

## Get Into the Spirits

Napa and Sonoma offer a tasty mix of options when it comes to the craft-distilling trend.

**BY BILL FINK**

There's a new spirit in Napa and Sonoma, and it's strong—80 proof, mostly—with the scent of local flowers, fruits, or charred oak barrels, and a taste ready to challenge rivals in Kentucky, London, and Moscow.

The craft-distilling movement has taken Wine Country by storm, transforming what was a nearly nonexistent business a decade ago into a thriving industry, featuring at least 15 distilleries and spirit-makers that produce dozens of gins, vodkas, bourbons, brandies, and more each year. These local producers range from a couple in a converted garage to a multinational corporation, in locales as diverse as industrial parks and quaint in-town tasting rooms.

While the people, ingredients, and processes may be different, these spirits share the passion and creativity required to create such new tastes. Get the flavor of this expanding scene in Napa and Sonoma, by visiting a few of these distilleries for a sip or two.

### **Spiritual Successors**

The town of St. Helena is the original home of one of the area's first pot still distillers, and also hosts the newest craft spirits brand. Both have ties to wineries, so it's no surprise that they take spirit cues from the Old World.

The Karakasevic family's Charbay Distillery originally was part of their Spring Mountain Road winery. Now located in Ukiah, it uses a classic *alambic charentais* pot still distiller. The East European family developed their double hand-distillation technique through 13 generations, launching here in the 1980s. They distill a full line of spirits, from whiskeys to infused vodkas.

JCB Spirits, an offshoot of Jean-Charles Boisset's wine empire, is also based in St. Helena and debuted a line of spirits this spring. There's gin made with a wine base from Boisset's native Burgundy, France, including Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The distillery also creates fancy infused vodkas with flavors such as caviar and truffles, which can make for a surprising cocktail. So, if you need a break from wine, JCB Spirits has you covered.