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The Future of WHISKY

Worldwide demand keeps growing,
and distillers are scrambling to meet it.
How long will the boom last?

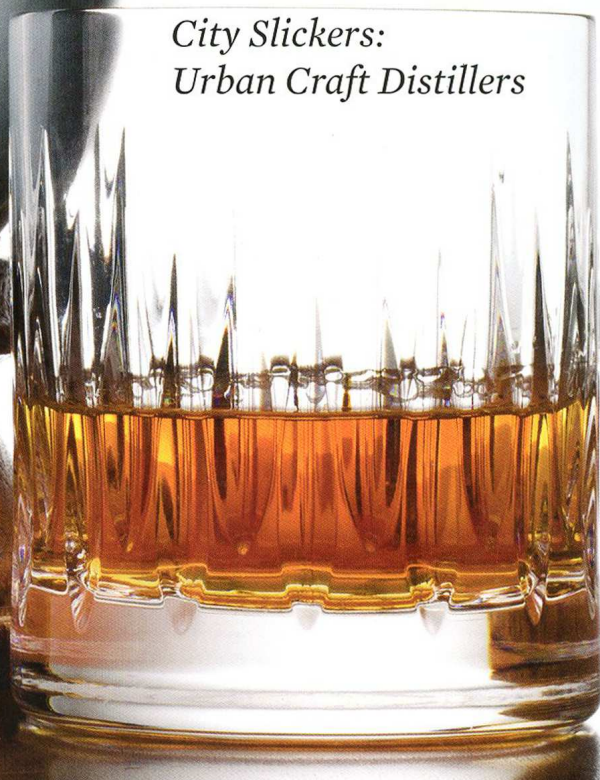
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*The Next Generation
of Bourbon Distillers*

*No-Age-Statement
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URBAN DISTILLERS

LEAVING BEHIND WHISKEY'S RURAL ROOTS, CRAFT DISTILLERS ARE THE NEWEST RESIDENTS IN THE HIPSTER 'HOODS OF AMERICA'S CITIES; A LOOK AT THE ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES. **BY JEFFERY LINDENMUTH**



Just a decade ago, if you wanted to witness American whiskey making in action, your best option was probably a flight to Louisville, followed by a drive of 60 miles or more to visit one of the Kentucky bourbon legends; a worthy adventure, but definitely a destination drink for most of the nation. In 2003, craft distilling was still in its infancy; the American Distilling Institute identified only 69 licensed distilleries. Today, it is not only surprising to see that number topping 400, but also to see where these entrepreneurs have set up shop. They are tucked next to Brooklyn condos. They are the gleaming jewels of city centers. Others, like their colonial forebears, are still braving the frontier: this time in distressed urban neighborhoods. These determined city sippers are returning the art and industry of distilling to American cities, even as they are confronted by lingering Prohibition-era misconceptions.

It Began with Beer

Just 50 yards from the door of Anchor Distilling (also the home of Anchor Brewing) a group of children is playing softball. Nearby, young women toting yoga mats are walking to class. The mixed-use neighborhood of San Francisco's Potrero Hill has been on a steady path of gentrification since Fritz Maytag started making beer here in 1979. Today, finding an apartment under \$3,000 a month is considered a score. "I think having the brewery first really helped pave the way. People enjoyed the employment opportunity," says David King, president of Anchor, which is today San Francisco's largest employer in manufacturing. Beyond offering good jobs, Anchor set the precedent for being a good neighbor.

The Potrero Hill community has grown up with the smell of beer brewing. King, however, worries that there are a lot of trucks. "It's a big commitment to be part of the neighborhood. We locate the holding bays as far away as possible from residences. We avoid 18-wheelers running around when kids are getting out of school, so we battle with a lot of logistics," he says. "If you want to be an urban distillery, you sometimes have to do things less efficiently."

It's nothing that can't be overcome, according to King. It just takes a lot of



Seattle's Westland distillery was established in 2009. This page, Westland president Emerson Lamb. Opposite, top: the distillery is located in the manufacturing district of SoDo. Opposite, bottom: Westland mash-woman Ellie Wong cleans the mash tun.

money. Anchor competes with the tech industry for talent by offering highly competitive wages and benefits. They bear the burden of safely operating a distillery within the rules and regulations of an urban environment, including elaborate sprinkler systems and other emergency preparedness. "It costs quite a lot more to operate here. It would be much easier and cheaper to put the distillery in the middle of a field, but that's the choice we make. We love being part of the community," says King. For Anchor, and others like them, good citizenship extends to contributing to myriad community organizations and philanthropic endeavors, as well as little things like referring their visitors to local restaurants.

With their history of success, Anchor has been invited by the city to take part in the regeneration of the area between China Basin and Dogpatch, where they hope to be brewing and distilling on Piers 48 and 49 by 2016. Typical of urban development, their fate rests, to some degree, in the hands of others. "If the Giants win the playoffs, our timeline will get pushed back because we need to use some of their parking space. It puts us in a real quandary, because of course we want them to win," laughs King.

An Educational Imperative

To bring a new distillery to life in an urban area requires rare determination. Just ask Allen Katz, co-founder and vice-president of New York Distilling, opened in Williamsburg

after four years of planning and visiting over 40 potential sites. "There is an ever-decreasing amount of manufacturing space in New York City. It's a familiar story in cities around the world that were manufacturing centers, but have flipped to residential over the last 20 years, as people have elected to live in cities again," observes Katz, whose distillery is actually attached to a condominium building. The

FOR KATZ, NEW YORK CITY WAS THE ONLY OPTION. HIS DISTILLING VISION, WHICH INCLUDES A LINE OF THREE DISTINCT BOUTIQUE GIN STYLES, DEMANDED ACCESS TO ONE OF THE WORLD'S COCKTAIL EPICENTERS.

plight was made even more difficult by regulations affecting plans for an on-premise bar called the Shanty; which required strict distances from schools and churches.

For Katz, however, New York City was the only option. His distilling vision, which includes a line of three distinct boutique gin styles, demanded access to one of the world's cocktail epicenters. With that, he saw the opportunity to bring distilling to the doorstep

of the men and women creating those cocktails. "There is a growing community of bartenders who might average 30 years old, and the great majority of them have never been to a distillery! Now, anyone can hop the subway or get off a plane at JFK and be at our distillery in 20 minutes," he says.

Katz also offers the distillery as a sort of demonstration kitchen for industry legends to bring their story to New York. "We've hosted great guest distillers: Jimmy and Eddie Russell [of Wild Turkey] and Jim Rutledge [of Four Roses]. They come here and distill with us for the day and everybody learns something," beams Katz. It's not just bartenders, but the whole community Katz aims to benefit, whether that means operating as a drop-site for Hurricane Sandy relief or hosting fundraising efforts for Girls Write Now, a literary outreach for young girls and a suitable cause for the creator of an American gin named Dorothy Parker.

Like everything in the city, distilling here is expensive. The distillery is not permitted to dump their spent grain or waste water untreated into the sewer, so in addition to hauling ingredients in, they must haul them out, paying to transport the byproducts to far-off farms in New Jersey. Katz is currently contemplating a digester that could process the waste on-site and create energy.

"When we submitted our plans for the first time, I could see the fire marshall's terror. He looked certain we were going to burn the city to

Boston's Bully Boy distillery is co-owned by Dave (shown) and Will Willis. Urban distillers are often short on space; long on customer proximity.



the ground,” says Emerson Lamb, president of Westland distillery, which began crafting single malt whiskey in Seattle in 2009. “Often, there is just no precedent for what we are doing.”

Westland is located in a former crane company in the manufacturing district of SoDo, anchored by KeyArena and home of the planned Sonic Arena. The modern distillery and tasting room welcome visitors with urban industrial chic: hulking exposed fir beams and polished concrete. “We are respecting the heritage here, embracing who we are with an urban rather than pastoral feel,” he says.

Westland’s challenges were many: explosion-proof rooms to house new make, constructing silos that can stash 100,000 pounds of grain in just seven feet of space. But for Lamb, it all came down to a desire to share his love of whiskey. “I’ve often thought, gosh, this would be so much easier in the middle of nowhere, but one of my greatest joys is to talk about whiskey. We would have fewer people to talk to about it.”

After distillation, the new make spirit is trucked to roomier environs in Lamb’s hometown of Hoquiam, Washington, a common strategy among urban distilleries where space is at a premium. “We have a very urban place to make the spirits and a very rural place to age and bottle, the stuff that is necessary but not considered the sexy part,” explains Lamb.

“When we started speaking with the inspectors in Boston, we realized that despite having the laws on the books, they literally had no idea what a distillery does,” says Will Willis, who opened Bully Boy Distillers in Boston with his brother Dave in 2010, crafting rum, vodka, and whiskey in a 150-gallon copper pot still. “It was as if we told them we were planning to make nuclear weapons.” Realizing that their first role would be as educators, the Willis brothers reached out to the local business association in Roxbury, where they located a 3,600 square foot building that could accommodate their still and an inventory of 53-gallon barrels to hold their American straight whiskey.

Even after explaining that there would be absolutely no sales of spirits, one stipulation of their residency was that there could be no sign, creating a navigational challenge for visitors who trek the 20 minutes from the Red Line “T” at Andrew Square for a tour. “I think it highlights the general lack of understanding. I do believe there remains much more of a stigma around liquor than beer; that liquor means drinking with a purpose. Thankfully, the great boom in cocktails and education by distillers is making spirits a more acceptable



Yeah, it's Detroit. Michael Forsyth (left) and J.P. Jerome are committed to the Motor City and their Detroit City distillery.



New York Distilling owner Allen Katz looked at more than 40 locations before selecting his Brooklyn site.

choice,” says Willis. (The distillery is in the process of upgrading to a 750-gallon still and moving to a larger, 8,000 square foot space, only 30 yards up the street; at this time, there are plans to add a tasting room.)

Operating in a more distressed neighborhood brings immense challenges. Willis says he can’t leave anything outside at night, or even erect grain silos for fear of vandalism. On the other hand, he can visit 50 of his 700 accounts within minutes. Most importantly, every bottle of Bully Boy declares, “handmade in Boston.” “I don’t think we at first understood the power of that city pride, or the lure of Boston as an international city. It’s worth its weight in gold.”

Industrial Revival

Detroit City distillery is bolstering already strong civic pride in gritty and downtrodden Detroit, where manufacturing space is plentiful and optimism runs high surrounding the summer 2014 opening of the distillery and bar in the culinary-centered Eastern Market district. Everything from the booze to barstools will be made in Detroit, with plans for non-traditional whiskeys made from Michigan wheat and barley, along with some specialty malts, recalling distiller J.P. Jerome’s tenure at Bell’s Brewery in Kalamazoo. “In Detroit, we make things,” beams Jerome. “After decades of oil refineries and the huge car industry, this city is not exactly afraid of flammable materials.”

According to Detroit City partner Mike Forsyth, also director of the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation’s REVOLVE group, distilling was once the second largest industry after automotive. The city functioned as a gateway for Prohibition-era rum runners, making the new distillery in a former slaughterhouse the latest chapter in a colorful history of Detroit spirits.

“There is a lot of pride. Everyone feels a part of the comeback and feels a loyalty to local business. To call yourself Detroit comes with great responsibility to be honest and genuine, and that is what we are doing,” says Forsyth. Detroit City stands to benefit from some recent distiller-friendly legislation that will permit direct sales to consumers, allowing them to entice the market shoppers while capturing a greater margin on their spirits.

Other similarly well-suited industrial cities appear less eager to welcome back distilling. In the case of Chattanooga, what began as an innocent Facebook question from Tim Pierant, “Would you drink Chattanooga whiskey?”



Chattanooga Whiskey co-owners Tim Piersant (left) and Joe Ledbetter plan to open their Whiskey Experience in 2015.



evolved into a massive grassroots campaign by the Chattanooga Whiskey co-founder to amend state laws that banned distilling in Hamilton County. “There was already brewing. We could not imagine why there was no distilling. But when we looked at the law, out of 95 counties in Tennessee, the majority of them could not distill,” says Piersant.

Like many upstart distillers, Chattanooga Whiskey began by bottling and selling whiskey obtained from MGP of Lawrenceburg, Indiana. Even though Chattanooga Whiskey was already being bottled and sold, lackadaisical local legislators, a tea party representative, and even other distillers all conspired to stop it from actually being made in Chattanooga, according to Piersant. “The pushback was not from the general public. They were in favor. They wanted the jobs, the whole experience,” says Piersant, who exerted influence through social media with a “vote whiskey” campaign that ultimately succeeded in changing the law.

Slated to open in 2015 in a 60,000 square foot former car dealership in the heart of Chattanooga, the Tennessee Stillhouse marks a win for the Scenic City and urban distilling. “To return whiskey to a southern conservative town after 100 years was very controversial. But it’s part of our history and we could not see one good reason Chattanooga should not have its own whiskey,” says Piersant.

Featuring a 30-foot copper continuous still, Chattanooga Whiskey is betting big on tourism, with plans for their Whiskey Experience

to attract 250,000 to 500,000 visitors a year alongside an aquarium and other downtown attractions. “We want to educate people in the process and product and history of American whiskey. I think that can be very responsible and very family friendly,” says Piersant.

Growing Up, Moving Out

In some ways, such grand and well-conceived projects are in contrast to America’s urban distilling pioneers, who often operated in the city out of necessity. Such was the case of Portland, Oregon’s Clear Creek distillery, founded in

“IN DETROIT, WE MAKE THINGS,” BEAMS JEROME. “AFTER DECADES OF OIL REFINERIES AND THE HUGE CAR INDUSTRY, THIS CITY IS NOT EXACTLY AFRAID OF FLAMMABLE MATERIALS.”

1984 by Stephen McCarthy in a building purchased as his wife’s studio. With its iron gate, woodstove, and discreet location on NW 23rd Street, Clear Creek fit well with the neighborhood’s commercial bakeries and light industry.

As restaurants moved in, however, the neighborhood changed around them, according to Rachel Inman, vice president of

production, who joined Clear Creek in 1989. “It was never easy. We’d get 50,000 pounds of fruit delivered at a time, and the street was too narrow to unload the truck from both sides, so we’d have to keep moving it to alternate unloading from both sides, just so it would not tip. I resorted to saving parking spaces for the trucks with boxes of bulk glass, but as I was dropping it with the forklift a guy on his cell phone could walk in front of me. It was getting too dangerous to continue,” recalls Inman.

After looking at “tons of spaces,” Clear Creek remains in the Northwest, moved to a larger, more industrial building that also acts as a retail store. Unlike the days when you could ring the doorbell and catch McCarthy making the cut for his McCarthy’s Oregon Single Malt whiskey, tours have been disbanded due to “industrial espionage” and the need to focus on the hard work of meeting demand.

Fortunately, distillery tourism in Portland has been picked up by the next generation, a half dozen distillers operating across the river in a light industrial area in the Southeast district, collectively dubbed Distillery Row. With Eastside Distilling and Stone Barn Brandyworks among them, their diverse production includes vodka, gin, rum, whiskey, aquavit, absinthe, and more. The nearby boutique Jupiter Hotel even markets a Booze and Brews package that includes two passports to Distillery Row tours and tastings with a stay. Of course, for the intrepid, there’s always rural Kentucky. ■