

WOODY CREEK DISTILLERS

60 SUNSET DRIVE | 970-279-5110
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by LAUREN GLENDENNING | photos by JEREMY WALLACE

PRICE: Spirits to sip, \$5 to \$10; cocktails, \$12; "fleet" of whiskeys, \$16; small tasting of any three spirits, \$12 | **AMBIENCE:** Distillery and tasting-room atmosphere featuring masculine finishes and comfortable living-room seating | **SIGNATURE COCKTAILS:** The Wall, with gin, lime, cardamom, peppercorns and lavender bitters; hot buttered rum with rye, sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg and clove hot water

There are bars that make fresh ingredients and inventive cocktails, and then there's Woody Creek Distillers, taking "handcrafted" to a whole new level.

Woody Creek Distillers is making nearly everything in-house — the spirits, the infused spirits, the countless styles of bitters, coconut nectar, even its own tonic water.

Woody Creek Distillers has a short yet storied history. Just 3½ years ago, the distillery opened in Basalt with its first batch of potatoes harvested from the

owners' ranch in Woody Creek. Because potato fields have to rotate crops, the distillery currently is getting its potatoes from the Emma area. And because it mashes the potatoes fresh during harvest season from late August through November, what's bottled has to be enough to last through the entire year.

Once you taste these spirits, you'll understand why that's not always an easy feat.

And taste them you should. A small tasting of any three spirits is \$12 at the distillery, or try a "fleet" of all whiskeys — the Straight Rye, 4-Grain, Rye 535, White Whiskey and Cask X — for \$16. Gift boxes sold in the tasting room feature vodkas and other spirits. My favorite combination is the pear and apple brandy box set.

Woody Creek's Signature Rio Grande Potato Vodka picked up a double gold award for best vodka in the 2015 San Francisco World Spirits Competition out of 168 vodka entries. Call for a tour of the facility with distiller Dave Matthews and learn about the complex process of making such great-tasting vodka. It's smooth and complex — just as good for sipping as it is for mixing.

The mixing might be what



TOP THREE REASONS TO VISIT WOODY CREEK DISTILLERS

- 1 The craft cocktail menu features 30 inventive options
- 2 The award-winning spirits are carefully distilled and made with local ingredients
- 3 Nearly everything is made in-house, even the tonic water



wins most people over, though. The craft-cocktail menu here is tremendous with 30 creative concoctions. There are classics like the Bloody Mary with homemade celery bitters and bacon salt or the whiskey old-fashioned with homemade simple syrup, orange and bitters. But it's when bartenders get together to come up with new recipes when the real magic happens.

"We sit back here and taste everything and think, 'What flavors would taste good with this?'" says bartender Amy Young. "We all cook at home, too, so we know what kinds of flavors work together."

A Thai-garita with coconut-infused vodka, mint, mango, Kaffir lime cordial and ginger beer float will send your taste buds on a delicious journey. Or try The Wall, a delicate blend of gin, lime, simple syrup, cardamom, cracked peppercorns and two kinds of bitters — lavender and Peychaud's. It's refreshing and herbal, and if you're not careful, you might just order four or five — or eight.

Other exciting highlights on the cocktail menu this winter include the Harvest Moon, with bacon-infused whiskey, rosemary,

sage, blackberry syrup and cherry wood smoke, and the Smoke on the Water, made with rye whiskey, apricot preserves, lemon, agave nectar and barrel-aged tobacco bitters.

"Everyone is excited about making these cocktails," Young says.

Cocktails and pure spirits obviously are the distillery's specialty, but Mawa's Kitchen, based in the Aspen Business Center, is partnering with the distillery this winter to create snack plates like charcuterie and other items to help keep tummies full. And with food now available in the gorgeous tasting room, there's no reason not to cozy up on one of the couches and order another cocktail.

TOP Bartender Amy Young pours a gin cocktail made with cardamom and lavender bitters

ABOVE Woody Creek Distillers' craft spirits are bottled at the distillery
LEFT From left, the Whiskey River made with elderberry whiskey, wine and lavender; a Woody Creek made made with vodka or gin, and The Wall, a gin cocktail with cardamom and lavender bitters