

Whiskey's Craft Revival

Distillers experimenting with heirloom corns and unconventional grains are creating new life for the classic spirit.

CRAFT WHISKEY IS BOOMING. And while many new brands are cutting corners by buying their product from factory distilleries, then slapping their own label on it, there's an increasing number of innovative producers making truly original spirits.

DRINKS

Take, for example, Chicago's Koval, which opened in 2008. It distills unconventional grains like millet and oats to create unique flavors in its aged whiskeys. Other distilleries use traditional ingredients like corn and rye but source heirloom varieties to bring out subtler flavors.

"I get the best raw materials I can, distill them in the best possible way, and then age them in the best way that I can," says Daric Schlesselman, of Brooklyn's Van Brunt Stillhouse, which makes two of its whiskeys from a mix of four grains — malted barley, wheat, corn, and rye. "That, to me, is craft."

Here are four more of our favorites.

1. KOVAL MILLET, \$50 ILLINOIS

Koval, the first distillery to open in Chicago since Prohibition, sources its organic millet, a small-seed grass common in Africa and Asia, from a farming collective in the Midwest, then processes the grain in copper-pot stills. The result is a first-of-its-kind

single-barrel whiskey with a round, bright flavor. *koval-distillery.com*

2. LOW GAP, \$72 CALIFORNIA

Distiller Crispin Cain, who runs the American Craft Whiskey Distillery, north of San Francisco, first makes two whiskeys in cognac-style pot stills — one from corn and one from barley. After aging them in French and American oak barrels for a year, he mixes them together to produce this smooth, round whiskey. *craftdistillers.com*

3. TROY & SONS OAK RESERVE, \$37 NORTH CAROLINA

In the Blue Ridge Mountains, distiller Troy Ball uses an heirloom-variety white corn grown only in North Carolina to make this moonshine-like spirit, then lets it mellow in bourbon barrels for up to three years. *ashevilledistilling.com*

4. CLEAR CREEK McCARTHY'S SINGLE MALT, \$55 OREGON

Steve McCarthy, founder of Clear Creek Distillery, pays homage to

Islay-style Scotch whiskey — think smoky spirits like Laphroaig — by making his from 100 percent peat-malted barley imported from Scotland. He then ages the liquor for three years in Oregon oak barrels to add a bit of American brawn. *clearcreekdistillery.com*



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