

LONG ISLAND
PULSE

THE POWER ISSUE

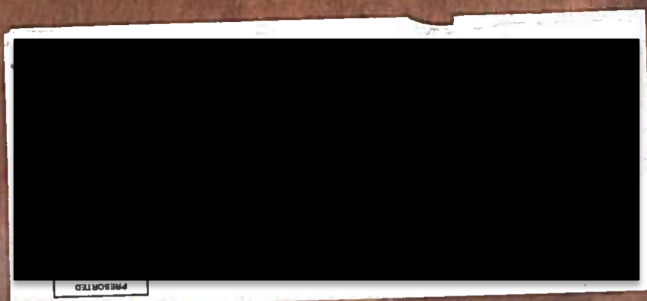
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MARCH 2017



High Spirits

The genesis of Long Island Spirits went against the grain

by NIKO KROMMYDAS

TEN YEARS AGO, RICH STABILE opened the first distillery on Long Island since Prohibition, making his vodka from local potatoes. He produced 500 cases of LiV (Long Island Vodka) in Long Island Spirits' first year and self-distributed all of them, driving to every liquor store, bar and restaurant he serviced. Since then, Long Island Spirits' annual production has increased thirtyfold and includes other spirits, most notably a line of Rough Rider whiskies distributed in more than 35 states.

In the handsome 100-plus-year-old horse barn in Baiting Hollow, a variety of decidedly bold spirits are produced. Consider Happy Warrior Cask Strength Bourbon. It's aged a minimum of four years in charred new oak barrels before undergoing a second maturation of three to six months in French oak barrels that are washed in an aged brandy Stabile distills from chardonnay made by Sherwood House Vineyards.

It all stems from Stabile's interest in distilling, choice of potatoes over grain and a dedication to local ingredients.

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN DISTILLING?

Growing up in an Italian household, we would visit my grandfather in Brooklyn during the fall and help him make wine. Those times always stuck with me. But I felt like I could make more of a difference with spirits. I spent a lot of my

free time visiting the local wineries, breweries and distilleries. That's what ignited it. I started immersing myself in reading, attending distilling workshops, taking classes at Cornell to self-educate. What really triggered the move to start my own distillery was really personal: I was trapped in Paris after 9/11 for about a week and my first daughter had just been born. That inspired me to focus on doing something that I was really passionate about and that didn't require me to spend a lot of time overseas for extended periods. It's true: when you do something you love, it doesn't feel like work.

TELL US ABOUT THE LEGACY OF YOUR BAITING HOLLOW LOCATION.

Being a Long Island native I know the lineage with potatoes here, especially on the East End. We found a 100-year-old horse barn destined for demolition that backed up to about 100 acres of a potato and rye farm. The barn (with its twin cupolas) was completely restored to what it looks like today on the exterior. But we converted the roughly 10,000-square-foot inside to a state-of-the-art distillery—the impressive interior heights of the ceilings are crucial for this purpose.

The barn dates back to about 1912 and it's less than a mile from the Long Island Sound. We've been told by decedents of the previous owners that during Prohibition the barn had a colorful past. The twin cupolas were used to signal rumrunners if the coast was clear to smuggle their illegal goods onto the beach. The booze was then stored in the barn until they could be transferred onto the railroad, which was only about two miles away.

WHAT IS THE SPIRIT OF YOUR SPUDS?

I've always been a big fan of potato vodka. Potatoes are much more expensive to use, that's why most use grain. We use about 20 pounds of potatoes to make one bottle of vodka. We use the white Marcy round potato, an iconic Long Island variety and typically about two inches in diameter, which means more skin to fruit on the potato providing a higher starch content and yielding a much creamier, better tasting vodka.

The terroir of Long Island is ideally suited for growing potatoes. The loamy soils have excellent drainage and the microclimate (with the Gulf Stream hitting the South Shore) adds about 15

The tradition of the East End potato is in high spirits in Baiting Hollow. Rich Stabile is securing the honest tuber's place in Long Island's legacy.



YVONNE ALBINOWSKI



to 20 extra growing days to our farmers versus Connecticut. The local potatoes we use, and our process, allows us to create vodka that has a wonderfully rich and buttery-like mouth-feel with slight hints of citrus and banana, whereas wheat vodkas tend to have a sharper flavor profile by comparison.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT LONG ISLAND SPIRITS' DISTILLERY?

We're a field-to-glass distillery...Sustainability is part of our DNA. As much as we can source close to us, we do. We use winter rye, corn, barley and oats for our whiskies. For our Deepwells Gin we use local lavender, apples, pears, merlot leaf and watermelon as part of the 28 fruits and botanicals we distill the potato base with. For our Sorbetta liqueurs we use local strawberries and raspberries. Even our barrels come from about 15 miles away from East Coast Barrels in Medford.

We're also one of the few distillers that use a variety of different yeasts during the fermentation process. Our Rough Rider cask-strength rye, known as "The Big Stick," uses champagne yeast. Normally, most distillers want to have a very quick fermentation, which means they're using a strain of yeast that's aimed at converting the sugars from the rye. We use a slow, low-temperature fermentation process that yields much more of the yeast esters and floral character giving a better flavor.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

We became well known as LiV for our vodka and this provided a great education on honing our craft to develop and expand into creating other spirits. We spent a lot of time experimenting with multiple techniques before releasing our more complex spirits such as our Deepwells Gin, Rough Rider and Pine Barrens whiskies. We continue to experiment with an eye to the future for product-line expansions.

Whiskey has really become our flagship spirit over the last few years and we expect that to continue. We just installed a new stone mill to preserve a lot of the grain's natural enzymes in the milling process. And we just built a 4,000-square-foot barrelhouse for additional storage; it can hold about 1,500 whiskey barrels when it's full. A new automated bottling line allows us to devote more time to actual production. We're in the process of adding another still and four new fermenters by the end of the year as we look to start distributing in Europe. **D**

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Rye, corn, barley and oats are the foundation of Long Island Spirits' whiskies.

LEFT BOTTOM

New fermenters are taking our region's spirits global.

THIS PAGE

The Rough Rider's moniker honors Long Island native Teddy Roosevelt.

