community with MaryJane

bloom

where you're planted

Bloomery Plantation Distillery

> "Water what's going right instead of what's going wrong ... And the blooms will choke out the weeds."
> – Jane Lee Logan

When life gives you lemons, as they say … you could make lemonade, or you might just kick it up a notch like Linda Losey, proprietress of Bloomery Plantation Distillery in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains of West Virginia. Linda and her husband, Tom Kiefer, distill award-winning artisan "SweetShine" limoncello, a luscious Italian lemon liqueur, from their own plantation of Italian Santa Theresa lemon trees.

While rich in citrus, Linda has been dealt more than her share of life's metaphorical lemons. She is a mother of four who has lost two sons and managed, miraculously, to find the "SweetShine" in life.

"One step at a time. That's how you move through it," she says, from experience. "You don't have control over what's been, nor do you have control over what will be. You only have control over the now, and it starts with that first shaky, unsteady step in moving toward something—something that will be different and brighter than where you are now. I've known love and laughter, heartache and tragedy. Yet through it all, I've emerged with grace and compassion through the help of family, friends, and community."

After a 4,000-mile solo horseback ride across the country to help heal her heart in 2004, Linda approached life on a day-by-day basis for a few years. She wrote a book called *The Great God Hunt: The Workings of the Universe Revealed*. Then, in 2010, she and Tom set out on a voyage to Italy for the canonization of Tom's great, great aunt as the first Saint of Australia. The trip turned out to be inspiring in more ways than Linda expected, and her longtime dream of entrepreneurship began to take shape. "We tasted hand-zested, homemade limoncello and fell in love with the flavor profile. Unable to find that same flavor on the shelves in America, we began the quest of creating our own," she recalls.

Linda and Tom had no experience with distilling spirits. On the contrary, her background was in marketing and public relations, his in civil engineering. But inspiration was singing her siren song in the form of that unforgettable limoncello from Italy. The couple began experimenting with exciting results. "We won 100 percent of the time," Linda said in an interview with *Capacity Magazine*. "Tom said, 'I think we've got something here. I think we could probably make this.'"

Back in the states, Linda and Tom combed the Internet and discovered a dilapidated 1840s log cabin on 12 wooded acres where the Blue Ridge Mountains meet the Shenandoah River. Where others might have only seen decay, the couple immediately saw a mini-distillery in the rough.

"We turned our Craigslist find into an organic sustainable farm—we're the first commercial growers of lemons in the Mid-Atlantic. In addition to lemons, we grow Caroline raspberries, Hawaiian ginger, pumpkins, cranberries, and black walnuts, while also sourcing from other small American farms. We turn those farm-fresh fruits, roots, and nuts into award-winning liqueurs."

photos courtesy BloomerySweetshine.com, Linda's photo courtesy Sarah Murphy

> Bloomery SweetShine: "an artisanal blend of virtue and vice."

So, back to the SweetShine … what is it, exactly? Ask Linda and she'll call it "an artisanal blend of virtue and vice." Wink. Technically speaking, though, SweetShine is Linda's modern twist on the South's signature beverage: moonshine.

"SweetShine stems from America's most colorful and complex time in history—from flappers and suffragists, to bootleggers and temperance workers, to speakeasies and the Charleston. For some, it was a time of uninhibited expression; for others, a period of resistance," Linda explains. "It was also a spirited time when moonshiners flourished throughout Appalachia in spite of the revenuers' best efforts. Lawmakers realized long ago that spirits were an easy tax target, and moonshiners have practiced the art of distilling illegally ever since."

Bloomery Plantation Distillery, which opened for business in 2011, is steeped in bootlegging history. The small, unincorporated community of Bloomery held the honor of being the largest bootlegging operation in the area during prohibition.

"More illegal 'shine came through this one tiny hamlet than in any other area in the state," Linda boasts with sparkling humor. "Even the structural elements of our historic log cabin distillery are tied to moonshining. In 1870, two new additions were added to the original log cabin. The board and batten were from dismantled gundalows—ferry boats used to haul people and products across the Shenandoah River. At night, by the light of the moon, the boats also hauled moonshine. The captains of the gundalows were known as moonshine boatmen."

The more Linda learned about the moonshining tradition, the more she grew to respect its place in her region's cultural past.

"Moonshining has long been a way of survival for many families and is a huge part of the culture of the Blue Ridge Mountains of West Virginia. It's been tradition to pass down recipes from generation to generation. Old-timers used to temper their moonshine with real fruit and sugar for a smoother, more palatable 'shine."

Taking a cue from the old-timers' recipes, Linda and Tom craft Bloomery's all-natural SweetShine with 190-proof 'shine, pure cane sugar, and farm-fresh ingredients from their own farm as well as other local producers.

"Our family of flavors are crafted by hand, naturally. From the hand-zesting of every single lemon to hand-writing every bottle's proof on the label. All of the local fruits, roots, and nuts from our farm—and from neighboring farms—are hand-selected by our master macerator," she explains. "We carefully handle every bottle to ensure only the best, from our hands to our customers. Not only is our SweetShine carefully handcrafted, it's beautifully focused—and stark-raving good."

And that's not just Linda's and Tom's opinion. "The limoncello rivals any award-winning Italian limoncello. In fact, in two world competitions, they have taken 20 medals for their limoncello, cremma lemma 'Moonshine Milkshake,' raspberry limoncello, hard lemonade, and chocolate raspberry liqueurs," reports Sheilah Kaufman of *Town Courier Urbana*.

Linda is quick to share credit for the distillery's success with the colorful "cast of characters" that keep the SweetShine flowing. "I have a team of 14 here," she says. "Thank God they've bought into my vision, and they carry it out very well. I just trust that everyone is going to give me their best—and they do."

What's next for Bloomery Sweetshine? "We want to take it national. We want to grow the brand," Linda told *Capacity*. "One of the great things we do is customer service—customer engagement—which I think is important in any business. We have a unique cast of characters. Everybody's allowed to be who they want to be here. Customers call this 'the happiest place in the world.'"

Visit **BloomerySweetShine.com** to learn more about the distillery or to order SweetShine online. And for some sweet recipe ideas, visit Bloomery's Cocktail Playground at Pinterest.com/bloomerypins/cocktail-playground.