



Toasting Raleigh, North Carolina's community spirits

Yes, there are barbecue joints. That's a given. But the Raleigh region is about more than finger-licking ribs and corn bread. Restaurateurs are spreading their influence outside of the kitchen, entrepreneurs are embracing authenticity, and art institutions are telling new and forgotten stories. **Dean Lisk** METRO CANADA



The Green Light

Hidden behind a bookcase in The Architect Bar, The Green Light is a nod back to prohibition, when secret doors led to clandestine drinking spots. There are only 32 seats inside the cocktail lounge where the staff likes to take their time and educate guests about their creations (many featuring North Carolina spirits). Reservations are recommended, but a couple may be able to squeeze in. Just ask the doorman who guards the entrance. **For more:** architectbar.com/the-green-light

Ava Gardner Museum

Located just outside Raleigh in Johnston County, the Ava Gardner Museum chronicles the career of the Oscar-nominated actress who stunned Hollywood with her beauty in the '40s. Members of her family still live in the area, and the exhibits — which change frequently — feature artifacts from her movies and personal life, including items that chronicle her marriages to Mickey Rooney, Artie Shaw and Frank Sinatra. **For more:** avagardner.org

THE AUTHOR WAS HOSTED BY VISIT NORTH CAROLINA, WHICH DIDN'T REVIEW OR APPROVE THIS STORY.

Distilling history

An enlarged black and white photograph from 1951 hangs above Jeremy Norris's still. Young men in their early 20s are celebrating Benson's Mule Days — a Johnston County festival and parade to honour those pre-automobile beasts of burden — with mason jars of white lightning held in their raised hands.

"Probably some of my distant kinfolk are in this picture," says Norris, a fifth-generation North Carolina moonshiner, and the first in his family to legally distill the spirit.

"These guys decided the parade needed a liquor still in it. So they went home, loaded a still onto a trailer, and were going to run it through the parade. The only problem is they were going to run whiskey while they were going through the parade. They got run out of town."

Norris is the owner of Broadslab Distillery near Benson, about half an hour by car outside Raleigh, the state capital.

Last year, his one-man, dirt-to-bottle operation produced 2,000 cases of spiced rum, apple shine, a corn whiskey enhanced in charred oak barrels, and a legacy shine made from his granddaddy's own recipe.

"He used to tell me he had a doctor's degree in bootlegging, cause all his brothers, uncles, daddy, granddaddy, all of them where bootleggers and still makers. He started stilling on his own around 13," said Norris. "In the 1950s some federal agents decided it was time for him to retire."

His granddaddy, Leonard Wood ("he had a number of aliases"), raised him in a board and batten house with a 12-12 roof and an old oak tree growing out front. The tree provided shade from the summer sun for the produce stand they used to



Jeremy Norris, owner of Broadslab Distillery, comes from a long line of moonshiners and produces spirits based on some of those generations-old family recipes. DEAN LISK/METRO CANADA

have next to the highway running toward the outer banks.

When the interstate opened in the 1980s, it had an effect on the traffic and sales plummeted. Norris was 14 at the time. "My granddaddy said he was too old to do it, but he said to me, 'you should really open up a moonshine museum on this farm.'"

Like many subsistence farmers, Wood and his ancestors weren't the only ones supplementing their income by side-hustling in white lightning. "A lot of college educations were bought off moonshine money. Shoes, where kids were going barefooted if it hadn't been for their daddy bootlegging," said Norris. "Plus it's really good for a common cold, it's really good for if you want to relieve your arthritis. It will limber you up."

In 2005, North Carolina

amended its alcohol laws to allow distilleries, with 61 now operating in the state. Micro-breweries began operating in 1986, with 211 craft brews now on tap. Along with usual — and new (think watermelon) — ingredients, many producers are adding a good amount of local history and community spirit to their recipes.

When Scott Smith and his three partners decided to open Outer Banks Distilling in Manteo on Roanoke Island, they called their small-batch rum Kill Devil. The name not only refers to the nearby town of Kill Devil Hills, but further back to how to the area received its name.

Kill Devil was the original term for rum during colonial days; having the devil inside you was a euphemism for having drunk bad water. So, people

would cut the water with rum in hopes of making it safer to drink. With the Outer Banks jutting further into the Atlantic than the rest of the mainland, ships would wreck along its coast. Locals would hide barrels of rum washing ashore in the sand dunes.

"We are in a place that ties so deeply into the history of rum and we really wanted to honour that," said Smith. Those shipwrecks, more than 1,550, lend their name to a special spring and fall release of Kill Devil Rum. The first in the series was the Irma, named after a 1925 wreck, and its release saw people line up outside the state-run alcohol store at 3:30 a.m. to ensure they got a bottle.

"When you are here, we want you to feel you are part of the history of Roanoke and part

of what makes this local area really tick."

Being part of something larger is also at the heart of the Tarboro Brewing Company. Located on the interstate from the coast to Raleigh, the same highway that ended Norris's stand, Tarboro is an economically depressed community trying to change.

The brewery was started by Stephen and Inez Ribustello, who both worked at the Windows of the World restaurant in the North Tower in the World Trade Center. After 9-11, they moved back to Inez's hometown and opened a café. Last year, they started the brewery, producing four different types of canned beer. A watermelon variety is their newest offering.

"People think it's pretty good," Rusty Holderness, a self-described "flunk for his daughter" Inez. He is proud of her, the brewery and the work being done to improve the community.

"It's a gathering place, we encourage kids as much as we do adults. There are other places but they don't have this kind of space," said Holderness who points to the chalkboard wall where youth can draw, the tables where people can sip on beer or pop, and the parking lot where a local farmers market is held once a week. "Their mission is to be a part of this community and make the community better."

Norris's granddaddy was also a proud man. When Norris decided to open Broadslab Distillery, he drew up the plans for his still on a piece of paper with his granddaddy. In 2012, 82-year-old Wood passed away. The first bottles of moonshine hit the market 30 days earlier. "He thought it was great," said Norris. "He thought everyone needed to be exposed to this and see the culture and the way it should be done."



Brewery Bhavana and Garland

Chinese dim sum, a Belgian brewery, an organic flower shop and a lifestyle-driven bookstore all come together in Raleigh's Brewery Bhavana. But, what is the common thread?

"The honest answer is there really isn't any connection," says Vansana Nolintha (shown above), who opened Bhavana with his sister Vanvisa and business partner Patrick Woodson in March.

The Nolinthas came to the U.S. from Laos without their parents when they were pre-teens. The siblings finished their post-secondary education during the last recession and neither could find jobs. They returned to Laos for a summer to spend time with their parents.

"We had a renewal, a sense of gratitude and reverence to the choice our parents made to send us away. And food has always been such a sacred medium to our lives. We knew we wanted to come back and do something with our story and our food."

Their inspiration turned first into Bida Manda (Sanskrit for father and mother), one of the first Laotian restaurants anywhere in the U.S. It's only a few doors up the street from where they opened Bhavana.

"I think, especially right now with the state of the world, we all long to be a community together, and Bhavana becomes that living room in the city where people from all walks of life can coexist," says Vansana.

That coexistence is also evident at nearby Indian restaurant Garland. James Beard Foundation-nominated chef Cheetie Kumar is well known in the city's music scene. She still performs occasionally with her band, Birds of Avalon, but it's her food — and a menu inspired by her experiences — where her current passion lies. Along with her husband, Paul Siler, and business partners, Kumar is also involved in rock club Kings and nightclub Neptune's Parlor, right next door to Garland.

"Cheetie has such a phenomenal thing going on," says Vansana. "There is a renaissance of re-connecting with our homes and our roots here in Raleigh." **For more:** brewerybhavana.com and garlandraleigh.com

North Carolina Museum of Art CAM Raleigh

With a recent expansion to house a permanent exhibit of Rodin sculptures, the North Carolina Museum of Art was able to create an expanded African art gallery in its east building. To mark the reopening, the museum is playing host to Inspiring Beauty: 50 Years of Ebony Fashion Fair until Jan. 21. The collection features works that, like Ebony magazine, helped to redefine ideas about beauty. **For more:** ncartmuseum.org



Billing itself as "Your museum for contemporary art," this gallery space in the Warehouse District of the city is as much about the community and residents as it is about the art and artists, with various programs for grade school students and adults wanting to discover the "now and the nearing." On display until Jan. 6, is No Damsel by artist Dorian Lynde, featuring popular Disney princesses as contemporary women. **For more:** camraleigh.org



Raleigh Denim

Sarah and Victor Lytvinenko started making jeans in their apartment 10 years ago out of a desire to create something authentic.

"It's about quality and craft," says Victor. "I was into cooking and food, and got into wine making for a while, and just applied a lot of those principals to denim."

Now successfully selling their hand-crafted jeans for \$200 to \$300 in stores across Canada and the U.S., Raleigh Denim still operates with authenticity; utilizing fabric from a N.C. mill made of local cotton, a team of 45 people and some machines first put into use in the 1930s, '40s and '50s.

"It turns out a lot of the older machines make more beautiful stitches," says Victor. **For more:** raleighdenimworkshop.com



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