

LIFESTYLE / RECREATION

# Whiskey, bourbon, vodka tastings at LI distillery



Jeanne Theriault and her husband, Bob, of Riverhead, stop off at LI Spirits distillery for a tasting. (June 16, 2013) Photo Credit: Johnny Milano

By **JIM MERRITT**

Special to Newsday

Updated September 17, 2013 9:21 AM

Linda and Donald Sookram are discovering a little-known corner -- and product -- of farm country. Shot glasses in hand, the Richmond Hill, Queens, couple stand at the bar in the Long Island Spirits Distillery tasting room in Baiting Hollow, drinking samples of locally produced Sorbetta, a liqueur also known as a vodka-based infusion.

They clink glasses and -- arms linked -- take sips of lemon Sorbetta.

"I like the fruity taste," says Linda. But the lime- and orange-tinged versions are rendered "a little strong."

## DRINKIN' WHISKEY AND RYE

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The Long Island Spirits Distillery takes a detour off the beaten path of North Fork tasting rooms. In a rustic, 2,500-square-foot oak-timber room inside a restored historic barn, glasses are filled with liquor instead of merlot or chardonnay.

Local agricultural products, such as potatoes and strawberries, are fermented and distilled in a main-floor production area. The distilling process takes a little more than a week for vodka. In addition, whiskeys and brandies are aged in barrels for one to five years. Well over 50,000 bottles will be produced this year by Long Island Spirits Distillery, says owner Rich Stabile of Smithtown, who founded the operation in 2007.

Visitors choose their "poison," as the old saying goes, from five kinds of Sorbetta, which includes strawberry and raspberry; two types of vodka (LIV and espresso, both distilled from potatoes grown on East End farms), and three whiskeys: Pine Barrens Single Malt Whisky, Rough Rider Straight Bourbon Whisky and Rough Rider Bull Moose Three Barrel Rye Whisky.

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Each pour is three-quarters of an ounce, amounting to less than a shot -- and you get to keep the glass as a

souvenir. Drink mixes, soda, T-shirts, shakers and other nonalcoholic items also are sold in the tasting room. A picture window looks out onto a deck, a potato field and the vineyards of the neighboring Baiting Hollow Farm Vineyard.

On a Sunday afternoon, a steady stream of vodka and whiskey aficionados from near and far line up for tastes.

"I'm not much of a wine drinker," says T.J. Diaz, 30, an electrician from Farmingville. "This is my forte."

Stacey Markle, 37, visiting from upstate Medina, calls the vodka she tastes "very smooth and drinkable."

## HOW TO TASTE LIQUOR

A craft distillery in wine country isn't such a reach -- doing a proper whiskey, rye and vodka tasting is "very much like tasting a wine," Stabile explains. Here are the steps:

**2. TASTE** As with wine, roll some on your palate to release the flavors.

**3. FINISH** Stabile describes this as "a long-lasting, light burn that you get at the end." Take note of how long it lasts on your tongue and at the back of your throat.

**WHAT** [Long Island Spirits Distillery](#)

**WHERE** 2182 Sound Ave., Baiting Hollow

**INFO** 631-630-9322, [lispirits.com](http://lispirits.com)

**COST** \$9 vodka tasting, \$13 whiskey tasting

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