

The Bloomery's tasting room is tucked in a former slave quarters just one hour from the nation's capital.



BY ELAINE JEAN

*On the Road with Elaine*

# THE VICE TOUR: HAND-ROLLED CIGARS, HOOCH, AND HORSES

Abraham Lincoln once observed that, "Folks who have no vices have very few virtues." So, in the interest of improving your character this weekend, why not head west to sample some of the worst habits within a one-hour drive of Washington, D.C.?

Whether you're a newbie or a chimney, the knowledgeable staff at Leesburg Cigar and Pipe (205 Harrison St. SE, Leesburg, Va.) matches each customer with just the right smoke. This boutique tobacconist offers a huge selection of cigars and cigarillos, as well as pipes, tobacco, imported cigarettes, and accessories. The walk-in humidor is one of the best in the area, keeping cigars fresh and well-hydrated.

The shop is comfortably situated in an old station master's house in Market Station, appointed with rich leather seating and a big screen TV. Manly? Yes. But I like it, too.

Everything about the Bloomery Plantation Distillery (16357 Charles Town Road, Charles Town, West Virginia) is unexpected, from the diminutive 1840s log cabin to the hand-crafted limoncello it produces.

When proprietors Linda Losey and Tom Kiefer ventured to Italy for the canonization of his great-great aunt – now Saint Mary of the Cross – they returned with a thirst for the Neopolitan after-dinner drink that local liquor stores

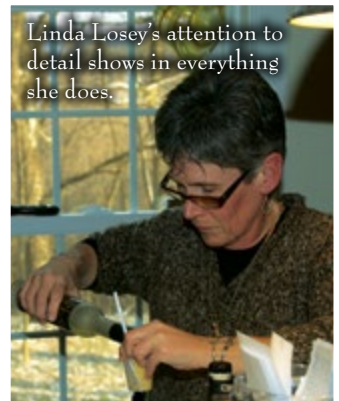
just couldn't quench. So they made their own. And it was very good.

In 2010 Linda purchased a ramshackle log cabin on Craigslist, hired ex-husband Rob to cultivate Caroline raspberry plants and Santa Theresa lemon trees, bought a greenhouse, hauled it back to the farm, and hung a shingle out by the roadside. Of course. That's what I do when I'm craving a drink.

No matter how illogical it all sounds, it was absolutely brilliant. And so are the flavors you'll sample at their stylishly rustic cabin in the woods.

The Bloomery product line has since been dubbed SweetShine and now includes Raspberry Lemon, Chocolate Raspberry, Cremma Lemma (a.k.a. Moonshine Milkshake), Ginger, Peach, Black Walnut, and Pumpkin Spice. Linda captures the essence of each flavor in a way that's pure, clear and bright – but never bitter – using organic fruit, zesting lemons by hand, and avoiding the nasty pith.

She leads tours of the grounds, pointing out that the little log cabin is one of only two slave quarters remaining in Jefferson County, and that the siding once belonged to an



Linda Losey's attention to detail shows in everything she does.



old canal boat. Stop at the greenhouse where she tends the trees that produce her heavenly hooch.

Back in the tasting room, Rob mans the bar, doling out samples of the fruits of their labor, sharing cocktail recipes, and exercising a quick wit. Visitors gather round on Fridays and Saturdays for complimentary tastings—free, that is, if you compliment the server. Offerings include miniature boozy frozen concoctions and designer cocktails with slightly wicked names.

SweetShine is available to purchase by the bottle for consumption at home, and you may also buy it on special order at Virginia ABC stores. Live music – folk, rock, reggae, blues, and soul—performed by local talent is offered with coffee beginning at six p.m.

You may want to bring a sense of humor to the Bloomery; these folks own a couple of lemon costumes, and they're not afraid to use them. If you tell them it's your birthday, you'll probably wind up wearing a lemon costume. If you tell them I sent you, you'll also have to don a lemon costume. In fact, the odds of being dressed up like a citrus fruit on any given day are quite high at the Bloomery.

Entering Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races (750 Hollywood Drive, Charles Town, West Virginia) is, for the uninitiated, a bit like falling down the rabbit hole. Plastic palm trees and counterfeit cacti fringe rows of one-armed bandits – over 3,000 slot machines in all – with names like Vegas Shindig and Unicorn Dreaming.

My advice: stay away from themes that ooze sweetness. I lost a fair share of money on Dog Days just trying to get the Goldendoodle to prance. Gambling is an emotional sport and, in retrospect, the homage to John Wayne may have been a less-compelling choice. Win, lose, or draw, you'll certainly be entertained by this almost-glamorous destination.



In 1997 Penn National Gaming bet on a comeback for Charles Town Races, purchasing the facility and initiating a \$175 million upgrade. In 2010 gaming tables – including poker, blackjack, mini-baccarat, and roulette – made

their debut, and today the venue features simulcast racing, as well as numerous dining options and ample parking. The 3/4-mile race track draws trainers, jockeys, and horses from up and down the East Coast.

Reserve a table on the Skyline Terrace for dinner with an expansive view of the race track. The restaurant offers a full menu Tuesday through Saturday and, on Friday and Saturday nights, a prime rib and seafood buffet that reaches from here to there and back again.

Bets are placed with tellers next to the poker room on the same level, but for the ultimate experience call ahead and reserve a dining table with its own betting machine. One-swipe gambling is dangerously convenient.

The dining room is designated nonsmoking, so if you want to light up the cigars you bought earlier in the day you'll have to bring them down to

the apron of the track, where the action is. You may even pick up a few tips on upcoming races from the regulars.

Hand-rolled cigars, hooch, and horses—it's the perfect trifecta! ❖

**AUTHOR:** Elaine Jean is a freelance writer with a serious case of wanderlust. She and husband/photographer Paul experienced more than 80 day trips – ranging from the historic to the alcoholic – over a two-year period to produce "Carpe Weekend: 52 Day Trips and Adventures near Washington, DC," available on amazon.com.

- ❖ This day trip is best made on Saturday afternoons.
- ❖ Bloomery hours are Fridays and Saturdays from 11 a.m. – 8 p.m.
- ❖ Hollywood Casino is open 24/7; anyone under 21 will not be admitted.
- ❖ Skyline Terrace is closed Sundays and Mondays. Reservations are recommended.
- ❖ Live races are held year round; post time varies with the season.
- ❖ Visit [www.hollywoodcasino-charlestown.com](http://www.hollywoodcasino-charlestown.com) to see race schedules.