

Cardinal Spirits two weeks away from tasting room debut

By Jeff LaFave 812-331-4356 | jlafave@heraldt.com
0/0/

Good things take time. Great things require a permit from the state and a little bit of trial-and-error.

Five years into the process of founding Cardinal Spirits, co-founder Adam Quirk will spend the next two weeks readying the craft distillery at 922 S. Morton St. for its grand opening on Feb. 13 and 14, including some early invite-only sessions for the company's friends and funders.

Quirk now spends his mornings (and busy afternoons and late evenings) preparing the tasting room: Unpacking his new dishware on the bars locally made limestone countertop. Carefully placing a row of spider-like metal seats, fabricated from local artist Josh Smith of Clutch Fabrication, under the thick, heather gray serving space.

There's the reading nook, complete with how-to handbooks on the distilling process, and encyclopedias of Indiana's native plants delicately set aside for browsers-to-be.

Quirk has placed bright yellow flowers, picked with care by florist Linda Chapman of Harvest Moon Flower Farm. The flowers are placed in Erlenmeyer flasks you might remember from elementary school science class. They're placed along a window table made of maple that Quirk cut down and finished himself. The tidy resting spot overlooks the B-Line Trail, as well as the blossoming new pastel townhomes of B-Line Station.

Patience, as well as a remarkable attention to aesthetic detail, has brought Quirk and co-founders Jeff Wuslich, Rick Dietz and Jason Katz through the madness of the estimated \$1 million process, and it will get them through the pressure of Cardinals debut weekend of hosting and hors d'oeuvres.

Not unlike the frenzied distillation process itself, which federally requires all alcohols to reach 190-proof concentration that's 95 percent alcohol by volume before calming and returning the concoction to a pleasantly drinkable 70- or 80-proof creation.

We ferment our base product here in-house, which for a craft distillery, is pretty rare, Quirk said.

Most small distilleries purchase bulk spirits then re-distill them to create a desired blended flavor. Cardinal's still from Headframe Spirits in Butte, Montana, can feed two gallons of product per minute. The 12-foot-high system of chrome and copper columns boasts a digital screen at arms height for the operator, and can get service from the manufacturer via an Internet connection.

"It's a new-to-the-world system," Quirk said. "It's obviously modern, and we have controllers for all the pressures inside, but it looks like it was made in the 1860s, too."

Cardinal's debut liquor will be its vodka, a signature recipe that aims to combine the fruity, floral notes of white grape and wine yeast with the earthiness of Indiana's heirloom corn, Quirk said.

"You get this mouth-feel that's really rich and luscious," he said.

Aged whiskey, gin and liqueurs made from local herbs flavored with lavender, persimmon and lemongrass grown at Strangers Hill Organics on Howard Road will come in due time. Quirk is already anticipating the cedarberry-infused "Trevlac," a herbal spirit named after a strand of pines owned by the Sycamore Land Trust to promote the trust's 25th anniversary, as well as a coffee liqueur created with the beans of Hopscotch Coffee, located just across the B-Line Trail.

When Cardinal's doors open, 10 specialty drinks will await the distillery's new friends on the south side ranging from the traditional vodka martini to the Midwest Mule, made with local berries and a side menu of cocktail foods and charcuterie.

"The idea was to make a flavor for every palate, and that's so difficult when you don't have whiskey or gin or beer or wine, he said. But there's something for everyone."

Even with its bottles of vodka, which Cardinal Spirits plans to have on hand for take-out sales on opening night, Quirk and company have embraced the opportunity to make something familiar. The art-deco packaging is a playful callback to a camper's field guide, or perhaps a library book from the 1950s.

"We love the scientific side of all this -- we're all science nerds at heart but we also have a great fondness for nature," Quirk said. "That's really what we're aiming for: the perfect mixture of science and nature."

Cardinal Spirits two weeks away from tasting room debut



Cardinal Spirits two weeks away from tasting room debut



Cardinal Spirits two weeks away from tasting room debut



Cardinal Spirits two weeks away from tasting room debut



Cardinal Spirits two weeks away from tasting room debut



Cardinal Spirits two weeks away from tasting room debut

