

NOW IN CHICAGO

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Spirited Developments

Once a bastion of bathtub gin, nowadays, our fair city is one of America's hottest towns for craft, small-batch (legal!) spirits. Here are three of our favorites.

| By Anthony Todd |



WHISKEY MASTERS
Koval co-founders Sonat
and Robert Birnacker

▲ Koval

At the ripe old age of 6 years old, Koval is the granddaddy of the craft-distilling industry in Chicago; it was one of the first modern small distilleries in Illinois (with a license, that is). "I helped get the laws changed to let distilleries have a tasting room and sell bottles on-site," explains co-owner Sonat Birnacker, who left her career as a professor of German cultural history to open the distillery. Gentlemen: Raise your glasses!

Koval's core products are whiskey, bourbon and rye, and it is a grain-to-bottle, organic, kosher distillery. Each product is made on-site in its Ravenswood facility, including a wide range of fruit and herbal liqueurs. If you've never bought jasmine, caraway or walnut liqueur, your bar isn't fully stocked for an emergency. If you're not a whiskey lover, Koval has just launched a dry gin.

Koval has been sharing the love too, passing on its knowledge to others. "We've taught more than 2,000 people to distill and have set up a third of all the craft distilleries that have started in the past five years," Birnacker says.

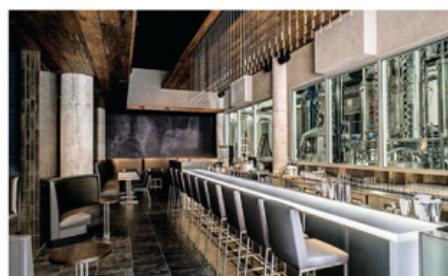
Must Buy: Koval single-barrel rye (\$50). Unlike many ryes, this one is the genuine article, made from 100 percent organic rye grain and aged in American oak. It's perfect by itself or in a classic Manhattan, offering notes of caramel and spice. 5121 N. Ravenswood Ave., 312.878.7988, koval-distillery.com

▼ CH Distillery

CH may be the prettiest distillery in Chicago—and that's good because it's the easiest to see. The entire operation is on display through the glass windows behind the bar at its West Loop facility.

In a massive milling operation in the basement, CH creates its own mash from scratch. "We did it because it's the best way to make the product," founder Tremaine Atkinson insists. CH makes vodka, two kinds of gin, amaro, aquavit and limoncello at its facility—and its bartenders only use CH products in their cocktails.

Must Buy: CH peppercorn vodka (\$35). At CH, the distillers do it right, using Tellicherry peppercorns. The result is eye-opening spicy—and perfect for a Bloody Mary. 564 W. Randolph St., 312.707.8780, chdistillery.com



▼ Chicago Distilling Company

Jay DiPrizio started out by experimenting in his garage. "It was illegal, but whatever," he laughs. "Once the laws changed, we turned our hobby into a business." Now, he's teamed up with wife Noelle and brother Vic, and the family's distillery and Logan Square cocktail bar are taking off. The distillery produces vodka, gin and white unaged whiskey, the last distilled on-site using local organic grain. "We're not trying to replicate the big whiskeys out there—we're using different yeast strains and grain mixes," DiPrizio says.

Must Buy: Chicago Distilling Company Finn's gin (\$28). This modern-style gin just won a gold medal at the New York World Wine & Spirits Competition. It's a great martini base, but try it in a fruitier cocktail, like an aviation. 2359 N. Milwaukee Ave., 872.206.2775, chicagodistilling.com

