



## LIQUID ASSETS

# STRAIGHT UP FROM THE LAKE: NORTH SHORE DISTILLERY TAPS INTO OUR GREATEST LIQUID ASSET

PHOTOS BY JOHN BOEHM

In an early quest to perfect their hand crafted batches of gin and vodka, Derek and Sonja Kassebaum of North Shore Distillery in Lake Bluff *imposed* on family and friends to do a blind taste test of their spirits using different water sources. "Lake Michigan won, hands down," Derek boasts.

"We tried distilled water, spring water...the commercial water was the worst," he says. So they turned, quite literally, to the North Shore and opened the tap. "I figured I'd have to distill the lake water to make it palatable in a batch," Derek explains, but when he realized it was great straight from the lake, he was floored. "That was one of the shockers." Lake Michigan water, in its most natural state, produced the best gin and vodka.

"There's just something about the mineral content of the water which softens the taste of the alcohol," he says. The water's unique contribution to the distilling process, along with the right blend of ingredients, earned rewards as North Shore Distillery Gin No. 6 won rave reviews and critical awards in 2007 and 2008.

"Since water is roughly 55% of each bottle of gin and 60% of each bottle of vodka, its flavor and quality is essential," the couple says. "For each batch of gin, we add the hand-prepared botanicals and water to the still, along with our very clean, high-proof spirit. We heat the still gently, extracting the rich, complex flavors from the botanicals into the spirit. After distillation, we then add more water to bring the spirit back down to a drinkable proof."

In a busy month, the 60-gallon still is fired up every day, producing as much as two or three batches in a single day. It's not only the smooth tasting run of the mill (but far from average) vodka or gin they produce; Lake Michigan water, Midwest grains and organic and wild harvested botanicals are the basis for other imaginative creations, which sell out in a flash.

As a boutique distillery, North Shore is known for its amazing limited releases of infused gins. 2007's Rhuginger No. 6 was infused with rhubarb (from just up the road, in Woodstock, Illinois) and a hint of ginger. Other specialties featured exotic infusions: No. 6 Mingled with Dates and No. 6 Mingled with Ceylon Tea, both in 2006 and the sensational Summer 2008 Alphonso Mango No. 11 gin.

"For (this) single-batch limited release, we purchased rare (and expensive) Alphonso mangoes from India at Patel Brothers on

Devon," says Sonja, explaining that the sweet flavor of this fruit gave the spirit a very distinctive, rich taste. "The base of the limited release was Distiller's Gin No. 11, which is made with organic juniper berries, fresh lemon peel, cardamom, Ceylon cinnamon, coriander, cubeb berry, anise seed, angelica root and orris root, in different proportions than our Distiller's Gin No. 6.

"We get a lot from the Spice House," Sonja adds, "and we use as much wild harvested and organic as we can." Getting the right blend means a lot of trial and error.

A chemist by training, Derek approaches the process with a scientific eye blended with an artisan's palate. "I taste every batch," he says, then opens an unassuming cabinet in the spacious warehouse-turned distillery and shows off a collection of past work: small hand marked bottles containing samples from every batch ever made. "As you can see, we do a lot of experimenting. Real 'chemies' come in here and expect to see charts and experiments set up (like a laboratory). No, that's not how I work. I go by taste, if it tastes good, I go with it."

"It's almost like cooking when you're a chef putting together a recipe," Sonja adds. With the freshest of all ingredients coming right from the North Shore, it certainly turns the water of Lake Michigan into a real local Liquid Asset.



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## ORIGINAL NORTH SHORE COCKTAILS

### FRUIT & SPICE (CAN BE SERVED HOT OR COLD)

2 oz. Distiller's Gin No. 6  
1 oz. fresh lemon juice  
1/2 oz. apricot liqueur  
1/3 oz. ginger syrup

Shake ingredients over ice, strain into cocktail glass. Garnish with a cinnamon stick. Or, combine ingredients and warm slightly, then add 2 oz. hot water to create a warm toddy.

### APPLE CIDER COCKTAIL (CAN BE SERVED HOT OR COLD)

2 oz. North Shore Vodka  
1/2 oz. German apple schnapps  
3 oz. apple juice  
Dash of Cinnamon Schnapps (optional, not the ones labeled "hot")

Shake ingredients with ice, strain into cocktail or champagne glass. Top with slice of apple and dash of ground cinnamon. Or heat juice well, then add other ingredients to mug and add juice. Stir, then garnish with ground cinnamon.



Derek Kassebaum samples his absinthe

## CLASSIC COCKTAILS FROM THE 1920S

### THE BEBBO COCKTAIL

From *Vintage Cocktails & Forgotten Spirits* by Ted Haigh

1 1/2 oz. North Shore Gin No. 6  
1 oz. fresh lemon juice  
1/2 oz. honey  
2 teaspoons fresh orange juice  
1 dash Angostura Bitters

Stir all ingredients in a shaker (without ice) until the honey dissolves. Add ice, shake & strain into cocktail glass. Garnish with a cocktail cherry.

### CORPSE REVIVER NO. 2

Adapted from *Savoy Cocktail Book*, ca. 1930

1 oz. North Shore Gin No. 6  
1 oz. Lillet Blanc  
1 oz. Cointreau  
1 oz. fresh lemon juice  
2-3 drops Sirène Absinthe Verte

Combine ingredients in shaker with ice. Shake well, then strain into cocktail glass. Garnish with a cherry.

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