

# B.C. whisky scene commands attention

## WHISKY FROM C1

was a 43-year-old Canadian Club and the year before that, a 21-year-old Pike Creek, a sherry cask finished whisky made at the Hiram Walker distillery in Windsor.

To use a cliché from the spirits industry, Hiram Walker likely makes more whisky before coffee break on a single morning than Sons of Vancouver makes all year. And since the distillery makes so little (it still hasn't reached its goal of 100 barrels of whisky per year), the Palm Trees release is already sold out. The good news? There's a new release with similar DNA scheduled in the next month or two.

"A week or two ago we were talking about having a smaller release since we were worried that February was such a quiet month, we didn't want to have bottles sitting around," said Max Smith, the other partner. "That's no longer such a big concern."

It's a big win and it's hard to overstate the impact this will have on Sons of Vancouver. They hope that it also shines a light on craft distilleries across Canada and especially in B.C., where the whisky scene is starting to command a lot of attention.

"British Columbia is miles ahead of the rest of the country," said Davin de Kergommeaux, author of "Canadian Whisky" and founder of the Canadian Whisky Awards. "We're almost seeing a signature B.C. whisky style and the province becoming a whisky region in its own right."

"It will be the first whisky region in Canada defined by flavour," he added. "And it's really good flavour too."

The rise of B.C. whisky isn't only news in Canada. Thanks in part to the Victoria Whisky Festival, a small event with an outsized influence on the world stage, renowned brands from around the world often choose this venue to show off their spirits.

This year, for example, Waterford Whisky, an ambitious terroir project from Ireland, was pouring its organic spirit right next to Two Brewers, a Yukon single malt distillery that won seven gold medals this year. In the next room, people were sampling Amrut, a peaty Indian whisky, across the aisle from the Nikka table, where Japanese whisky was on offer. Also in attendance were many of the big guys: the Dalmore, Glenfiddich, Maker's Mark and dozens of others.

Fettercairn, a newish single malt bottling from a nearly 200-year-old distillery, even held its Americas launch at the event and educated the thirsty public with a seminar on its Scottish oak project that would make the company less reliant on imported American wood and introduce a new flavour profile. When asked why the brand managers chose Victoria, a city of 400,000,



for the big launch, communications director Kieran Healy-Rider, global head of whisky discovery for Whyte and Mackay, said the festival was well respected within the industry.

Although the festival is an institution in its own right, some of its reach is owing to the symbiotic relationship it has with the awards, known for their commitment to

Jenna Diubaldo, left, James Lester and Max Smith of Sons of Vancouver hope their Canadian Whisky of the Year win at the well-regarded awards ceremony pushes Canadian spirits into the spotlight.

DARRYL DYCK  
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impartial and blind tastings by a panel of qualified judges. The organization is a non-profit that uses all excess funds to promote Canadian whisky through advertising and flying in foreign journalists to cover the event.

De Kergommeaux is thrilled to see B.C. craft distillers doing so well and attributes their success to consumers, who no longer want "mixing whisky" and, instead, prefer something with a point of view and bold flavour. Like coconut notes on a rye, or a whisky aged in blackberry wine barrels, like you can get from Stillhead Distillery on Vancouver Island, or Shelter Point's peaty spir- its with a "coastal influence."

As happy as he is for the little guys, though, de Kergommeaux says the small capacity of these distilleries does create a small wrinkle for his project.

"In a way, it's almost disrupted our process because the goal was to bring Canadian whiskey to the world, and we're going to get coverage in the Times of India and in newspapers in Korea and all over America," he said. "But there's nobody outside of B.C. who's going to get a bottle of Sons of Vancouver."

Still, everyone feels that a rising tide will lift all boats, especially Diubaldo, who hopes that it will help B.C. move closer to gaining recognition as a distinct regional producer of Canadian whisky.

"I really hope it pushes Canada into the spotlight even more," she said, "so we can continue to rebuild our reputation in whisky."

"Especially for the craft producers in B.C. who are making some of the best whisky out there."

# Hey 'Wheel of Fortune,' give Ben his M\*N\*Y

## OPINION: MENON FROM C1

swers not matching the category!"

Is this a growing problem? Does the show throw up a "Food & Drink" puzzle and then the answer turns out to be CATNIP or SLUDGE? Hang gliding is *fun*. Scrabble is a *game*.

"TAKING A QUICK JOG" is neither.

I have a dear friend who is addicted to running. A few years ago, she was bugging me to join her on one of her bonkers missions in which her tiny soles gleefully assault the asphalt. We'd start on the Danforth, she suggested, go down to the Beaches, cut across a trail, hightail it back. *Easy-peasy*.

I realized she did not know me at all. I couldn't run from the Danforth to the Beaches even if a Bengal tiger was in hot pursuit. Woman, lace up your Nikes and scam!

Even hardcore joggers would not classify "TAKING A QUICK JOG" under the rubric of "Fun & Games." The hardcore only care about TAKING A LONG JOG. Telling a runner to find joy in a half-block sprint is like asking Tom Brady to stop turn-

ing his retirement into Groundhog Day. It can't be done.

The conspiracy theorist in me is starting to wonder if "Wheel of Fortune" is deliberately creating "scandals" for the free publicity. When I watched that show as a teen with my mom — oh, stop, not every child can be smoking menthols with the cool kids behind the mall — it was never in the news.

It was just a game show that was way easier than "Jeopardy!"

Now? "Wheel of Fortune" generates more quarterly headlines than Tesla.

Pegged to the Ben from California brouhaha, Us Weekly published a Unabomber-length manifesto this week: "Wheel of Fortune' Snafus and Wild Moments Over the Years: Mispronunciations, Controversial Puzzle Rules and More."

There was the time Sajak accidentally opened a grand prize envelope before the contestant had spun. There was the time a contestant lost \$1 million after mispronouncing "Achilles."

There was the time Sajak snapped at "ungrateful contestants" and later apologized. There was the "epic

fail" when all three contestants, over nine spins, could not solve: "ANOTHER FEATHER \*N YO\*R \*A\*."

*Another feather in your gag?*

*Another feather in your dad?*

*Another feather in your map?*

It was as excruciating as watching chimps try to solve the Riemann hypothesis.

But you know what's interesting about these snafus and wild moments over the years?

Most of them happened recently.

I am now offering a prize to anyone who can provide proof of a news story that was published about a "Wheel of Fortune" cock-up before the dawn of social media.

The prize? I don't know yet. But please remember it is 2023 and I toil for a N\*WSPAP\*R. I am not a R\*CH M\*N.

So you might just win a tattered paperback of "Critique of Pure Reason." My wife is on my case to downsize my library to make more room for her appalling keepsakes. This could be a win-win.

Show me the proof and I will send you a used book!

In the interim, it's time for "Wheel

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of Fortune" to do more than be cutesy-coy on Instagram.

Ben from California was robbed. "TAKING A QUICK JOG" is not "Fun & Games" any more than hide-and-seek is a salad dressing. Give the man his prize. Or at least bring him back for another go.

I am now convinced "Wheel of Fortune" is focused squarely on "going viral."

I give it three months until a puzzle deliberately misspells "liquefy" or "sherbet."

And if that's not enough for a media tsunami starting with "Entertainment Tonight," maybe Sajak will openly mock a contestant's ethnicity before he and Vanna moonwalk into the crowd while French kissing.

"Fans Shocked After Game Show Turns Into Racist Orgy!"

I'm on to you, "Wheel of Fortune." You cheated Ben from California for the cheap buzz.

And you just taunted the wrong wacky guy.

Give him his M\*NEY or I will D\*STR\*Y Y\*U, one used book at a time.

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