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# Reaping the harvest

Koval releasing house whiskey and five new liqueurs

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Last summer, a running joke developed at Koval Distillery: What will Sonat find at the farmers market this week?

Asian pears. Sunchokes. The rarely seen Midwestern fruit, papaw. Sonat Birnecker Hart, who owns Koval with her husband, Robert, found it all, and she wanted to turn each ingredient into an unlikely spirit.

"They were horrified every time I went to the farmers market," Birnecker Hart said. "But the raw material was so wonderful."

Koval, a Ravenswood distillery with more than two dozen spirits to its name — mostly whiskeys and liqueurs — is about to release six more: Asian pear, walnut, papaw and caraway liqueurs, a sunchoke brandy and a new "house whiskey." All should be on shelves this month, but the surest place to find them, especially the limited offerings, will be at the distillery (5121 N. Ravenswood Ave.; 312-878-7988).

Here is a look at the new spirits:

## 47th Ward whiskey

After a brief appearance last year, Sonat and Robert are reintroducing this as

the distillery's "house whiskey" — probably a wise move since Koval already makes 15 other whiskeys: light, medium and dark versions of spirits distilled from rye, oat, wheat, spelt and millet. The 47th Ward — named for where the distillery is located — is an approachable, slightly-sweet, less-specialized sipper made with rye, oat, wheat and malted barley. In other words, it's a great place to start if new to Koval's whiskeys. **Availability:** year-round.

## Caraway liqueur

Known for aiding digestion, this liqueur isn't uncommon in Europe — where Robert is from and Sonat has lived — but it has been rare on this side of the Atlantic. Thick, herbal and nicely boozy, Koval's take is both a deft cocktail ingredient and savory post-dinner sipper. **Availability:** year-round.

## Walnut liqueur

Based on a recipe from Robert's grandmother, this liqueur is thick with nuttiness, with light notes of spice. It's clean and savory, and I can't wait to see what mixologists do with it. **Availability:** limited; only 240 bottles made.

## Asian pear liqueur

Juicy and sweet, this liqueur is alive with ripe fruit from Oriana's Oriental Orchard, an organic farm in northern Illinois. Perhaps too sweet to sip on its own, it's another perfect ingredient for creative cocktail makers. **Availability:** limited; 240 bottles.

## Pawpaw liqueur

A once-popular fruit that has fallen out of favor, papaw briefly is restored to prominence, courtesy of Oriana's Oriental Orchard. Darkly foggy, this liqueur offers a lilting fruitiness that's thick without being syrupy. A fascinating cross of cider, tea and liqueur with a clean finish, it makes for easy sipping. **Availability:** extremely limited; even less of this was made than the Asian pear or walnut liqueurs.

## Sunchoke brandy

You probably haven't had anything quite like this clear spirit distilled from the root of a species of sunflower. It starts peppery, then fades into clean earthiness. Not for everyone, but adventurous palates will want to seek this out. **Availability:** limited; 240 bottles.

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