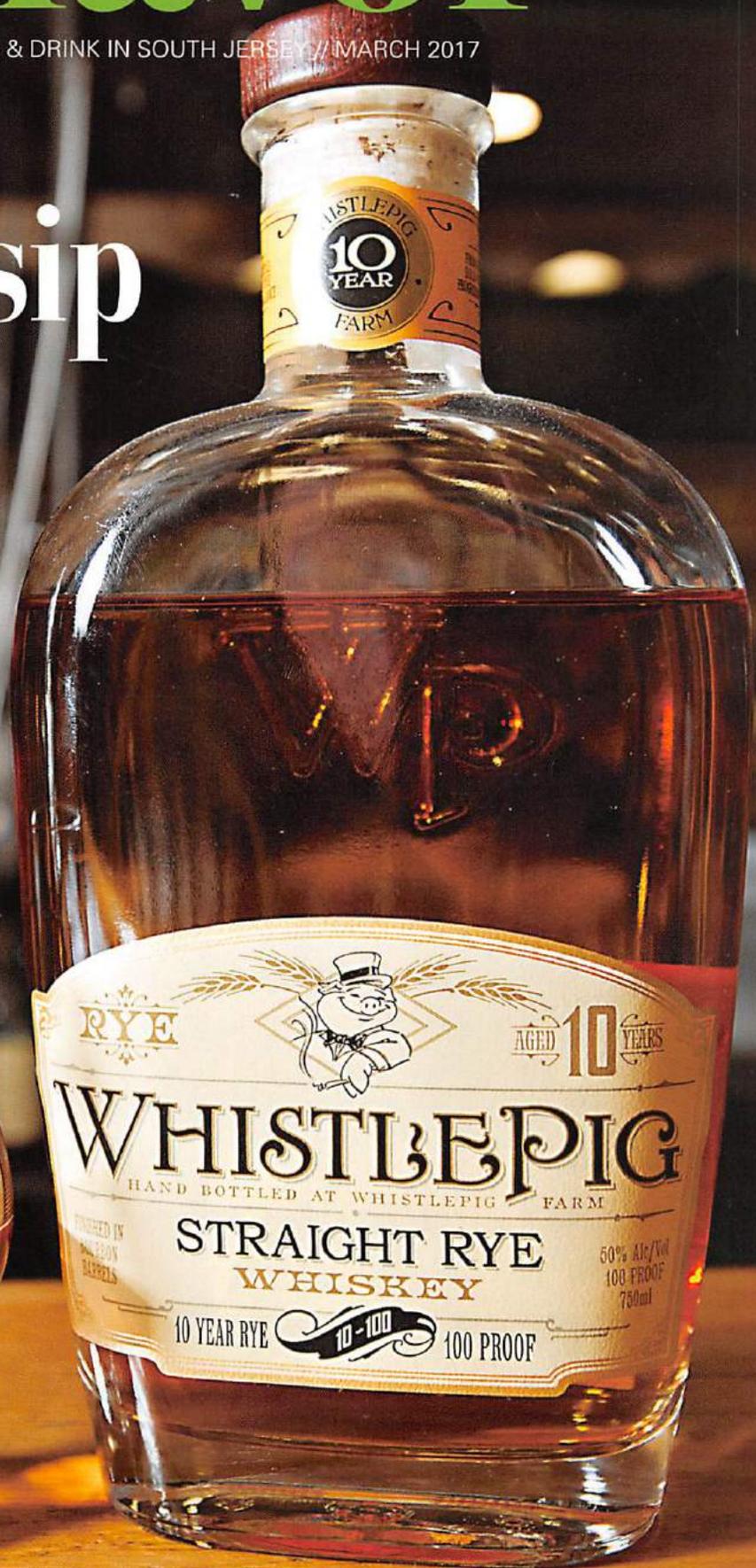
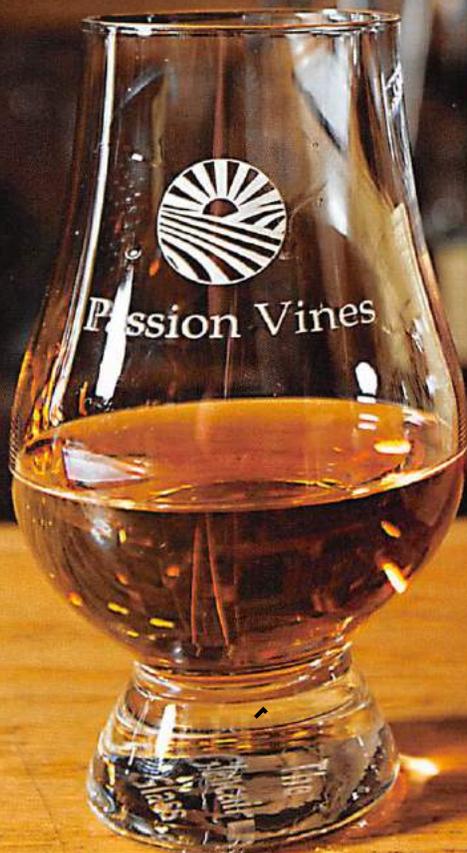


flavor

FOOD & DRINK IN SOUTH JERSEY // MARCH 2017

Take a sip

Whiskey's having
a moment in
South Jersey





Whiskey

The new aged
kid on the block

STORY BY JOHN RUSSO // PHOTOS BY MATTHEW STRABUK

Every day is a teaching day for Dave Baldwin.

In the light of day, the Northfield man is Mr. Baldwin, a fifth-grade math, science and social studies teacher at the Joyanne D. Miller School in Egg Harbor Township.

But every Wednesday night, Baldwin is at Passion Vines Wine Bar in Somers Point doing another type of teaching for the adults.

Known as the "Whiskey Guy," Baldwin brings his knowledge of the hip varieties of liquor to Passion Vines' Whiskey Wednesdays. He's finding, over the past few years, people in South Jersey want to learn about whiskey.

"People are starting to learn that what they thought, which is 'I don't like whiskey,' is not actually true," Baldwin said. "They're just drinking the wrong whiskey."

Whiskey seems to be a growing business in South Jersey, and the area is not alone.

"It isn't necessarily a South Jersey trend. It's all around the world," Baldwin said. "There are pockets that are stronger and some that are weaker, but in general whiskey production and consumption is ramped up worldwide."

For the last two and a half years, Baldwin has been a member of Another Dram Society, founded by 58-year-old whiskey enthusiast Chuck Westcott, of Somers Point. The club, named for a sample pour of whiskey, has more than 20 members who get together for regular tastings.

Whiskey drinking can become an expensive hobby. Sometimes people don't know where to start.

"Dave and I were looking for ways to welcome people into whiskey," Westcott said. "It's intimidating. People don't try them because it's intimidating and expensive. If you want to try some whiskey, you don't want to buy a bottle based on label, and if it's peated and you hate peat, then you just wasted \$50 or \$70 on a bottle you won't drink."

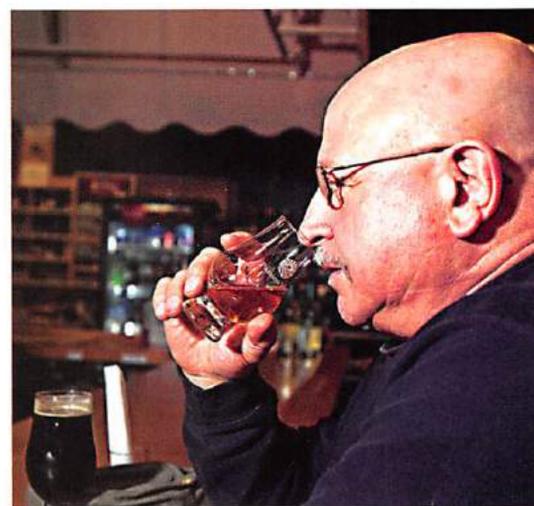
Passion Vines has more than 150 different types of whiskey available to ensure people do find the right one. It's not that hard to believe there are that many different types.

There's Scotch whisky, blended Scotch, single-malt Scotch, Tennessee whiskey, bourbon, small-batch bourbon, and the list goes on. These styles have always been there, but now people are actively discovering them.

"We do half-priced whiskey night on Tuesday, and it does

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The spirit is seeing an increased interest from South Jersey drinkers and makers alike



Tony Eldis, of Absecon, sniffs a glass of Balvenie scotch at the Passion Vines in Somers Point.



More than 150 varieties of whiskey at Passion Vines Wine Bar in Somers Point.

really well,” said Kevin Cronin, the head chef at The Iron Room Restaurant in Atlantic City.

The Iron Room has more than 350 varieties of whiskey available for its in-house patrons as well as liquor store clientele. They’ve been doing half-price whiskey on Tuesdays since they opened in 2013.

“Mostly, if it’s Tuesday and you’re here, most people are out of their element,” Cronin said. “I don’t mean that in a negative way. I mean out of their element because there is so much it can be overwhelming. Now they can try different stuff, and that’s actually the best way. Do a rye, do a bourbon, do a Highland Scotch. Mix it up.”

So what makes a whiskey?

Whiskey is basically made from fermented grain mash, which is a combination of malted barley, grains such as corn, rye or wheat, and water. Whiskey is then aged in wooden casks to give it distinct flavors and profiles. And where it’s made, like Bourbon County, Kentucky, or Scotland, is often where some varieties get their names.

Little Water Distillery opened as the first legal distillery in Atlantic City in November. Its first product on the shelves in liquor stores around Atlantic County was White Cap whiskey, a collaboration with Davis Valley Distillery in Rural Retreat, Virginia.

Though sales manager and CEO Mark Ganter plans to focus on rum, having whiskey be the first product the company put out was an easy decision.

“We weren’t trying to convert anyone into a product,” Ganter said. “The investment in whiskey is there on all levels, from the small distillery level to



Whitecap whiskey was the first product sold in stores from Little Water Distillery.

“

People are starting to learn that what they thought, which is ‘I don’t like whiskey,’ is not actually true. They’re just drinking the wrong whiskey.”

DAVE BALDWIN

Whiskey enthusiast and employee at Passion Vines Wine Bar in Somers Point

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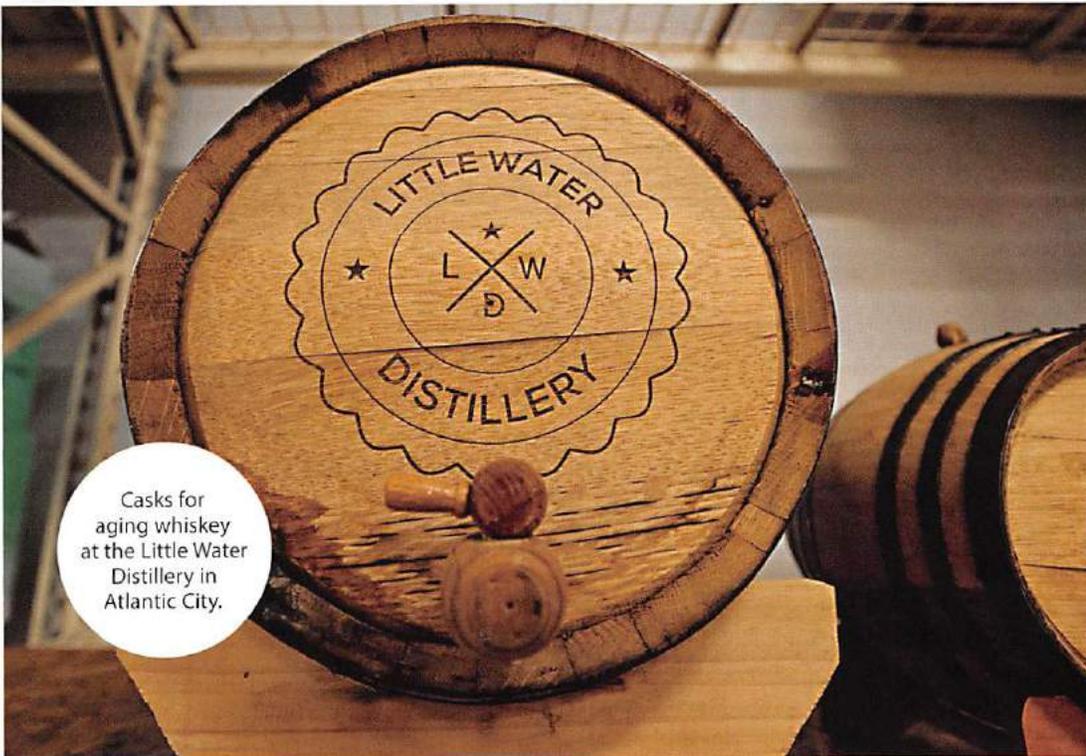
Highland Park, a single malt Scotch whisky, is among the offerings at Passion Vines.



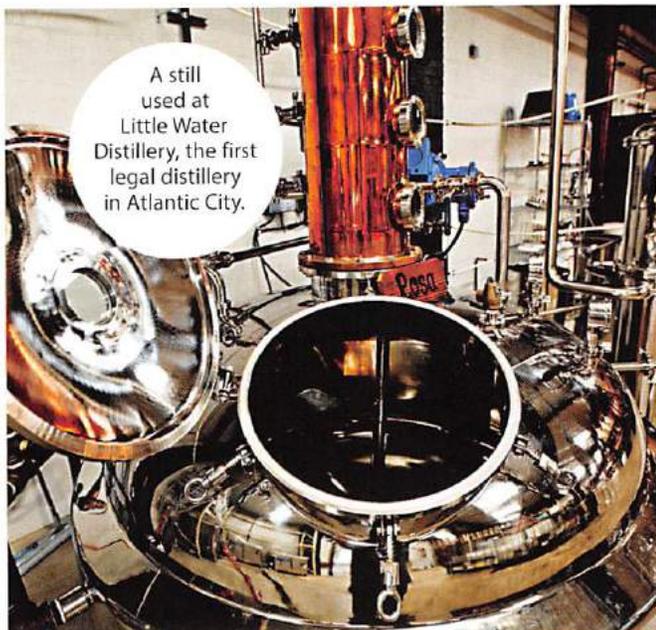
HOW IT'S MADE

Mark Ganter, CEO and sales manager of Little Water Distillery in Atlantic City, gives an easy-to-follow process of how whiskey is made and distilled.

- You start by mashing your grains — could be corn, wheat, barley or rye. You cook them, similar to how you make a beer.
- Once that's made, you convert the starches to sugar and that sugar to alcohol. Once that is done, you introduce it to a still and begin the process of distillation.
- Distillation is the process of vaporizing the alcohol and re-condensing it. You do this by raising the temperature. Once you evaporate the methanol and ethanol from the alcohol, you let it rest.
- When any whiskey comes off the still, it's around 140-170 proof. It's then proofed back down with water and put in a barrel to age for typically two years. The whiskey's color and flavor comes from the type of wood in the cask, the type of water used and how long it sits in the barrel. When it's done, it's around 80-85 proof.



Casks for aging whiskey at the Little Water Distillery in Atlantic City.



A still used at Little Water Distillery, the first legal distillery in Atlantic City.

PASSION VINES WINE BAR

265 New Road, Somers Point
 Passionvines.com; 609-601-8463

LITTLE WATER DISTILLERY

807 Baltic Avenue, Unit B, Atlantic City
 Littlewaterdistillery.com; 609-344-7867

IRON ROOM RESTAURANT AND ATLANTIC CITY BOTTLE COMPANY

648 N. Albany Ave., Atlantic City
 Acbottlecompany.com; 609-348-6400



By day David Baldwin is a fifth-grade math, sciences and social studies teacher at the Joyanne D. Miller School in Egg Harbor Township. But Wednesday nights, Baldwin is the Whiskey Guy, spreading his extensive knowledge of the distilled alcoholic beverage with fellow enthusiasts and novices at Passion Vines Wine Bar in Somers Point.

the macro distilleries. It's a very solid market with a very good clear marker and perception on what whiskey is. It was an easy starter, that's for sure."

Whiskey has become connected to the craft beer market over the past several years. It contributes to the aging of heavier beers (in regards to alcohol by volume) through the use of the casks whiskey is aged in to add new nuances to beers.

Founders Kentucky Breakfast Stout (Grand Rapids, Michigan) and Goose Island Bourbon County Brand Stout (Chicago) are two of the most nationally sought-after beers that have used this process. Baldwin has seen a lot of new whiskey drinkers surface because they want to experience first-hand what makes some of those barrel-aged giants so delicious.

"People will hunt and look for bottles, just like with craft beer," Baldwin said.

Like the craft beer scene, the whiskey

scene can only boost the food/drink industry in an area.

Philadelphia, New York City and Washington, D.C., are some of the cultural hot beds along the East Coast making a living off the craft scene, whether it's with hip, unknown whiskeys or the breweries and distilleries popping up all over the place.

It doesn't matter if it's distilling or just exposing new consumers to whiskey, Atlantic City and the surrounding areas can only benefit from promoting the whiskey market.

"I think places like us are really important because we step outside the box," Cronin said. "We have managers, servers, chefs and bartenders. They come in here because they want to learn about this stuff, take this stuff back to their managers. If more places like this open up, you're going to see a lot more people driven to these places."



FIVE WHISKEY VARIATIONS UNDER \$35

BULLEIT RYE

This rye bourbon is great for sipping or using to make some top notch rye cocktails such as the classic Manhattan or Old Fashioned. \$25

ELIJAH CRAIG

One of the best go-tos for bourbon drinkers. Great with an ice cube in it or mixed with a splash of ginger ale. \$25

GEORGE DICKEL

This Tennessee whiskey is a great alternative to the main-stream Jack Daniels. It's robust, bold and great on the rocks. \$25

MONKEY SHOULDER

It's hard to find a great scotch without breaking the bank. This blended malt scotch is comprised of Glenfiddich, Balvenie and Kininvie, all single-malt giants, making for a truly unique scotch experience. \$30

WHITECAP

The A.C. distillery's first offering is made from two mashbills — corn aged 18 months while the rye/wheat was aged for six months. The end result — 60 percent corn, 20 percent wheat and 20 percent rye for a sweet and spicy finish. \$30

