

HOMETOWN SPIRIT

Local craft breweries have given Washington a thriving beer culture. Now it's hard liquor's turn. A renaissance is under way in a distilling industry dating back to George Washington's recently revived rye operation at Mount Vernon. Here's a tour of the area's best homegrown hooch. **BY WILL GRUNEWALD**



MOUNT VERNON

Historian turned distiller **Steve Bashore** leads a small team that uses historically correct methods, wooden buckets, and copper-pot stills to eke out two batches of whiskey on average a year. It's worth a visit just to take in the aroma of wood smoke and sweet rye, but the gift shop does carry bottles that sell out quickly after each release.



CATOCTIN CREEK

Scott and Becky Harris strategically situated their distillery in Purcellville in the heart of Virginia wine country, and even staunch wine lovers admit their Roundstone Rye's warming spice and mellow sweetness are as comforting as a buxom Bordeaux. Skeptical? Try their Virginia Brandy, made from local grapes and aged in real Bordeaux barrels.



LYON DISTILLING COMPANY

This year-old St. Michaels outfit churns out spot-on corn and rye whiskeys as well as white rum, but distiller **Ben Lyon's** staple is dark rum, a blend of molasses and sugar cane distilled in particularly small pots to heighten the caramelized goodness, then aged in barrels.



TWIN VALLEY DISTILLERS

Edgardo Zuniga—a former sous chef at Old Ebbitt Grill, Founding Farmers, and Clyde's—is the first to tell you he's learning as he goes. But only a few months into full-bore production in Rockville, Zuniga already hits all the right notes in his Seneca Bay Rum. He recently completed what he believes is Maryland's first-ever batch of bourbon.



NEW COLUMBIA

Inside an unassuming cinder-block building near Union Market is a state-of-the-art, sculptural copper still imported from Germany that produces Green Hat, a gin distantly related to the standard juniper-laden London Dry. Herbal flavors are emphasized for a unique and, frankly, better G&T experience.



ONE EIGHT

Set to open in the new year, One Eight's tasting room on Okie Street, off Northeast DC's New York Avenue, will feature its gin and rye whiskey but will also bring DC's first vodka since Prohibition, made from local grain. One Eight's proximity to New Columbia and Atlas Brew Works will make the Ivy City neighborhood a boozehound's paradise.

Troubled Waters



Even in Washington, where residents are keenly aware of bureaucracy's ironies, no one would let red tape strangle a moral principle, would they? Well, yes. In leafy Chevy Chase DC, Advisory Neighborhood Commission member **Gary Thompson** recently proposed removing the name **Francis Newlands** from the fountain at Chevy Chase Circle, a spot of National Park Service turf bisected by the Maryland/District line.

Newlands, a Nevada politician and a real-estate investor, founded Chevy Chase in 1890 and insisted that African-Americans and Jews be precluded. Racial covenants were outlawed in 1948, but plaques honoring him on the 1933 fountain remain in place. "I just go, 'Ew, why do we have this here?'" says Thompson.

The answer, fellow ANC members told him at a December meeting, is that scrubbing the name would be a huge hassle. "The only way to change it would be an act of Congress," said **Rebecca Maydak** before voting no.

It would actually take more than that. First, any ANC resolution would likely need to be buttressed by a DC Council vote. Then the District's Historic Preservation Office would need to petition the park service. These obstacles—as well as a general cynicism that had chatterers on the Chevy Chase DC listserv cheekily suggesting the fountain be renamed for **Kim Philby**, a sometime resident and Cold War double agent for the Soviets—mean Thompson will likely never see his proposal enacted.

There may be, however, a force greater than bureaucratic inertia. Thompson acted after stumbling on a six-year-old memo from retired attorney **Edward Sisson** objecting to the plaques. Sisson says bureaucracy is no match for spare time: "What the hell else am I going to do?"

—BENJAMIN FREED

