

Celebrating the Georgia lifestyle

December 2014

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Everything old is new again

Georgia's distilling has a shining future

BY JANE F. GARVEY

Georgia's wine and beer industries, laid waste by Prohibition, are recovering their lost ground—and now here comes the third cog in the adult beverages wheel: distilleries. This is a movement that's happening all over the country.

Before the U.S. Revolution, the Colonies were awash in spirits. Then, in New England, rum, made from Caribbean molasses, was the preferred spirit. But after the Revolution, the British cut off that molasses trade, so distillers turned to grain to produce spirits.

Making whiskey has long been a fine American tradition, and alcohol has been an important source of government revenue from the earliest days of the Republic.

But enforcing the whiskey tax ultimately proved difficult. So did later efforts to exterminate its production. The Prohibition years (1920-1933) were filled with illegal alcohol—some of it toxic—yet the public thirstily consumed much alcohol of all sorts.

While artisan wine and craft beer production have resumed since the Prohibition era, distilleries are just now getting new leases on life. Producing everything from rum to bourbon to vodka to moonshine, Georgia is opening distilleries from one end of the state to the other.

In Americus, 13th Colony launched the distillery comeback in 2009, starting with two tiers of vodka and gin, and now produces corn whiskey, bourbon and rye.

Corn whiskey—also known as moonshine—was what the bootleggers made hidden in the hills and



RALPH DANIELS

Karin and Erik Vonk grow the sugar cane for their Richland Rum on their estate near Richland. Richland Rum won the 2014 "Flavor of Georgia" Adult Beverages category.

"hollers" of Appalachia. They made it at night to elude discovery by the "revenuers." Running whiskey launched NASCAR in Dawsonville as a byproduct of bootlegging illegal whiskey. The folks who made the illegal moonshine today are making it legally and paying the tax on it.

Appropriately, Dawsonville Moonshine Distillery is located in the same building that houses City Hall and the Georgia Racing Hall of Fame. Cheryl Wood proudly points to a photograph of her grandfather, Simmie Free, holding a bottle of clear liquid while noting that he was well aged—88—when he passed away, and his father, "Fiddler" Fate Free, made it to 109.

In Southeast Georgia, Still Pond, which also has a muscadine-producing winery and vineyard, has launched a moonshine distillery. In addition to muscadine-based moonshine whiskeys, a muscadine brandy is in the barrels, says owner Charles Cowart. And his latest product, Still Pond's



13TH COLONY

At 13th Colony in Americus, its award-winning corn whiskey was the first aged spirit the distillery released. Each bottle is signed and numbered by the distiller.

Vintners Vodka, in two proofs, 80 and 99, shipped in late October.

At Moonrise Distillery near Clayton, Jim Harris and his son Scott use old-fashioned methods and classic Appalachian pot stills to make their



CRAIG MOORE

Old 4th Distillery opened within the Atlanta city limits in late 2014, producing vodka and gin. Brothers Jeff and Craig Moore renovated a historic Old Fourth Ward space for the distillery.

whiskey, bourbon and fruit brandies using locally grown raw materials.

By using locally produced raw materials, by conducting tours and feeding into the tourism of the area, and by creating jobs, Moonrise Distillery and its colleagues positively affect the well-being of the region.

Now in his 80s, Carlos Lovell and his daughter Carlene Holder at Ivy Mountain Distillery in Mount Airy have made a legal enterprise out of an activity that Lovell learned in his younger years from other mountain distillers, such as his father.

At Ivy Mountain, Lovell relies on clear, pure spring water and locally grown corn to make the barrel-aged sour mash whiskey. He also distills peach and apple brandies, which were often made in the old days. The apple brandy makes a fine addition to a chicken cooked with apples and cream [see bonus recipe, page 36A].

Apple and peach brandies also are among the products from Granddaddy Mimms, which produces corn whiskey and a blended whiskey. The name for this operation comes from the nickname locals and family called mountain distiller Jack McClure. Country singer Tommy Townsend, a McClure grandson, has partnered with Georgia Distilling Co. in Milledgeville to re-create not only McClure's stills, but also the techniques his grandfather used to make his apparently highly regarded libations.

The metro Atlanta area is also seeing a burst of distilling activity. Lazy Guy Distiller occupies an 1830s building near downtown Kennesaw, where owner and distiller Mark Allen launched his first production in April 2014. Allen says Lazy Guy uses Georgia-grown grains and fruits for its whiskeys.

In downtown Atlanta's Old Fourth Ward district, Old 4th Distillery founders, brothers Craig and Jeff Moore, assert primacy as the first legal distillery inside the Atlanta city limits since Prohibition. Beginning in the fall 2014, Old 4th launched with plans to produce a line of vodka and gin, and began to do tours. Product

should be available beginning on Dec. 15 of this year, says Jeff Moore.

Decatur and neighboring Avondale Estates are getting on the distillery bandwagon. Both municipalities cooperated with distillery owners to smooth the way. In fact, Avondale Estates approached Decatur inter-nist Tim Watts, who grew up in Italy, about doing a distillery, which will soon open and produce whiskey that will be all barrel-aged. Getting past the local ordinances is "the biggest hurdle for any distillery," he says.

Independent Distillery Co. co-founders Tommy Williams and Michael Anderson would agree. After Decatur changed necessary ordinances, Independent's distillery was off to the races in September 2014. Their double-distilled smooth, aromatic Hellbender corn whiskey can be found at Pallookaville Fine Foods in Avondale Estates, and Independent plans an expansion into the making of fine rum and bourbon as well.

Also supportive of its resident distiller, Richland, located between Columbus and Albany, embraced Richland Rum, an enterprise launched by Erik and Karin Vonk. The couple grows sugar cane at Vennebroeck, their nearby estate, where they began this project in 1999.

More distilleries are in the early stages, including one in Dahlone-



COURTESY FRUITLAND AUGUSTA

Fruitland Augusta Georgia Peach Vodka and Georgia Peach Sweet Tea Vodka currently are made out of state, but that could change if laws now on the books in the Augusta area are revamped to allow it.

ga, Stillhouse Creek, which plans to produce grappa among its other products. Dalton Distillers, on its Facebook page, says it will be ready to go by late November to early December in Dalton.

These entrepreneurs are passionate about what they do, but the support of the local political authority is critical to their success. While most have gotten that support, some have opted to move operations out of state.



Ivy Mountain Distillery's Carlos Lovell, right, and his daughter Carlene Holder have turned what was once an illegal family enterprise into a very legal operation. They're pictured here, in front of the simple building that serves as their Mount Airy-based distillery.

Another impediment to the distilleries' future development is that they can't sell on site, unlike the wineries. Erik Vonk solved this problem for Richland Rum when some local folks banded together to open a retail store across the street from the distillery. They sell one product: Richland Rum, which they buy from the distributor, Eagle Rock, not from the distillery directly.

That's not a solution most distillers can rely on. As Jim Harris of Moonrise Distillery points out, "When customers come to the distillery then can't buy the product, it makes them mad, and that damages my brand." Vonk says he found the same reaction among his customers.

Others are optimistic that the Georgia Legislature in time will find a solution.

"Once [elected officials] see that we're actually producing a viable product that makes money and earns revenue, [and] when there's enough of us clamoring, we'll get there," says Tim Watts. "There's so much interest and excitement now. It'll happen."

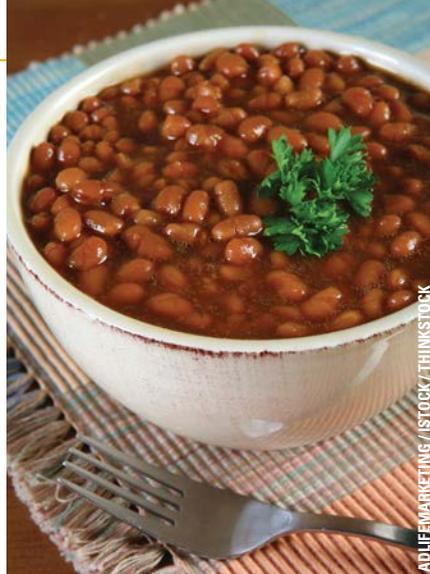
Jane F. Garvey is a food, wine and travel writer from Decatur.

Chicken Liver Pâté With Country Ham and Apple Brandy

- 1 pound chicken livers
- 2 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons olive oil, divided
- Freshly ground sea salt
- 5 ounces country ham, cut into small dice
- 2 shallots, peeled, diced
- 1/2 teaspoon finely chopped fresh thyme
- 1/2 cup apple brandy
- 1-1/2 sticks (12 tablespoons) unsalted butter, at room temperature
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Crackers or toasted French bread slices, for serving

Trim livers of any tough connective tissue and dark spots, then rinse and pat dry.

In a nonstick frying pan, heat 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon olive oil over medium heat. Place enough chicken livers in the heated oil to allow them to brown without touching. Turn livers and cook until just pink,



Baked beans get some extra zip with the addition of Richland Rum's "Almost Rum" and the rum itself.

3-4 minutes. *Note: They will continue to cook after being removed from the heat.* Scoop cooked livers out and set on a plate. Heat remaining olive oil and cook the second batch similarly. Season all with freshly ground sea salt.

In remaining fat in pan, cook diced country ham, shallots and fresh thyme until meat is lightly browned and shallots are soft. Add apple brandy and reduce to about 2 tablespoons. Remove from heat and let cool slightly.

Transfer chicken livers and country ham/shallot mixture to a food processor fitted with a steel blade. Cut unsalted butter into tablespoon-size pieces and add to food processor. Pulse until butter is incorporated, then whirl until smooth but still textured. Pack mixture into a 2-cup crock, cover with plastic wrap and weigh down if possible; cover with lid. Chill for 1-2 days so flavors can develop. Serve with toasted rounds of French bread or crackers and a white sweet wine. *Makes about 2 cups. Serves 10-12 as an appetizer.*

Hot Buttered Peach

- Fruitland Augusta, Augusta*
- 2 ounces Fruitland Augusta Georgia Peach Tea Vodka
- 1 ounce hot water
- 1 ounce ginger liqueur
- Whipped cream
- Grated nutmeg

In a mug, combine Fruitland Augusta Georgia Peach Tea Vodka, hot water and ginger liqueur. Top with whipped cream and a little grated nutmeg. *Serves 1.*

Richland-based freelance journalist Chip Jones likes to use Richland Rum, to make these baked beans.

Richland Rum Baked Beans

- 2 (22-ounce) cans Bush's Best Steakhouse Recipe Grillin' Beans
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon Richland Rum's "Almost Rum" premium cane sugar syrup
- About 1/4 cup ketchup
- 1 tablespoon mustard
- 3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon (or more as needed) olive oil
- 1/2 medium onion, peeled, diced
- 1/4 green bell pepper, seeds and ribs removed, cut into small dice
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled, minced
- 6 strips good bacon
- Lots of freshly good ground black pepper
- 1 ounce Richland Rum

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Drain beans and rinse. Place in a large bowl and add butter, "Almost Rum," ketchup, mustard and Worcestershire sauce. Set aside.

Heat olive oil in a medium nonstick pan and add onion and bell pepper; sauté. Add garlic and sauté, stirring constantly so it doesn't brown. Add sautéed onion, pepper and garlic to the bowl with beans.

In the same pan, cook strips of bacon until crisp. Remove and drain on paper towel. When cool enough to handle, crumble and add to bean mixture. Stir to combine. Season to taste with freshly ground black pepper. Add rum. Pour beans into a glass casserole and bake for 30-45 minutes. *Serves 4-6.*



web exclusive

For more appetizer, entrée and cocktail recipes, plus a list of distilleries in Georgia, see our "Second helping" story on page 36A of this month's digital edition, online at georgiamagazine.org.

Georgia's distilled spirits

BY JANE F. GARVEY

In addition to our in-state distilleries, several Georgians have gone forward with distilled spirits production out of state. Born in Japan and Southern by choice, Yuri Kato buys her vodka then infuses it (in Kentucky) using real Georgia peaches to create her brand: Fruitland Augusta, which tastes like real peach, not artificial. She's created two vodkas: Georgia Peach Vodka and Georgia Sweet Tea Peach Vodka.

Michelle Weber, of Savannah, produces her three vodkas in Wisconsin, where they're distilled from wheat and corn with a hint of vanilla. The brand is Southern Curves, and there are three flavors: NEKED, which has a hint of vanilla; Southern Praline, flavored with toasted pecans and crunchy brown sugar candies; and Sweet Georgia Nectar, showing notes of honeysuckle, peach and jasmine.

From Alpharetta, LeeAnn Snyder, Jennifer Policky and Carrie King launched Vixen Vodka in October 2011. The product is pure smooth vodka, with no flavors or infusions, and the packaging is sophisticated. It's distilled in Colorado.

Below is a list of Georgia's distilleries and ones set to open soon.

In production

- **13th Colony Distillery**, Americus. thirteenthcolony.com
- **Dawsonville Moonshine Distillery**, Dawsonville. dawsonvillemoonshinedistillery.com
- **Georgia Distilling Co.**, Milledgeville. (478) 453-1086
- **Granddaddy Mimms**, Blairsville. granddaddymimms.com
- **Independent Distilling Co.**, Decatur. independentdistilling.com
- **Ivy Mountain Distillery**, Mount Airy. ivymountaindistillery.com
- **Lazy Guy Distillery**, Kennesaw. lazyguydistillery.com
- **Moonrise Distillery**, Clayton. moonrisedistillery.com
- **Old 4th Distillery**, Atlanta. old4th.com
- **Richland Distilling Co.**, Richland. richlandrum.com
- **Still Pond Distillers**, Arlington. stillponddistillers.com

Coming soon

- **Dalton Distillers**, Dalton. facebook.com/DaltonDistillery



CINDY SUDDERTH

Andy Sudderth, of R.M. Rose Co., in Dillard

- **Ghost Coast Distillery**, Savannah. ghostcoastdistillery.com
- **R. M. Rose Co.**, Dillard. rmrosecompany.com
- **South Georgia Distillery**, Alma. southgeorgiadistillery.com
- **Stillhouse Creek Distillery**, Dahlonega. stillhousecreekdistillery.com
- **Watts Whiskey Distillery**, Avondale Estates. wattswhiskeydistillery.com

Georgia originated but not made in-state

- **Fruitland Augusta**, Augusta. FruitlandAugusta.com
- **Southern Curves Vodka**, Savannah. southerncurvesspirits.com
- **Vixen Vodka**, Alpharetta. vixenvodka.com

Georgia Grown spotlight recipe

Georgia Blue Cheese Grits

Courtesy of Georgia Grown

- 5 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup half and half or cream
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup Georgia grits (Gayla's, Logan Turnpike, Freeman's Mill, Buckeye Creek Farm or Riverview Farms)
- 1 cup crumbled Georgia blue cheese (Sweet Grass Dairy, Nature's Harmony or Flat Creek)

Bring chicken broth, half and half or cream and salt to a boil. Whisk in grits, stirring to prevent clumping. Lower temperature to a simmer. Continue cooking, stirring often for about an hour. *Note: Different brand grits vary on cooking time.* Stir in crumbled blue cheese. Stir until melted.

Visit Georgia Grown's website, www.georgiagrown.com, for more great recipes from farms and producers across our state.



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