



AD

JANUARY 2004 • VOL. 1, NO. 14 • AMERICAN DISTILLER: A SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON THE DISTILLING PROCESS

The American Distilling Institute

Box 577, Hayward, CA 94543-0755, USA
Phone: 510-886-7418
Fax: 510-583-1009
www.distilling.com
distilling@aol.com

AD will promote distilling and discussion concerning Whisky, Malt Whisky, Blended Scotch Whisky, Bourbon, Rye Whisky, Vodka, Gin, Grappa, Eau de Vie, Schnapps, Calvados, Apple Brandy, Apple Jack, Liqueur, Cognac, Armagnac, Rum, Tequila, Cordials, Perfumes, Tinctures, Distillation, Pot Stills, Column Stills, Coffey Stills, and Aroma Therapy.

American Distiller is the journal of the American Distilling Institute. It is published bi-weekly as an electronic newsletter in PDF file format, and emailed to all ADI members and AD subscribers. A printed and mailed version of the newsletter is available for an additional fee.

The ADI is the collective voice of the new generation of progressive beverage, medical and aromatic distillers, and is dedicated to the mission of disseminating professional information on the distilling process. The ADI has filed for a designation as a 501(c) Non Profit Corporation.

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The Simple Pot Still

by Edward Hamilton, www.MinistryOfRum.com

In the early days of distilling essential oils for medicine and fragrances, the simple pot-still was the only tool available to the chemist. By slowly heating a liquid sample and collecting the vapor, the compound was separated into its various components according to their relative boiling points. To refine the separation and concentration process, the time-consuming distillation process was performed two or three times.

In the beverage alcohol industry, it's the distiller's job to separate the ethyl alcohol that we drink from the light alcohols, esters, aldehydes and fusel oils produced during the fermentation process. As the fermented wash is heated, the lightest alcohols and esters, known as the *heads*, are the first elements to be condensed from a still. Once the heads have been set apart, the *heart* of the spirit is collected. Lastly, the *tails*, which contain heavier oils and congeners harmful to the caliber of the spirit are boiled from the wash. Inasmuch as the heads, heart and tails are essentially colorless when they are condensed, the distiller must be skilled in judging the cut among

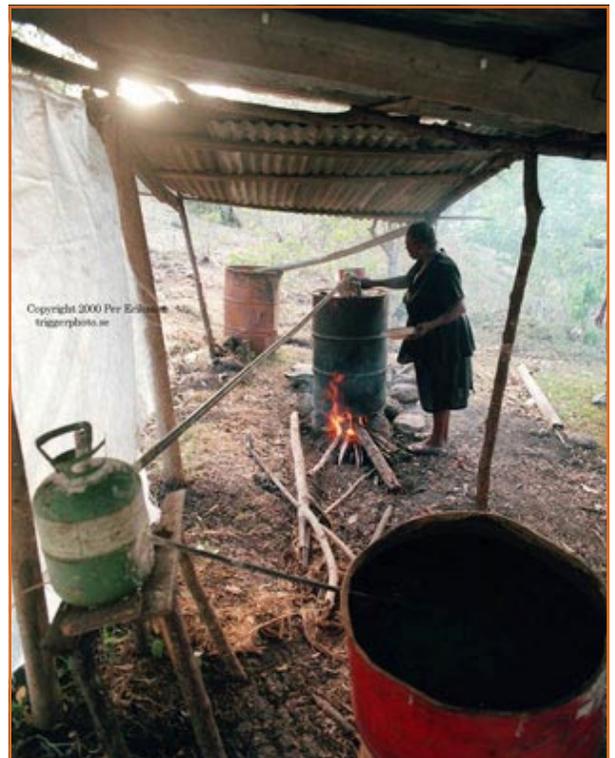


photo by Per Ericsson, www.triggerphoto.se

them. In addition to monitoring the alcohol content of the condensate, subtle deviations in viscosity suggest the presence of the heads, heart or tails, but ultimately it is the distiller's senses of smell, taste and experience that determine which part of the distillate will be used and which portion will be discarded.

Over the centuries, the basic pot-still, which resembled a copper teapot with a long spout, was modified to include retorts, or additional distilling pots. These improvements to the basic still essentially allowed double distillation to be accomplished during the time it previously took to dis-

till a single batch of product. In the continuous-column still, fermented wash is introduced to the top of the column to cascade down through a series of baffles while steam, piped to the bottom of the tower, heats the wash.

With the invention of the column still in the 19th century, the science of distillation advanced with two advantages over the simple pot-still. First, through a series of tubes attached to the vertical still, several product streams could be condensed that reflected the temperature profile of the still and the composition of the mixture being distilled. Second, by taking the distillation process from a batch to a continuous process, production was greatly improved. Most continuous-column stills are configured with two or three columns in series in order to refine the distillation process, but the single-column still most accurately reflects the distillation properties of the pot still while maintaining the advantage of greater production.

Among connoisseurs of fine spirits, it is generally agreed that the best spirits are made in pot stills, which contribute to a broader flavor profile than is generally associated with spirits produced in multiple-column stills. However, in the hands of a skilled operator, column stills are quite capable of producing comparably excellent spirits while providing the advantages of a continuous process.

Notwithstanding the fact that pot stills are simpler and cost less than column stills, the pot still also has the advantage of enabling small quantities of wash to be distilled with a high degree of control at a cost that is in line with the production capability, and market, of the small distillery. In the final analysis, regardless of whether the spirit is a product of a complex column or the simplest still, ultimately, it's the practiced art of the distiller that determines the quality of the drink in your glass.



Book Review

By Rick Lyke

Originally published in *All About Beer* magazine.

AMERICAN STILL LIFE:

The Jim Beam Story and the Making of the World's #1 Bourbon

By F. Paul Pacult

John Wiley & Sons

Hardcover, \$24.95, 240 pages

In the preface to *American Still Life*, drinks journalist F. Paul Pacult acknowledges he was focused almost solely on wine until 1989, when he was given an assignment by the *New York Times* to write editorial copy for a special advertising section on Scotch whisky. Pacult's world up until that point was pretty much red or white. Suddenly, the color brown took on new meaning and importance.

Pacult's decision to venture beyond the vineyard and write about spirits has served to elevate the general public's understanding of and appreciation for some of the greatest beverages in the world. After all, if the *New York Times*, *Bon Appetit* and *Sky Magazine* are willing to give room to spirits, it must be all right to enjoy a glass before dinner.

In *American Still Life*, Pacult traces the roots of the Jim Beam Bourbon dynasty. Started in the 1780s by Jacob Beam, the story is a true American dream: Immigrants with an Old World recipe and hopes for freedom land in American and find economic success. *American Still Life* goes into great detail to show the role that Bourbon production played on the Kentucky frontier and how the drink survived Prohibition, the Great Depression and a pair of World Wars. Along the way the descendants of Jacob Beam proved that whiskey is almost as thick as blood.

When a family has been in the same business in the same geographic area for parts of four centuries roots run extremely deep. In *American Still Life* Pacult shows how the Beam family has branches that influence most of the great Bourbon houses, including Heaven Hill, Stizel-Weller, Early Times and many others. Pacult rightfully says that the Beam family tree is a "towering American oak."

An interesting side note to the Beam legacy traced in *American Still Life* is the collector's item china decanters that the company began marketing in 1955. Working with regal China, the limited edition bottles celebrated everything from the Kentucky Derby to Elvis Presley. More than 100 collectors clubs were formed around the country and at least one counterfeit ring sprung up to try to cash in on the craze. Police in Ohio broke up the ring and destroyed the fake bottles and the molds used to make the bottles.

Pacult's affiliation with Beam began in 1992 when he made public relations trips with Booker Noe, the distiller emeritus at Jim Beam and a member of the seventh generation of distillers in the family, to introduce the Booker's, Basil Hayden's, Maker's and Knob Creek family of small batch Bourbons. Clearly this access to the scion of the Beam clan and the time seeing the legion of Bourbon fans turn out for the events greatly influenced and enhanced Pacult's work on *American Still Life*.

Noe pays Pacult a great compliment in the book's foreword by saying: "While I thought I knew everything about my family, *American Still Life* taught me that you can always learn more about who you are and where you came from."



POT STILLS USA

The trade show will be held February 27-28, 2004 at the St. George Distillery in Alameda, CA.

E-mail distilling@aol.com, visit us at www.distilling.com or phone 510-886-7418.

Left: Putting his nose in the pot is Lance Winters of St. George distillery.

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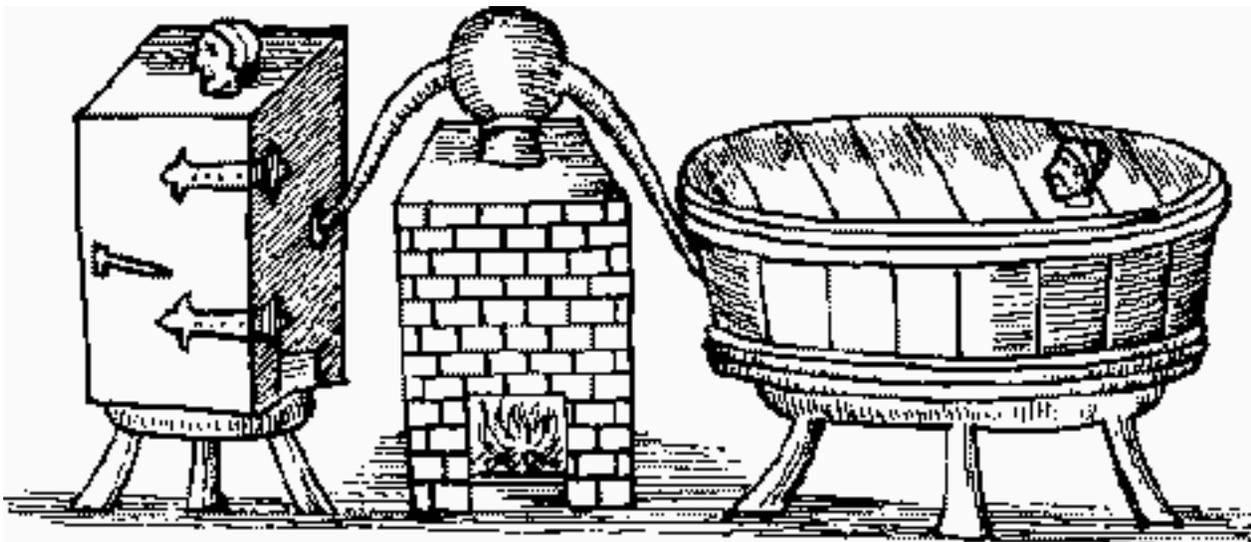


ILLUSTRATION FROM "THE ART OF DISTILLATION", LONDON 1718, BY JOHN FRENCH