

[Food+Drink]

A brief honeymoon

The day travels a standard arc, from pajamas to pajamas. There's the lift of coffee, the lull of work, the jostle of the ballerina and



Leah Eskin
Home on the Range

ballplayer shuttle. There's the calm of dinner prep and the oasis of dinner dispatch. Home-work struggles, bedtime struggles, bed.

All assisted by the toolset that comes standard on the base model: sight, sound, scent, intuition, touch and taste. Especially taste.

The path from alarm-off to alarm-on is scattered with incentives — early morning buttered toast, late afternoon latte, midnight truffle — like crumbs across the forest floor.

Even so, I didn't know that taste rides its own crests and troughs. I made this discovery one night when the agenda was full and the refrigerator empty. I was up packing for a trip, trying to download the novel, upload the clothes from laundry to suitcase. Periodically I would stop to check on the moon. It was supposed to do something — lurch, or go dim — and I had sworn to wake my junior astronomer for the spectacle.

I looked through closets, looked at the moon, looked for a snack. Finally I settled for simple: honey on spoon. I stepped outside and, in the extra-dark dark, swallowed sunshine.

I might have presumed the 2 a.m. taste bud tired, or tired of work. Instead, I got an extraordinarily precise report. I could taste the honey: golden, lightly lemon. And the contributing flower: delicate, pale purple. And the on-duty bee: burly, earnest. And his state of mind: pensive.

As was I. Perhaps the daily jumble had eclipsed many such flashes of enlightenment.

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JOAN MORAVEK/FOOD STYLING

Honey butter

Prep: 5 minutes **Makes:** 1 cup

- 2 sticks (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh rosemary
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper

1 Mix: Combine all ingredients, using an electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, until smooth.

2 Roll: Use soft honey butter immediately, or mound onto a stretch of parchment paper. Roll into a sausage shape. Chill.

3 Enjoy: Good slathered on almost anything, especially grilled corn, fish or shrimp; hot biscuits; or crackers awaiting cheese duty.

V is for vodka, with hints of vanilla

Some small-batch distillers are highlighting the taste of ingredients

By Zak Stambor

SPECIAL TO TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

The marketers of top-selling vodka brands will tell you that their spirits are "clean," "smooth" or "pure." And, even though some brands will note that they're made from the very finest winter wheat, grapes, etc., there is nary a description of what the vodka actually tastes like.

That's not surprising because, by law, vodka is an odorless, colorless, tasteless spirit.

Because of that I've never given much thought to what differentiates one from another. I considered vodka to be a mundane, but necessary, ingredient in cocktails, at best, and an efficient means to get drunk, at worst.

That is, until I discovered that some distillers weren't content to produce a spirit that is little more than a commodity.

"We're trying to challenge the norm," says Kent Fleischmann, founder of Dry Fly Distilling Inc. "We want to raise the bar on vodka and produce something memorable that keeps people coming back again and again."

Dry Fly isn't alone. A number of distilleries are producing hand-crafted vodkas that are not the same colorless, flavorless spirit of yesteryear. These aren't flavored vodkas, which often taste synthetic or saccharine. Rather they are spirits produced by distillers seeking to highlight the primary ingredient. And because vodka can be made from nearly anything — from wheat to rye to corn to potato — the ingredient used to produce a particular vodka gives that spirit its personality.

Take Dry Fly, whose vodka is made from locally produced wheat, which gives the spirit a sweet flavor.

"We're in wheat country," says Fleischmann, whose distillery is based in Spokane, Wash. "We have beautiful resources. That's why we utilize only local ingredients. It just makes perfect sense. Why would we use anything else?"



Try 'em

Dry Fly Distilling Vodka:

Produced from wheat, the spirit has a sweet vanilla aroma. The spirit has a buttery mouth-feel with hints of vanilla, butterscotch and cream soda.

Koval Distilling Vodka:

Produced from rye, the spirit has a sweet smell reminiscent of banana bread. The vodka has hints of ripe bananas and vanilla.

Ed Phillips & Sons Prairie Organic Vodka:

Produced from corn, the vodka has an aroma hinting of pear and melon. It has a creamy mouth-feel, with traces of melon and roasted corn.



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