

Another Round: More Words of Wisdom About Beer

By Scott Laird



Usually we stick to discussions about beer in this column, but in this issue we accepted an invitation to visit the Cornelius Pass Roadhouse and ventured into the sometimes mysterious world of distilling.

Whether it's brewing beer, making wine, or distilling spirits, Oregon is leading the way in micro enterprises that are producing top quality and often unique alcoholic beverages. The McMenamans Cornelius Pass Roadhouse (CPR) Distillery is no exception, where distillers Bart Hance, who lives in Columbia County in the hills of Yankton outside St. Helens, and Arthur Price from Beaverton, are practicing the centuries old art of distilling.

Hance and Price are overseeing the development of the McMenamans second distillery project (the original McMenamans distillery is located at the Edgefield property in Troutdale) and have been meticulously developing recipes in the old granary barn built in 1855 and lovingly restored in 1998 on the Imbrie Farm in Hillsboro. It is the county's oldest agricultural building,

employee and former brewery manager for McMenamans, Hance jumped when offered the chance to expand his horizons, dabble in the fine art of operating a still, and create an additional line of spirits for the company. Price, an eager sorcerer's apprentice, is an eight year employee, a former bar and pub worker, who had his eye on a brewer's position before this spot in the distillery became available.

Together Hance and Price have been experimenting, tasting, and adjusting their recipes over the last three years, establishing the current line of five products, generating new ideas and developing a reputation for turning out some very fine spirits.

For those unfamiliar with the



distillation process, a tour of the CPR Distillery is a fascinating and enchanting experience. A natural host and story teller, Hance, and the equally agreeable Price, welcome visitors and willingly shed light on their work world, engaging visitors with tales about the history of the property, the processes they use and the products they produce.

Mostly they make wheat based whiskey, but they also produce gin, a pinot noir brandy, and a hazelnut liquor. There are several other varieties of brandy currently aging in oak barrels and they are also hoping to release some rum in the next year or so.

Hance says he likes using locally sourced ingredients when possible. Gin is made from juniper berries, but some of the other botanicals that go into their recipe are sourced right off the Imbrie Farm property. "That's about as local as it gets," says Hance. "I walk right out here and pick sage, mint, yarrow, and rose petals to make our gin." One of the other unique things about their gin is that they use Oregon Grape in the recipe.

To make whiskey they use the same malts that McMenamans brewers use to make beer, and follow a similar process to make a mash. "Whiskey is essentially a beer before it's distilled but without hops," explains Hance. Hance

Alambic Charentis pot still is both eye catching and beautiful, and as Hance describes it, "rustic" and "primitive."

According to Hance, hundreds of years of trial and error led to the shape and the design of the pot still.



says they separate the liquid from the mash, double distill it, then age it in oak barrels for three years to create their signature line of whiskey called "Billy."

Those whiskey barrels are 63 gallons, an unusual and larger sized barrel that reduces the ratio of wood to liquid. They are custom made by an Oregon based cooper.

Although Hance and Price are the conjurers of the potions, the real magic at the CPR Distillery happens in the caldron - the still itself. Built in Cognac, France over 100 years ago it was originally designed for making brandy. The hand pounded copper, 160 gallon,

"Those shapes lead to the flavor profile associated with Cognac brandy," says Hance.

The distillers say they can control the amount of heat under the pot still and control the amount of water that goes in, but that's about it. "All the decisions that we make during a spirit run are made by the distiller's taste and smell," explains Price. "Our palates are the most important piece of equipment in the distillery," adds Hance.

Price says there is a lot of overlapping and sharing of resources and knowledge within the various

continued on page 19



built with all mortise, tenon and dowel, (there is no metal holding it up) and is listed on the National Registry of Historic Buildings.

Hance, with long flowing grey beard and pony tail, is the grand wizard of the operation, a real life but more fun loving, and younger version of Potter's Dumbledore. A twenty-six year

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