

Being There



Losey's recipe won out in blind taste tests every time against multiple competitors and Bloomery SweetShine was born.





What a Hooch!

THE OWNERS OF BLOOMERY SWEETSHINE WERE INSPIRED TO OPEN THEIR OWN MINI-DISTILLERY AFTER ONE GREAT NIGHT IN ITALY STARRING LIMONCELLO. **BY JANICE HOPPE**

After getting their first taste of Limoncello five years ago in Italy, Tom Kiefer and Linda Losey left the country not only with some “fine” artwork for their walls at home, but with a dream of opening their own mini-distillery and a determination to replicate that recipe.

“We got lost in Italy and happened to find this restaurant where the chef didn’t speak English and we didn’t speak Italian,” Losey remembers. “We clicked using hand signals and pointing on the menu. It was a great time and they kept trying to get us to buy the artwork on the walls. After our third bottle of wine, he brought out the Limoncello... we left with two bottles of it and the artwork off the walls.”

When they returned home, Losey and Kiefer could not find anything on the market that came close to the Limoncello they tasted in Italy. Losey got to work and replicated the recipe, but a blind taste test was in order to be sure it tasted just as good as the bottle from Italy.

After 23 shots of Limoncello to compare Losey’s recipe to others on the market, hers won out in a blind taste test every time. All that was left now was to find the space to open a distillery.

A HIDDEN TREASURE

West Virginia was the perfect setting for Losey and Kiefer’s farm distillery. The pair found a 12-acre parcel of land in Charles Town, W. Va., with an old farm cabin atop a hill surrounded by woods. “The Craigslist ad said it was all run down and we did find this incredibly dilapidated, but great energy place,” Losey says. “We bought it and worked on it while working full-time.”

As the pair got to work restoring the cabin and building their distillery, Bloomery SweetShine, they learned the farm is steeped in history. “The man I bought it from was a logger and did a good job in keeping these 200-year-old oak trees alive and honored the land,” Losey says. “In the 1700s, it was a bloomery located near the river. It made the original iron for the Lewis and Clark expedition in the 1800s.”

A bloomery was a cheaper, simpler way to produce iron than by using a blast furnace. It used charcoal for fuel, but unlike blast furnaces, the iron ore never reached a temperature hot enough for it to melt. The Shenandoah Bloomery, as it was known, was home to the largest bootlegging operation in the area. Structural elements of the log cabin distillery today are tied to the original moonshining operation.

The log cabin was originally built around 1840 as one room with an upstairs sleeping area. In 1870, two additions were added to the original log cabin. “The side additions on the cabin have only been painted twice,” Losey says. “The original board and batten is here from the moonshine boats. There is all this cool stuff that has come out about the place.”

FLAVOR PROFILES

Bloomery SweetShine grows fruits, roots and nuts to make artisan cordials by hand and sources what it does not grow from other small farms nearby. “Although we are not organic; we are all-natural,” Losey notes.

Dallas Summer Musicals P.31 / Raymond F. Kravis Center for the Performing Arts P.34 / Pacific Event Productions P.38 /
Lionbridge Technologies Inc. P.40 / B&B Theatres P.44 / Medieval Times P.48 / City of Orlando P.52 /

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Linda Losey, Co-owner

In September 2011, Bloomery SweetShine opened with four flavors and a completely renovated mini-distillery. "We are the only craft distillery in America with a sole focus on all-natural liqueurs," she says. "We make it and grow the fruit ourselves. We are truly garden-to-glass, farm fresh and hand-crafted; we handwrite the proof on every bottle."

Bloomery SweetShine products include Cranberry Clementine, Black Walnut, Raspberry Lemon, Ginger Shine, Peach Shine, Chocolate Raspberry,

Cremma Lemma, Limoncello, Hard Lemonade and seasonal Pumpkin Spice.

"I had always had a vision in my head of what I wanted," Losey says in terms of the labeling. "I wanted the 1920s and Prohibition. I was in the bar with my daughter and her friend who I've known since she was in third grade. Her friend said 'The ladies on the label need raspberry boobies.' We made the label that way and it flew from there. The label embodies our fun outlook and honors our history."

A FUN OUTLOOK

Bloomery SweetShine has received 24 awards since it began production, including a Double Gold for best nut liqueur and a Bronze for package design in 2015 from the San Francisco World Spirit Competition. It also took home this year the Good Food Award for its Pumpkin Spice. In just three-and-a-half years, the mini-distillery has seen 60,000 visitors and is winning top international awards. "It blows my mind," Losey admits.

Bloomery SweetShine's future lies with new cocktails and millennials. "Younger generations love to experiment and try new things and this generation is no different," Losey says. "They want to try new things, create something that is farm fresh, and quick and easy. The cocktail culture is changing from 15 steps with flames, garnishes and dry ice to the new generation who wants simple and back to basics with a twist. That's what we do."

Cocktails made with Bloomery SweetShine can be done in as little as three steps. A gin and tonic can be sweetened up with a shot of cranberry clementine. Losey promises it is "cocktail bliss." ♦