

Diner's Journal

Notes on Eating, Drinking and Cooking

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Ordering a Genever, by the Barrel

By ROBERT SIMONSON



House of Bols

Piet van Leijenhorst, master distiller at Lucas Bols, left, with Jackson Cannon, among barrels of genever.

Cocktail bars have become so focused on authenticity of ingredients that it has become fairly commonplace for owners or bartenders to travel to American whiskey distilleries to buy their own private barrel. Jackson Cannon, bar director of three Boston boîtes — [Eastern Standard](#), [The Hawthorne](#) (where he is also co-owner), and [Island Creek Oyster Bar](#) — has done so for years. But no tavern, to Mr. Cannon's knowledge, has anything like his latest acquisition: a full cask of [genever](#), straight from Holland.

Mr. Cannon went to [Lucas Bols](#), the Dutch liquor company, to hand-pick his barrel. It was not easy to persuade the centuries-old liquor company to agree to the arrangement. "It took years of talking to them about it," he recalled. When he first brought up the idea, "my friends at Bols were giving me back a blank stare. They said: 'We don't know what you're talking about. We've never done that.'"

The liquor he chose is far older than the bottled Bols genever available in the United States today. It was [aged](#) for six months in new French oak, then four more years in used French oak. “It ended up being pretty distinctive from what we have over here,” Mr. Cannon said. “It has a little more spice more it. It’s got a more intensity, great acidity and tannins and it’s well integrated.”

Mr. Cannon has roughly 183 liters of the stuff. He is using it in cocktails at all three bars, including the Dutch Oven, a variation on the Old Fashioned, and The Nook, in which the genever is mixed with lager, agave nectar, lime juice, tabasco and Worcestershire sauce. He believes the genever is closer in spirit to the kind that was used in the 19th century, when so-called Holland gin was a common sight in American bars, and genever was shipped overseas in barrels, not bottles.

“Using Old Tom gin or London Dry gin in old cocktail recipes, something was wrong,” he said. “A lot of bartenders knew that.”

Mr. Cannon isn’t through searching for liquors at their source. Later this year, he’s traveling to Mexico. He hopes to return with a private stock of mezcal.