



WINEMAKER-DISTILLERS WITH A WHOLE LOT OF SPIRIT

Hybrid winery-distilleries are on the rise, with more and more winemakers looking to branch into the worlds of spirits and beer. Get to know these pioneers.

by Susan G. Hauser

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On Friday nights in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, the tasting lounge of Infinity Beverages Winery and Distillery is hopping, thanks to the rocking live music and flowing cocktails. Summer Heat, its most popular drink (recipe on the next page), has become the tasting room's big draw.

"And we're not even a bar," says Founder, Winemaker and Distiller Matthew Rick, who plans to bottle the cocktail next year. Infinity Beverages began as an urban winery that expanded into a craft distillery, which enabled crowds and revenue to soar. The following spots represent a diverse range of unique places to sip wine and spirits.

Distilling in Wine Country

A pioneer of American winery/distilleries, 12th-generation distiller Milo Karakasevic was simply carrying on a family tradition in 1983 when he founded Charbay Winery & Distillery in St. Helena, California. His son, Marko, expanded Charbay's offerings with flavored vodkas, and whiskey distilled from beer. At the winery, tours include tastings of wine and apéritifs.

From Old World to Idaho

In Caldwell, Idaho, brothers Andy and Greg Koenig, inspired by the beverage scene in their father's hometown of Lustenau, Austria, established a winery in 1994 and added a distillery in 1999. Koenig Vineyards & Distillery hit pay dirt when it started to flavor its potato vodka with Idaho's state fruit, huckleberries. It's no surprise that the Huckleberry Martini (recipe at top right) is a hit.

Spirited Winemaking

Another pioneer is Tad Seestedt of Ransom Wines & Spirits in Sheridan, Oregon. Unlike many of its contemporaries, Ransom started as a distillery in 1997, and it planted Pinot Noir vines and added a winery in 1999. Renowned for his dedication to historic spirits styles, Ransom offers wine, spirits, vermouth and cocktails at its tasting room in nearby McMinnville.

Iowan Pioneers

At Cedar Ridge Winery & Distillery, in Swisher, Iowa, both operations opened simultaneously because owners Jeff and Laurie Quint wanted their fledgling business to stand out. They became Iowa's first licensed distillers, making whiskey from corn grown on their farm. The tasting room offers wine, spirits, cocktails and live music.

An Indiana Institution

*The list of spirits, liqueurs and wines (fortified and otherwise) is long at **Huber's Orchard, Winery & Vineyards and Starlight Distillery** in Starlight, Indiana. Opened in the 1800s, it's one of Indiana's top tourist attractions, as the 650-acre farm and tasting room attracts about 600,000 visitors per year. Most people ask for sangria made from Huber's wine and brandy.*