum—a market they’re beginning to explore. Named after the infamous greenhead that’s the bane of beachgoers in Cape Ann, it’s infused with lemongrass, green tea and mint.

Undoubtedly, it’s the first greenhead we’ve ever welcomed.



TURKEY DELIGHT  
OWNERS MAT PERRY  
AND EVAN PARKER



WATERS OF LIFE  
TURKEY SHORE'S OPEN-  
TOP FERMENTOR

# Bully Boy Distillers BOSTON

Founded by brothers Dave and Will Willis, Bully Boy Distillers was inspired by Charlescote Farm, their family's fourth-generation working farm in Sherborn. There, during Prohibition, the Willis' grandfather amassed a trove of locally made bottles, storing it in a fieldstone vault in the farmhouse basement, which friends and family used as a speakeasy. It was crude, homemade booze, with names like "Medford Rum" and "Cow Whiskey," which might've been unpalatable but certainly had character.

Will (formerly a global real estate financier) and Dave (a lawyer) traded the rat race to help run the farm and honor their family's legacy by creating more polished versions of the spirits they'd seen stashed in the basement. Working on the edge of Roxbury and the South End, they now make two whiskeys (a white and a wheat), two rums (a dark and a light) and a vodka. The distillery takes its moniker from a workhorse their great-grandfather named in honor of his Harvard roommate, who had a habit of using the word "bully" as an expression for something great. The roommate's name was Teddy Roosevelt.

With the loud sounds of a car repair shop coming from across the street, the Willis brothers make their booze in a space that looks like a cross between a garage and a laboratory. Besides the labels on the bottles, the few dashes of color come from an old *Dukes of Hazzard* trash can and vintage magazine ads for long-forgotten liquor brands.

"This is a backlash against the 60-odd years of large conglomer-



**BULLY FOR THEM**  
DAVE AND WILL  
WILLIS AT WORK

ates dominating the market," says Will. "We'll make in a year what Maker's Mark does in a day. The yield is really small, maybe 1 gallon every 17 minutes, but none of the big houses produce an un-aged whiskey, which we do."

The brothers are largely self-taught from a decade of distilling at home, and their jump into the commercial market was dictated by their enjoyment of the process, along with the rising tide of cocktail culture.

"Boston's a drinking town," Dave points out. "We were shocked no one was doing this already."

Like other distillers, the Willis brothers love experimenting with



their product in traditional ways, like altering the amount of char on the oak barrels in which it's aged. They also enlisted local cocktail guru Noon Inthasuwam to create a series of infusions with Asian flair; the first, a blend of white whiskey, apple, ginger root, honey and cider vinegar, debuted in February. Free from the chemical flavors that characterize so many major brands, their ideas are taste tested at the bar set up right inside the front door.

Their white whiskey earned a 95 out of 100 and their vodka a 92 out of 100 from the Beverage Testing Institute, an independent rating service that considers a 94 extremely high and highly un-

usual. Not bad for a pair of farm boys who could've climbed the corporate ladder and, instead, decided to make themselves, and incidentally us, happy.

## Ryan & Wood

GLoucester

Also a family operation, Ryan & Wood is located in somewhat fancier digs—an office park. There's even a tasting room/gift shop with T-shirts, caps and tiki glasses for sale, in addition to the liquor they produce: Knockabout gin, Beauport vodka and Folly Cove rum. The fact that they're set up for visitors is part of the business model developed by Bob Ryan and his nephew, Dave Wood.

"We wanted it to be something that attracted agri-tourism, so that all the people who come here to whale watch or sightsee would come visit, and we wanted to show the people who've made a living off the sea for 400 years that there are other options."

Like a lot of second- and third-generation Gloucester natives, Ryan had worked as a "fish cutter," aka seafood processor, and watched the industry shrink and the town's once-thriving waterfront wither. He went into banking, but he wanted to bring manufacturing to Gloucester, so he started the distillery with his nephew, a lawyer. His wife, son and assorted other relatives are also full-time employees.

In 2006, he received permit number 73 from the federal

government (he estimates there are now more than 400). Back then, as far as he knew, his family had no connection to the liquor business, but it was the approval process for the license that taught him otherwise. The feds take careful consideration before granting permission to make liquor to anyone who has a family member within two generations with a criminal record. They questioned Ryan about this, and he was stumped. Then one of his cousins sheepishly explained that his grandfather, who had earned a nickel a day as a Gloucester constable during Prohibition, earned a dollar a night doing security for rumrunners, and he'd been arrested for it.

"It almost shut the whole thing down," Ryan laughs.


In choosing which spirits to make, they wanted to appeal to the broadest possible audience. Rum was a no-brainer, because of its deep New England roots and because a lot of people who drink it are the boating types who visit Cape Ann during the summer. The same goes for gin. As for vodka, it's simply the best-selling spirit. The name Knockabout comes from the fishing schooners built at the turn of the last century, while "beau

port" is how the 17th-century explorer Samuel de Champlain described Gloucester Harbor. Folly Cove, just to the north, is famous for its many shipwrecks and as a place where smugglers throughout the centuries sought safety (or mistook it for Gloucester), only to founder on the rocks.

Ryan is a wealth of lore, like the fact that before the Civil War the town of Medford alone had 63 rum distilleries. He's also shrewd in his packaging decisions, realizing that wax-sealed tops aren't friendly to the service industry, or the storage specs on most visiting pleasure boats. Most of all, though, he and his family are justifiably proud of their spirits, most recently adding whiskey to their portfolio.

"Rye is the tipping point in distilling," he says, "and that's where we stack up."

Apparently, connoisseurs agree. A businessman drove all the way from Washington, D.C. to pick up a case of Ryan & Wood straight rye to bring home. That was an even bigger compliment than the father who brought his kid on a distillery tour and said, "Earning his chemistry badge for Boy Scouts was a lot less painful than I thought it was going to be." \*\*\*



### KERNEL OF AN IDEA TEN FLAVORS GO INTO KNOCKABOUT GIN.

