

NORTH AMERICAN WHISKEY

A Global Phenomenon

A LOOK INTO THE
CONTINENT'S
MOST PROMISING
WHISKIES

by Robert Plotkin

The chant "Buy American" can now be heard in bars and cocktail lounges around the globe. In response, master distillers from Kentucky and Pennsylvania to Ontario and Tennessee are releasing the epitome of their crafts. They've cracked open hand-selected barrels and bottled their best. As it turns out, their best is world-class.

North American whiskies possess vivacious personalities that are universally appealing; yet by nature, our whiskies are understated, preferring rather to saunter through life without pretense or conceit. Even as they ascend toward stardom, our whiskies remain accessible to all palates and priced for all budgets.

Whiskey enthusiasts are beating a path to our shores. The following hot new North American whiskies provide the reasons why. Cheers!



PHOTO: DUSTIN DOWNING

KOVAL SINGLE BARREL BOURBON WHISKEY

Established in 2008, KOVAL is Chicago's first distillery since the mid-1800s and is the brainchild of internationally renowned master distiller Dr. Robert Birnecker. The Austrian native is one of America's leading experts on distillation and has taught or consulted with a third of all craft distillers who've opened distilleries in the past five years.

Dr. Birnecker's mastery of the still is evident in the **KOVAL Single Barrel Bourbon Whiskey**. While made with the requisite mash bill of 51 percent corn, the minor grain used is rather unusual: millet. The corn and millet combination produces a fascinating whiskey with loads of fruit flavors on the palate and cloves, pepper and caramel on the finish. The organic, unfiltered whiskey is quite unlike any other bourbon.

"We are trying to produce a more approachable whiskey," says Birnecker, CEO and Master Distiller, KOVAL Distillery. "Using only the 'heart cut' of the distillate, we achieve a very soft and smooth distillate right off the still," he explains.

Regardless of what may ail you, our advice is to consult with the good doctor.



KOVAL INC.

Cocktails Go Local

With its flurry of micro-breweries and distilleries popping up every year, one of America's finest drinking towns keeps getting better thanks to Chicago's local beverage scene. While we're not quite seeing any Lakeshore Drive wines yet, the city is embracing local spirits and using them to create cocktails that represent a sense of place.

At the Omni Chicago Hotel, F&B Director Dawn Hooks works to pair Chef Hasho's hyper-local cuisine with a beverage program to match. "It's an exploding scene here in Chicago, and we are constantly using local brewers and distillers," she says, pointing to Koval and North Shore distilleries as among the most prominently featured on the menu.

As in the kitchen, the cocktail list is seasonal, with an emphasis on what's available and what's fresh, but the bar benefits from an on-property garden that will grow mint and other fresh herbs year-round. "We're working with one of our farmer partners on that, which is important to us, as we want to support our local folks. We want to keep our program specific to this hotel, and we want it to be something our customers will come in and say, 'Wow! I can't get this anywhere else.'" ■■



Dawn Hooks is the F&B Director for the Omni Chicago Hotel.

Koval Whiskey and North Shore Vodka are both made in the Chicagoland area and are prominently featured on the Omni menu.

