

Raise a glass to Pennsylvania's booming craft distillery movement

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Old Republic Distillery operates a tasting room in West Manchester Township. Customers can sample the distillery's line of spirits which includes a newly released 80-proof rum.

At 1749 The Whiskey Rebellion restaurant in Carlisle, the whiskey choices top off at nearly 60 selections.

Along with Dewars White Label Scotch from Scotland and Buffalo Trace from Kentucky, diners can opt to order a Pennsylvania brand.

Perhaps, a Big Spring White Corn produced in Bellefonte or Wigle Rye from Pittsburgh?

[Visit To Old Republic Distillery In York](#) Co-owner Bill Mathias on the art of making an aromatic rum

In the past couple of years, Pennsylvania's status as a producer of spirits has been resurrected nearly 95 years after the start of Prohibition.

"It's just getting engrained in the consumers' brains to be more adventurous with their culinary palate," said Edward Tubbs, director of operations for Hospitality Asset Management Company, which owns the hotel.

Following in the footsteps of the craft beer movement is a spirits boom that shows no signs of slowing down.



[11 distilleries worth checking out in central Pennsylvania](#)

Much like the craft beer boom nearly 20 years ago, distilleries are rising across central Pennsylvania. Here's a list of some that are fully functioning as well as distilleries that will be opening in the near future.

Around the state, distilleries are erecting stills and producing handcrafted whiskey, rum and gin adorned with "made in Pennsylvania" labels. Earlier this month, "Whisky Advocate" fueled Pennsylvania's image by [naming Dad's Hat Pennsylvania Rye Hat Whiskey as the Craft Whisky of the Year](#).

In the coming weeks, [Midstate Distillery will open along North Cameron Street](#) in a converted paint factory. It will have the distinction of being the first distillery in Harrisburg since Prohibition.

Next spring, [Shawneetown Distillery will open in New Cumberland](#) in the former Pulitis Ristorante at 324 Market St.

The two join an already lengthy list of distilleries in central Pennsylvania that includes Thistle Finch Distillery in Lancaster, Old Republic Distillery in York County and Hidden Still Spirits in Lebanon.

[Tattered Flag Brewery and Still Works](#) will be the first brewery/distillery in the Harrisburg area when it opens in Middletown in March.

Craft distilling is undergoing explosive growth. In Pennsylvania there are 33 limited distillery licensed facilities with 14 more pending, according to the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board.

The mad dash started in 2011 when state lawmakers approved a new limited distillery license designed for small craft distillers. At \$1,500 a clip, the licenses are affordable, and allow distillers to produce upwards of 100,000 gallons of liquor per year.

The push for small batch handcrafted spirits echoes a national trend.

About 700 distilleries operate in the United States and 200 are under construction, said Andrew Faulkner, vice president of the [American Distilling Institute and managing editor of "Distiller Magazine."](#)

The most rapid growth is occurring in Washington, Colorado, Oregon and New York states, he said. Although, New Jersey and the Philadelphia area are fast becoming a hot bed of distilling.



[Old Republic Distillery in York 'on the cusp of breaking loose'](#)

Old Republic is relocating its distillery in a few weeks from Seven Valleys to North York. A former nightclub is being retrofitted to house the production facilities as well as a restaurant.

"People are finally waking up to the idea you can start a distillery," Faulkner said.

The perfect storm all started around the turn of the millennium, he said. Thank the Internet. Increased access allowed people to discover home distilling was legal in places such as New Zealand, Faulkner said.

It also allowed them to look up how to distill and where to buy stills.

Not only does distilling mirror the craft beer movement, it also borrows from the artisan cocktail trend and local food push. Many say much like wine and brewery trails, distilleries boost local tourism and create jobs.

"It's the same as the craft brewing trend. People want something that involves local ingredients, what they feel is a little more care and flavor into their spirits," said Pat Devlin, CEO and operations manager of Tattered Flag.

When the brewery/distillery opens in 2016 in three former storefronts and Elks Lodge, it will produce bourbon, rye whiskey, vodka, gin, absinthe and amaro, which is infused with botanicals.

[Hidden Still Spirits In Lebanon](#) How Hidden Still Spirits in Lebanon created its new gin

Tattered Flag will use as many local products as possible from herbs and juniper to local fruits such as apples and peaches for brandy, Devlin said. Tattered Flag expects to produce between 4,000 and 5,000 gallons of spirits per year in the beginning, he said.

The distillery was a second-thought for the partners who originally were focused on the brewery. Tattered Flag also will house a full-service restaurant.

While the bubble has yet to burst in the craft brewing movement, Devlin said the craft distilling market is just starting to take off.

About 120 distilleries operate in Washington state alone while whiskey sales nationwide continue to grow, Devlin said. He said Tattered Flag's goal is for its brewery and distillery to work in tandem.

"It's the atmosphere we are building and the experience and that's what people want when they come," Devlin said.

Building a distillery is certainly not easy or a cheap business proposition. Tattered Flag estimates it will cost \$2.4 million to open the combined brewery and distillery.

Basil Papoutsis of Shawneetown said on a scale of 1 to 10 opening a distillery rates at about a 12. He said he estimates the still is probably the cheapest purchase he has made to date.

The total for the distillery hovers around \$1 million in the distillery he plans to open in April in New Cumberland. Shawneetown will have plenty of space in the former Puliti's space with a tasting room and retail shop.

"I think we've peaked now. This is the last people getting in because we are going to reach saturation. I haven't heard of any other ones. When they do they find out how much it costs it's crazy," he said.

There are limitations such as the fact it's illegal to distill without the proper federal permits. For Papoutsis and other starting up distilleries it means everything must be in place before they can even think about entering the "research and development" phase of the business.

So before any whiskey or rum is produced stills have to be in place, regulations followed and permits acquired.

Shawneetown will produce moonshine, brandy, whiskey and bourbon.

It will sell at the distillery and Papoutsis said he plans to apply to sell his liquor through the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board stores. He also plans to sell at other retail outlets throughout the state.

"I don't want the problem I've seen in Kentucky and Tennessee. A lot of these guys can make super whiskey but they aren't marketers," he said.

Lew Bryson, managing editor of "Whisky Advocate" said some of the most successful micro distilled spirits are being carried at cocktail bars.

"My god they are just exploding and that eats this stuff up. I think that is their big market," Bryson said.

Distilling is repeating the craft beer boom but at a much faster pace, he said. Because of the craft beer boom, people have been more accepting of craft spirits and thus the timeline has been compressed, he said.

Wholesalers have been willing to take a risk and sell local, handcrafted spirits and already, small distilleries have been purchased by the corporate distilling giants. In 2010, William Grant & Sons purchase the Hudson whiskey brands of New York State-based craft distiller Tuthilltown Spirits.

However, for the most part distillers are producing similar products which isn't all that different to the early days of craft brewing. Everyone produced pale ales and stouts, Bryson said.

"The similarities are they are local which has a big appeal. You've got a real connection with the community and people in distilling," he said.