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Just Don't Call It Moonshine

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After Prohibition, laws made production feasible for only a few huge distilleries. A craft distilling movement began on the West Coast about 20 years ago, but restrictive state regulations kept it from spreading. In the last few years, though, as states sought new forms of revenue, they cut astronomic licensing fees and gave incentives to producers who got the bulk of their raw materials in-state, as with New York State's Farm Distillery Law in 2007.

Frank Coleman, senior vice president of the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, a trade group, said the number of distilleries nationwide has grown to 220, from 24 in 2001, and is expanding.

Like Mr. Grout, virtually all craft distillers use small pot stills rather than the huge column stills used by the industry giants. Though more labor-intensive, these more faithfully capture the essence of fruit and grain, and let a distiller precisely select what part of the distilling run to use to create the most nuanced styles and flavors.



Being small also confers one inestimable advantage: freedom.

“We have the ability to diversify wildly,” said Chris Weld, whose [Berkshire Mountain Distillers](#), near Great Barrington, Mass., puts out eight different spirits. “We can make a fruit brandy one day and a whiskey the next.”

“For us, all the fun is in playing with the ingredients, getting to tweak the formula for a gin,” Mr. Weld added. “Conversely, that also becomes a necessity for us to differentiate ourselves.”

Mr. Weld, 45, spent 17 hectic years as an emergency room physician's assistant in Oakland, Calif., before returning East, where he grew up crushing [apples](#) that his father grew in Westchester County.

Given the 80-hour weeks he puts in, the hospital might look like a sinecure.

His still is unlovely, a secondhand cousin of the African Queen he bought online and drove up from Kentucky. But its output is a thing of beauty. He makes a molasses-based rum, a number of fruit brandies from his own orchards and two gins, one of which, Ethereal, changes formula every six months. For his aged corn whiskies he puts spirit he distills from local white corn into oak and cherry barrels that he has cut, milled and charred on the farm.

BERKSHIRE MOUNTAIN DISTILLERS Great Barrington, Mass., berkshiremountaindistillers.com: Ice Glen vodka, Greylock and Ethereal gins, Ragged Mountain rum, Berkshire bourbon, New England corn whiskey.