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Bottle Spirits

What's conjured up at Portland's **craft distilleries** this summer?

BY OLIVIA GUNN KOTSISHEVSKAYA

GREAT WOODS SPIRIT

"**T**HIS—THEY MAKE this in bathtubs in Russia," says my mother-in-law as she downs a shot of **Maine Craft Distilling's Black Cap Vodka**. Over a spread of half-sour pickles, black bread, tinned fish, and salo (cured fatback from Medeo European Foods in Westbrook), she and my husband finish the bottle. In one sitting. My biggest shock the next morning isn't finding the empty bottle (I'd tapped out hours before them, already aching) but finding her as chipper as a chickadee in the kitchen, blaring Andrea Bocelli as she peels potatoes. "That's a clean drink, you know." She hands me a peeler.





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Maine Craft's tasting room on Washington Avenue is now our first stop on the Portland cocktail trail whenever visiting friends and family hit town. With fire barrels outside the industrial doors, long high-top tables, plenty of room for the "bourbon-flavored mayhem" from live bands like the **Cajun Aces**—and, of course, Mama Kotsishevskaya's approval of the vodka—it rarely disappoints.

But at five o'clock on a recent Wednesday, a cohort and I are surprised to find it empty but for a few others. Happy hour runs from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

"Plenty of time to do some damage."

"I think so," our server says with a smile.

"We'll take one **Lemonshine** and a **Cuba Libre**."

"And the poutine. I came for the poutine. You're paying, right?"

An hour or so later, we've each finished two (or more) \$4 cocktails. A jumble of \$4 High Life and PBR cans mingles with empty tumblers—our cue to move on to dinner.



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"I just called Izakaya. They have two seats at the bar."

Onward! But we'll be back. Saturday's just around the corner, and I can hear the Cajun Aces in the distance. They'll tear up the complex on June 7 and July 5, and I can't wait to get Mama K out on the floor. Stick with Black Cap and you might avoid the hangover. If not, that poutine (\$10) does the trick.

ON ICE

While I typically only find myself at Thompson's Point to catch a summer show,

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the lineup of offerings continues to expand. Forget Substance. There's something for everyone in **Stroudwater Distillery's** eclectic tasting flight: gin, vodka, rye whiskey, and bourbon (\$10).

I start with a sip, then toss back the rest of the bourbon. "Whew!"

"It's a tasting. I'm not sure that's how you're supposed to do it."

"Is there only one way?"

Stroudwater is open seven days a week in summer, with a 4-7 p.m. happy hour haven outside the hustle and bustle of downtown.

The extensive drinks menu showcases the distillery's five spirits with signature cocktails including the **Hawaiian Stone Sour** (\$12)—rye with fresh lemon and pineapple juice, simple syrup, and a splash of classic Angostura bitters. Sip it while you cool off on the patio watching the line at Bissell grow.

"We get a lot of curious people—those who don't drink beer, people meeting for business," our bartender says. "We'll be hosting more live music. Our last band,



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PORTLAND AFTER DARK



12OC, filled the place.”

“Is there a John in that band? I know a John who lives in Richmond, and he plays the—”

I stop my friend. “Okay, okay. What’s in the freezie maker?”

“Creamsicles and Pain Killers (\$14),” says the bartender.

“Oh, man. We’ve gotta get out of here. We still have work to do.”

DRINKS OF PARADISE

“What’s the sunniest drink you’ve got?” We’ve just stormed into Liquid Riot after a late afternoon downpour.

“Doesn’t get much sunnier than the Jungle Bird.” Moments later a frothy, peach-colored splash of Eden arrives and hits the spot. Maybe too well.

The *Jungle Bird* (\$12), made with Liquid Riot *Dow’s Demise Rum*, fresh pineapple, Campari, and lime, is refreshing and not overly sweet. But don’t be fooled—that’s rum you’re tasting. A third of the way through mine, I’m recounting better-forgotten college adventures and planning new ones.

Two-thirds of the way through, the heady combination of sunshine, ocean, and rum on Riot’s back deck overlooking the colorful waterfront has me considering the pirate’s life. The boats below are beckoning for a test drive. *With opportunities like this, who can blame Dixie Bull?*

“Are you all set on drinks?”

Yo-ho-ho! “Yes, I think so.” ■



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