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Local Spirit: Two New Artisanal Stills

Dateline: The Shores of Lake Michigan, Illinois

Two new artisanal copper stills, small-batch distilleries on the shores of Lake Michigan, have grabbed the palates of local connoisseurs of ultrapremium gin and vodka. **North Shore Distillery**, located just outside of Lake Bluff north of Chicago, is Illinois's only bonded and licensed distillery. Owners Derek and Sonja Kassebaum's flagship liquor is Distiller's Gin No. 6, a 90-proof beauty that is loaded with complex spicy, citrusy flavors with floral notes in addition to the classic core of mild juniper flavor. The distillers hand-initial and write the batch number on each high-design bottle. This gin is so delicious that I prefer it by itself in a chilled martini glass with only a lemon twist. North Shore's vodka is an amazingly smooth, crisp, and clean 80-proof spirit made of wheat and corn. It makes a perfect mixer but also is great straight out of the freezer.

The Kassebaums are also working on creating other spirits, and this summer two limited-release infused gins show their ambitions: No. 6 Tea Infusion is flavored with Ceylon black tea and is amazing with just a lemon twist or for a unique gin and tonic. No. 6 Date Infusion has the subtle sweetness and spicy flavor of Medjool dates and is great simply on the rocks. Each bottle is about \$27–\$30. They are available in fine liquor and wine shops in Chicago and its suburbs, as well as some local restaurants, and online from www.samswine.com. For more information, go to www.northshoredistillery.com.

Across Lake Michigan in a 1911 Amish round barn, the **Round Barn Winery** in southwest Michigan is turning some of its grapes into another premium American vodka appropriately called DiVine. Each frosted-glass bottle is signed by the vintner, and the frost design signals how best to serve it to bring out the smooth, slightly fruity, and pure 80-proof flavor: straight from the freezer or over ice. So far this fine vodka is available only at the tasting rooms of Round Barn Winery in Baroda and Union Pier, Michigan, for about \$33. For more information, go to www.roundbarnwinery.com.

— Dennis Wheaton

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