



HERITAGE DISTILLERY

THAT'S THE SPIRIT

Lane County loves to distill

BY ANDY VALENTINE

To our squealing delight, craft distilleries are on the rise. In the last six months, a number of brand-new spirit operations have popped up in and around Eugene, and they're all great at what they do. Here are a few for you to try.

HERITAGE DISTILLING CO.

The first thing you notice stepping into Heritage Distilling's new location at First Avenue and Madison Street is the atmosphere. The tasting room is cozy, copper-tone, oaky, boozy, warm, inviting.

The adjectives continue to mount. Affordable flights await at the bar, where five half-ounce shots go for \$5 total, and the cocktails are competitive. But digging beyond first impressions is a crucial part of getting to know a drinking place. Under this exciting cosmetic experience beats a passionate heart and a thirst for customization rarely found in such establishments. At the center of it all sits J.P. Wensel, founder and head distiller.

A practicing physician for many years, Wensel's love of beverage craft drives him to operate Heritage on the side. That is, he operates Heritage *as well as* being a physician. He is also a licensed wine and fine-spirit sommelier, a fact that becomes evident when he gets to talking about booze.

Heritage opened its first distillery in Gig Harbor, Washington, in 2012; its Eugene distillery opened in October.

On the subject of rye whiskey, one of Heritage's specialties, Wensel says: "Rye, in the United States anyway, is any whiskey that's distilled from a mash bill of at least 51 percent rye. In this case it's 95 percent rye. We like rye. Rye's flavor profile is totally different — you're going smell and taste orange oil, cloves, pepper — it's a lot different than bourbon."

Beyond formidable knowledge and fine-tuned products, though, Wensel and his crew are also passionate about encouraging people to learn about the craft. Heritage's My Batch program is designed so that anybody with an interest in distilling can come to the state-of-the-art distillery, spend three hours learning how to distill and bottle their own spirit, then take two bottles home. The class costs \$149.

It's an educational process born from a love of the craft. Pair this with Heritage's fully customizable personal cask program, Cask Club, in which your own personal cask is stored at the facility, aged a year at a time, and you're on your way to spirit heaven.

Overarching conclusion: The liquor at Heritage is delicious, and it's a result of knowledge and quality ingredients. As Wensel puts it, "It's a question of good grain and careful distillation techniques."

Heritage Distilling Co. is located at 110 Madison St. The tasting room opens at noon seven days a week. For more information on My Batch and Cask Club programs, visit heritagedistilling.com.

THINKING TREE SPIRITS

Farther west in the Whiteaker neighborhood, farm-to-flask liquor startup Thinking Tree Spirits has just opened for business. The place is smaller and more DIY, but no less inviting.

With a focus on sustainability, founder Emily Jensen — along with her husband, Bryan Jensen, and their partner Kaylon McAlister — aims to celebrate locally sourced ingredients and create a taste experience unique to the region. Everything down to the molasses in the rum is locally sourced. With this in mind, the resulting cocktails are bound to be amazing.