



going out

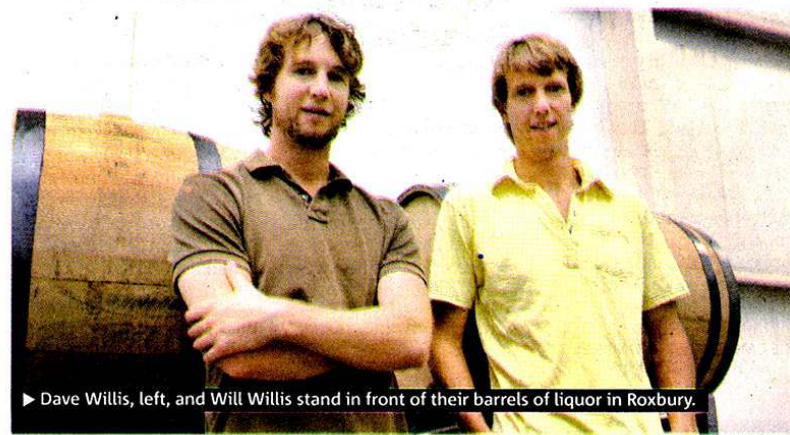
## Crafts and mixing

The rise of craft spirits has also coincided nicely with the revitalization of the mixing arts. "There's a newfound appreciation for cocktails, and with that comes an

appreciation for the spirits going into those cocktails," says Dave Willis. "You're seeing some really innovative products coming onto the market from craft distilleries across the spectrum. It's great to see." It's great to taste as well.

# The spirits of Massachusetts

► The Willis brothers bring locally made liquors to a bar near you ► Their key is reverse-engineering



► Dave Willis, left, and Will Willis stand in front of their barrels of liquor in Roxbury.

COURTESY SACCIO/METRO

Craft breweries have been the big story in the drinking world for the past couple of years, but more and more small-batch distilleries are cropping up throughout New England. The recently launched Bully Boy Distillers is the first distillery in Boston in at least 20 years, says Dave Willis, who along with his brother Will turned a hobby of distilling at home (learned on their family's farm in Sherborn) into a burgeoning company.

"It's a fourth-generation working farm where we grew up making craft products, like ciders and jams," says Willis. "We learned to distill on a small, two-gallon stove top still."

After they made the jump to a much-larger still in their warehouse space in Roxbury, what followed was a lot of painstaking product development, Willis says.

"We would do blind taste-testing of a full spectrum of a certain spirit; say, if we were doing rum, we'd pull certain characteristics



from rums we liked, and developed the profile of the spirit we wanted to craft, then go about reverse-engineering it.”

One of the three spirits they have available is an unaged, sippable rum that’s made with blackstrap molasses to taste lightly of butterscotch. About 25 stores and 40 bars and restaurants around the metro area now carry it — including Area Four, Grafton Street and Island Creek Oyster Bar. Think of it as a barrel-aged rum without the barrel-aging, Willis says.

The other two are a wheat vodka and an unaged whiskey. A barrel-aged, sour-mash wheat whiskey and a dark rum mellowed

in used wine casks will come further down the line.

The unaged whiskey has been a surprising hit, Willis says.

“We thought it would be more of a niche product, but the mixologists in town have had a lot of fun with it. Unaged whiskey is a fairly new entrant to the spirits market, and there aren’t a lot of them.”

These whiskeys are quite malleable, able to riff off of either the character of a vodka or a whiskey.

That versatility is part of reason why small-batch spirits like this are gaining a foothold. The local movement angle doesn’t hurt wither, Willis says.

“People want to know where the ingredients are coming from and that someone has their fingers on every step of the process.”

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