

# spirit

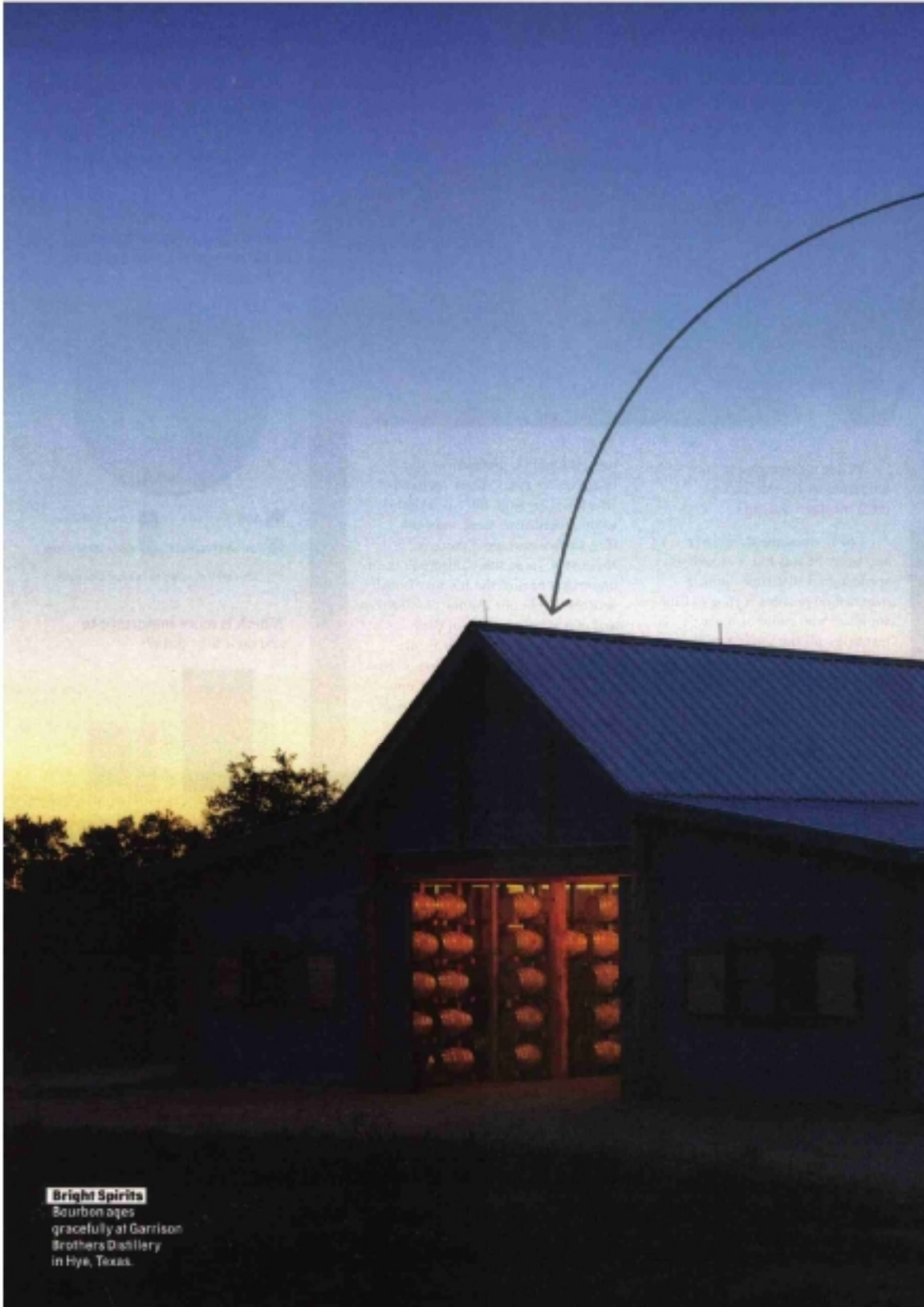
**SOUTHWEST AIRLINES**



**Think Small.**

Big taste is coming from  
tiny craft distilleries.  
Here's to them—and you!





**Bright Spirits**

Bourbon ages  
gracefully at Garrison  
Brothers Distillery  
in Hye, Texas.

# **— IN HERE.**

MADE WITH LOVING HANDS.  
**AMBER WAVES OF GRAIN.**  
A CRAFTSMAN'S PRIDE.  
**POURED JUST FOR YOU.**

SPRIT'S  SPIRITS

BY ALISON MILLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT RAINWATERS

## The morning sun creeps

skyward, slowly warming the barn-sized still house at Garrison Brothers Distillery in Hye, Texas. Both of its rolling steel doors are open, allowing the dry September breeze to circulate around two 500-gallon copper pot stills. Close by, 16 volunteers, whose ages span several decades, sit on stools around a plywood table fitted with basins of hot wax. The assembly line of hands is in slow, careful motion—some dip bottle necks into the viscous

black liquid, others gingerly turn the glass vessels as the dripping sealant dries. At one end, master distiller Dennis Todd, in scruffy beard and dusty baseball cap, keeps a close watch and, every so often, carries to the workstation another crate of bourbon. At the other end, two volunteers wipe fingerprints off the finished bottles, then line them up in front of Dan Garrison, the man who dreamt up this

bustling operation nine years ago. With white-gloved hands, he holds each one up to the sunlight, inspecting its illuminated contents before signing and numbering it with a fine-tip silver Sharpie.

A country music playlist heavy on Willie Nelson and Robert Earl Keen provides the soundtrack for this enthusiastic factory. At 10 a.m. Garrison lowers the volume. "Everybody take a quality



**Portuguese  
 Cocktail** made with  
 Montezuma rum from  
 Crested Butte, CO.  
 Recipe on page 54.



**Touch of Glass**  
 Dan Garrison  
 inspects and signs  
 every bottle of  
 Garrison Brothers  
 bourbon.

## CRAFT DISTILLERIES OF THE SOUTHWEST

Who are the players, and where can you get their libations? Some spirits are widely available; others you'll find in the regions where they're made.

### DESERT DIAMOND

KINGMAN, AZ  
 Folks were skeptical of Arizona rum—until it earned gold at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition.

### MONTANYA

CHESTED BUTTE, CO  
 Inspired by Ron Zacapa's legendary Guatemalan rum, Karen Hoskie rests hers at high altitude in barrels that once held Stranahan's whiskey (see right).

### LEOPOLD BROS.

DENVER  
 Vodka, gin, whiskey, absinthe, and fruit-based cordials, made with exacting methods.

### STRANAHAN'S

DENVER  
 Barley, water, yeast, and barrels—that's the recipe for this whiskey.

### PEACH STREET

PALESADE, CO  
 Sweet corn from Olathe, Colorado, is the key to the state's first bourbon.

### BALCONES

WACO, TX  
 Distiller Chip Tate respectfully veers from tradition. Two tasty examples: blue corn whiskey and Rumble, in a category of its own.

### RAILEAN

SAN LEAN, TX  
 It can't be called tequila because it's not made in Mexico, but Kelly Railean's agave-based spirit stands up to the "real stuff."

control sample," he calls out. Laurel Hoekstra, a part-timer who organizes this twice-annual, five-day event, circles the table with a tray, delivering a nip to each participant. "This one's for y'all, the brave Texans who have given us their time and talent," Garrison says, robustly toasting his crew. "To the finest bourbon bottlers in this great state!" By mid-afternoon, 700 bottles of luscious ambrosia will be ready for distribution.

**G**ARRISON BROTHERS IS one of about 400 craft distilleries in the United States. That number is rapidly rising, yet it's still remarkably low given our country's storied history with spirits. "In the 18th century, there were thousands of small distilleries in



**Order of Operations**

Fermented mash (top left) is distilled into barrel-ready whiskey, which assistant distiller J.D. Anderson tests for alcohol content (left). After two years of aging, it's bottled (above).

operation," says Michael Kinstlick, an industry expert and a co-owner of Coppersea Distilling in New York's Hudson River Valley, which will release its first product—an unaged rye whiskey—this month. "Nearly every farmer in this country would make hard cider, and the ones that had stills—which was an awful lot of them—would make apple brandy." Prohibition nearly eradicated the practice. And even though the consumption of alcohol is no longer illegal, many of the laws governing its production and distribution are still in place. Because of this, we've come to rely on imports and American brands bottled in heavily automated, high-volume facilities.

But the slow loosening of laws, the widespread success of the local food movement, the craft-beer boom, and a shifting economy have inspired spirits enthusiasts to ditch their careers and

pursue their passions. In 2000, there were fewer than 30 craft distilleries in the U.S. Though that number has swelled exponentially in the past 12 years, Kinstlick believes it's only the beginning. "It's been a bootstrap industry so far," he says. "Most of the people who have entered the market have no distilling experience at all. They're hobbyists who might have played around with a stovetop still or taken a distilling course and then bought a bigger rig and got licensed." The next wave, Kinstlick predicts, will take place when employees of fledgling distilleries leave to establish their own operations. Which is not to say that it's easy. Gathering funds, acquiring the proper permits, perfecting recipes, and navigating complex channels of distribution often takes years. And if you're a purist like Dan Garrison, you don't skimp. Or rush.

**Mornin' Sunshine**  
 made with Breuckelen gin from Brooklyn, NY  
 Recipe on page 84

**B**OURBON IS VERY expensive to produce. In 1964, Congress declared it a "distinctive product of the United States" and enacted a strict set of standards for its production. Contrary to popular belief, it does not have to be made in Kentucky. It does, however, have to be produced in the U.S. from a grain mixture of at least 51 percent corn, be free of additives, and rest in previously unused American oak barrels that have been charred inside. At Garrison Brothers Distillery, the corn, barley, and rye are stored in silos and funneled into a hammer mill, where they're ground into grainy flour. That's mixed with well water to create a thick soup, then cooked and fermented. The mash is then moved to a still, where, over the course of 12 hours, it is distilled into barrel-ready alcohol. During distillation, this "white dog" is constantly monitored by Garrison, Todd, or assistant distiller J.D. Anderson, who routinely smell, taste, and run their fingers through it. "That's where the art is," says Todd, a former Air Force mechanic with a family history of home brewing and distilling. "And the only way to

## CRAFT DISTILLERIES OF THE NORTHEAST

Blame it on cold winters: This corner of the country is a hotbed of activity.

### BULLY BOY

**BOSTON**  
A Prohibition stash in their grandparents' house inspired Will and Dave Willis to make rum, vodka, and whiskey.

### BERKSHIRE MOUNTAIN

**GREAT BARRINGTON, MA**  
Spring water once sold as "healing" is used in making gin, vodka, rum, and whiskey.

### PRIVATEER

**IPSWICH, MA**  
Rum made by Andrew Cabot, a descendent of the 18th century distillery owner and privateer of the same name.

### BREUCKELEN

**BROOKLYN, NY**  
Flavored with five botanicals, Brad Estabrooke's aptly named Glorious gin lands somewhere between Dutch-style genever and London dry gin.

### KINGS COUNTY

**BROOKLYN, NY**  
This year, NYC's first post-Prohibition whiskey distillery traded its 325-square-foot loft for a sprawling space in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

### TUTTILLTOWN

**GARDINER, NY**  
This 9-year-old operation, known for its Hudson line of whiskeys, paved the way for others in the state.

### STILLTHEONE

**PORT CHESTER, NY**  
The secret ingredient in their vodka, gin, and brandy? Orange blossom honey.

### PHILADELPHIA

**PHILADELPHIA**  
Makers of Bluecoat gin and Vieux Carre absinthe, plus vodka distilled from rye and an unaged corn whiskey called XXX Shine.



## CRAFT DISTILLERIES OF THE SOUTH

Where whiskey and white lightning take center stage.

### LOUISVILLE

**LOUISVILLE, KY**  
Makers of Angel's Envy, straight bourbon that's finished with a six-month stay in port wine barrels.

### TROY AND SONS

**ASHEVILLE, NC**  
When Troy Bell set out to make moonshine, she scoured the state archives and unearthed old local recipes. Now her stuff is showing up in cocktail bars around the country.

### PIEDMONT

**MADISON, NC**  
Moonshine of the highest caliber was once called coddady. Piedmont's version is spiced with vanilla, nutmeg, and cinnamon.

### CORSAIR

**NASHVILLE, TN**  
Known for bold experimentation in the realm of whiskey.

### OLE SHOKEY

**GATLINBURG, TN**  
Its list of moonshine flavors reads like a pie menu: cherry, blackberry, and more.

### CATOCTIN CREEK

**PURCELLVILLE, VA**  
With backgrounds in chemical engineering and software development, this husband-and-wife team makes gin, brandy, rye, and whiskey in Virginia's wine country.

### COPPER FOX

**SPERRYVILLE, VA**  
Rick Wasmund has been making single-malt whiskey since 2000. His training? An internship in Islay, Scotland.

**Rocktop Flip**  
made with Corsair moonshine from Nashville, TN.  
Recipe on page 84.

master it is to do it every day." Once the delicate brew is barreled, it must age a minimum of two years to be called "straight bourbon." And straight bourbon is what Garrison Brothers bottles.

According to the American Distilling Institute, the term "craft distiller" is reserved for operations that produce a maximum of 325,000 to 410,000 bottles a year, depending on proof. But most make far less. This year, Garrison Brothers put out 12,000. Jim Beam produced more than 35 million—of just its White Label brand. The goal isn't to saturate a mass market; it's to resurrect a lost art and place value in the handmade. And it's not just staple spirits that are being manufactured. Innovators like Chicago's Adam Seger, whose "Hum" is a rum-based liqueur infused with hibiscus, ginger, cardamom, and kaffir lime, are defying categories. Some craft distillers—including New England Distilling in Portland, Maine, and Koval Distillery in Chicago—come from families steeped in spirit making. Others, like Montanya Rum in Crested Butte, Colorado, model their methodology after

spirits traditionally made outside of the States. Shelburne Orchards in Shelburne, Vermont, and The Spirit Guild in Bakersfield, California, are bestowing family farmland with new purpose. Many outfits are organic; even more utilize strictly local ingredients. And the landscape isn't always agrarian. Brooklyn, New York, has at least seven distilleries, and there are 24 within a 30-mile radius of downtown Portland, Oregon. By choosing to buy spirits from other distilleries, some producers, termed "merchant bottlers," cut out the mashing, fermenting, and sometimes even the distilling process. But for the true craftspeople among this new cast, the pride, the beauty, the *raison d'être*, lies in a "land to glass" mentality.

Before Garrison Brothers began production, Dan Garrison experimented with yeast and grain for six months, even sending scores of samples to a lab for chemical analysis. "I spent many a night at the still house by myself with a table full of Mason jars," he recalls. "Every one was a different recipe or temperature." Then he bought barrels: different sizes,



from different makers, and charred to different degrees. In May 2008, he found the highest quality batch of bourbon among the 37 barrels he was aging. "It was definitely immature, but I knew it was going to eventually turn, and that all that sweetness, all that caramel, vanilla, and butterscotch, was going to come through." And it did. Last year, Garrison Brothers took home a silver medal at the revered San Francisco World Spirits Competition. It also earned best in its category at the American Distilling Institute's Judging of Artisan American Spirits.

For such a risky undertaking, the recognition was huge. Though it was perfectly legal to produce bourbon in Texas, no one had ever tried. And Garrison, who shortly

before establishing the distillery ended a 20-year career in technology marketing, had put everything into the venture with a firm goal in mind: to make a bourbon that would stand up to anything produced in Kentucky, and to make every barrel better than the one before. "From the time it all started to now, his vision has been the same," says Todd. "It gives me chills to watch someone taste a success that's been so long in the making."

**T**HE CROWD THAT showed up on that September day to lend their hands had been randomly chosen from a waiting list of 600. A twenty-something bartender from San Marcos, Texas, quietly dipped bottle after bottle in



**Deep in the Heart of Texas**  
 The sun peeks through some of Garrison Brothers' 68 acres of land (top left), after 12 hours of work, one of the stills lets off some steam (left); a volunteer seals a bottle with hot wax (above).



**Hand Hewn**

The barrel barn is made from Texas-harvested cedar.

hot wax. A retired teacher from nearby Fredericksburg wiped fingerprints off the finished product. And two students from the University of Texas School of Law affixed a hang tag to each bottle and glued shut cardboard cases of twelve. The process is time-consuming and labor-intensive—words that many businesses associate with failure. But Dan Garrison wouldn't have it any other way.

"I'm in touch with the work, the pain, and the fear that went into this," he says. "I want to run a family business that's profitable, that helps out our employees, our community, and our investors, but never becomes so focused on the bottom line that we lose sight of why we started." His wife, Nancy, agrees. "In an age when everything is less than authentic, here today and gone tomorrow, we stay true to the craft. We are not a flash in the pan."

At the end of each twice-yearly bottling session, Dan Garrison asks his team of temporary apprentices to inscribe their wooden work surface with a personal message. One imprint, carved into the rough plywood by a past participant, sums up the distillery's intoxicating ethos in five words: "Success without integrity is failure."

*Alison Miller is the senior editor of Spirit.*

## CRAFT DISTILLERIES OF THE WEST COAST

The birthplace of the local food movement is also the spot where craft spirits got their start.

### LOST SPIRITS

**SALINAS, CA**  
The most heavily peated single malt outside of Islay is made here, in a steam-powered log-and-copper still.

### ANCHOR DISTILLING

**SAN FRANCISCO**  
Often called the forefather of craft distilling, Fritz Maytag's Junipero gin has long been beloved by choosy bartenders.

### GREENBAR COLLECTIVE

**LOS ANGELES**  
This enviro-minded maker of organic spirits plants a tree for every bottle sold.

### CLEAR CREEK

**PORTLAND, OR**  
Oregon's original craft distiller started out with brandies made from local fruit.

### HOUSE SPIRITS

**PORTLAND, OR**  
Known for a gin called Aviation that's specially crafted for use in the eponymous drink.

### RANSOM SPIRITS

**SHERIDAN, OR**  
One of only a few producers worldwide of Old Tom gin, a malty pre-Prohibition spirit.

### DRY FLY

**SPOKANE, WA**  
The makers of this vodka, gin, and whiskey helped make Washington a more distillery-friendly state.

### WOODINVILLE WHISKEY CO.

**WOODINVILLE, WA**  
Two old friends pouring their sweat and savings into small-batch rye and bourbon.



Golden Stovefly with Dry Fly vodka from Spokane, WA. Recipe on page 84.