



LIVE AND DRINK BY YOUR OWN RULES.

By Teddy Durgin

**M**ISCellaneous Distillery opened in December 2016, selling its Risky Rum product via a tasting room on Main Street in Mount Airy. The brainchild of Dan McNeil and Meg MacWhirter, the business has taken off since then. Wholesale sales began in mid-2017. Before long, MISCellaneous Distillery had launched four more products ~ Dew Point Rum, Diametric



Whisky, Restless Rye Whisky, and Virtuous Vodka ~ with more on the way.

One of the things that distinguishes the operation is MISCellaneous Distillery sources 100 percent of its Rye from a Carroll County farm and all of its sugar products from Domino Sugar in Baltimore. MacWhirter says the local partnerships are very important. "We find these Maryland connections are an important part of our story," she stated, during a recent interview, "and they help us connect with our customers and accounts even if they haven't been able to see us at the distillery. We have great partnerships with both Hickory Hollow Farm and Gravel Springs Farms for grain, allowing us to grow and distill our products in the same county. We then send protein-rich spent mash back to Hickory Hollow for them to feed their cattle."

She continued, "Since Maryland is too far north to grow sugar cane, it was very appealing to work with Domino Sugar to source our molasses and sugar for our rums to make sure we are keeping Marylanders employed. As we grow into new categories, we are continuing to look for local inputs and ingredients wherever possible."



MISCellaneous Distillery currently self-distributes its entire line of products. MacWhirter concedes there are challenges and rewards with going this route. "We located our distillery in a very central location to help aid our self-distribution efforts," she stated. "But, being small and new, we have to spend a significant amount of time and attention getting our name out to consumers and introducing bars, liquor stores, and

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restaurants to our products and our brand. Getting to meet the consumers, owners, and buyers has been very fun and rewarding. We feel that our products are different from anything else on the shelves or behind the bar, but the only chance we'll get to introduce them to the public is one sale at a time. It's always a thrill

to share our products with a new potential account and get a "Wow!" reaction."

McNeil and MacWhirter have been saying "Wow!" a lot since getting into the beverage business. Both came from outside the industry. The former hails from the political world, having run campaigns and events. For her part, MacWhirter worked on international development efforts including a stint in the Peace Corps.

She believes her time with that organi-

zation informs her work today. "As a Peace Corps volunteer," she said, "I worked with an amazing group of women in Grenada. They modeled resilience and creativity in the face of big challenges, and they did so with a lighthearted and playful attitude. I know their influence shapes my work style today."

MacWhirter still craves being associated with larger groups and organizations today. For instance, MISCellanous Distillery is a member of the Maryland Distillers Guild, an affiliation that has greatly benefited the business's

bottom line. "As part of this community of distillers," she explained, "we benefit

from having a forum to learn from each other and we can combine forces in working to improve laws that constrain our growth. Plus, the Guild has a great series of festivals

scheduled in 2018 where we can all share our products with customers who enjoy drinking and learning about local spirits."

She and McNeil work well together, because they both enjoy different parts of the business. McNeil is a production man through and through. MacWhirter says it's not uncommon for him to spend 12- to 16-hour days back-to-back "making as much as he can to fill barrels and fill shelves." By contrast, she enjoys the interaction with customers and serving their needs.

She has especially enjoyed connecting with the public via MISCellanous Distillery's tours and tastings. "It's an opportunity to create a personal connection with our consumers, hear their questions, and show them the process of how spirits are made," she concluded. "We are proud to make every drop of our spirits on site from raw ingredients. Having people come visit is a great way to share with them what we are about. That said, as we grow, we know we won't have the luxury of meeting most of our customers in person. So, we created unique and engaging packaging and branding that represents us well and helps serve as a proxy for a trip to our town and distillery." ■

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