



ANDREA LORETO

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

A TASTE OF ITALY

Eugene's Elixir Inc.

BY NICK POUST

In 2009, Andrea Loreto was trying to market his time-consuming creation, a liqueur called Calisaya, but working with a third-party distributor didn't go smoothly. In spite of what he terms a distribution "disaster," he had enough positive feedback from consumers to confidently open his own distillery. That's how Eugene's Elixir Inc. was born, and how Eugene got its only member of the Oregon Distillery Guild, a nonprofit that happens to be the nation's first distillery guild.

Born in Florence, Italy, Loreto moved to California in 1998 and, when his wife accepted a teaching job at the UO, made his way to Eugene in 2006. An avid cook who taught cooking classes upon his arrival, he entered the realm of liqueur through cookbook-derived inspiration.

"In one of the cookbooks I brought with me from Italy there was an appendix on liqueurs, and I started making them," he says. "This is how I got into the liqueur business. A lot of tweaking went into it from the very first trial, but now I think I know enough about liqueurs."

Through that acquired knowledge and the process of infusion, Loreto's version of Calisaya, a bittersweet liqueur made with cinchona bark and an array of botanicals and flowers, was produced. Loreto wouldn't divulge much else about the liqueur. "There are other ingredients," he says, "but if I told you I'd have to kill you."

Kidding aside, he is secretive about the creative, unique twists he put on a liqueur that has been a staple in Italy for centuries.

The second liqueur of his making, Iris, is derived from pure iris root. Two liqueurs in five-plus years means the process is long, full of experimenting with the amount of alcohol, spices and Amazon Creek water used. "There's a very delicate balance," he says. "It can be overwhelming or taste like nothing. It's really complicated." And Loreto does all of this by hand, with few employees around him.

Loreto's Elixir Inc. distributes through the state and in Washington, California and Washington, D.C. The business has a wide reach, but for Loreto, the most satisfying aspect is the art in craftsmanship.

"I love it because it is extremely challenging," he says. "It's an art. To get to a good liqueur you have to invest a lot of time." And Loreto has surely invested, adding liqueur extraordinaire to his cooking talents.

To experience the flavorful results of all of this effort, Elixir Inc. is open by appointment for tours, tastings and sales. For more information, call 345-2257 or email Loreto at contact@elixir-us.com.

CHELA MELA

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