



*Melissa
Katrincic*



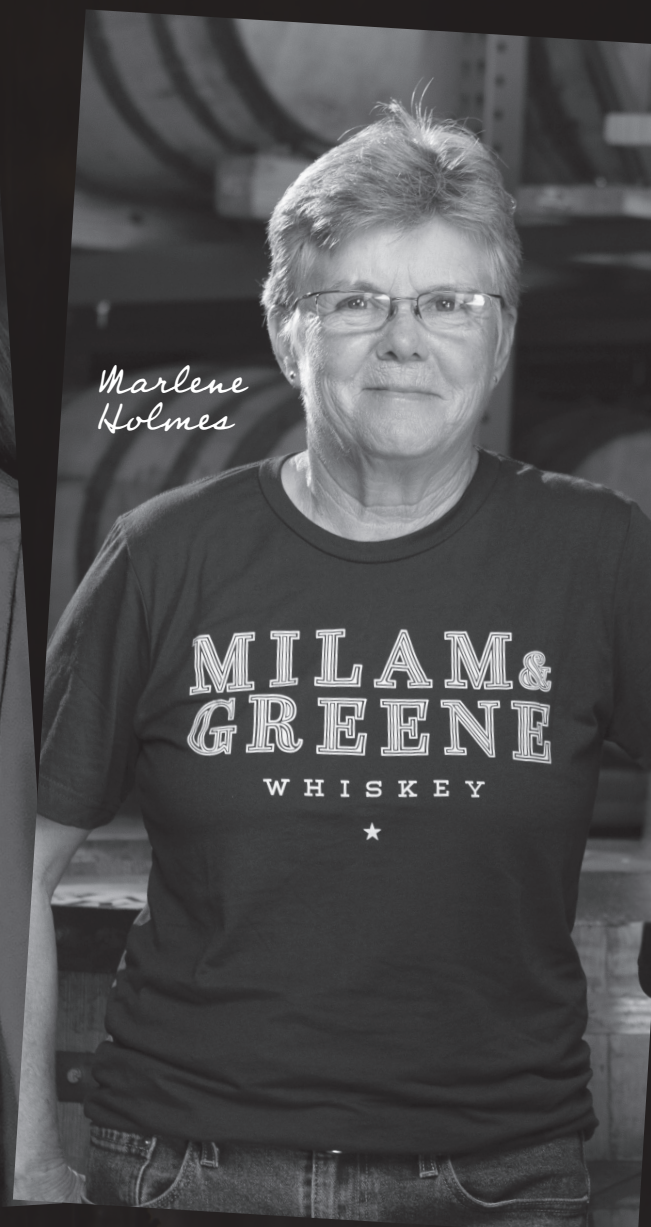
*Lynne
Dant*



*Becky
Harris*



*Natalie
Noel*



*Marlene
Holmes*

POWER HOUSE

These Spirited Southern Women Are
Bringing Fine Elixirs to Life

BY KATHRYN STREETER

FIVE

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arnessing the powers of business, science, and creativity, female distillers across the South are unleashing a kind of magic. The rise of women occupying key posts in the Southern world of spirits adds texture to the South's colorful distilling history—and it's ushering in a golden age of distilling, with the industry booming under the fresh eyes of female talent. Contributing to this rise are five highly talented women steeped in the making of spirits. And just in case you're thirsty, they've each shared a favorite fall cocktail using their respective product.

Becky Harris

CATOCTIN CREEK DISTILLERY
Virginia

Becky Harris of Loudoun County, Virginia, alongside her business partner, general manager, and husband, Scott, founded Catoctin Creek Distillery in 2009. The launch of the distillery revived Virginia's 400-year-old rye whisky* tradition, which had lain dormant since Prohibition.

"I was inspired by the most traditional way of making American whisky, specifically in Virginia," says Harris, who holds the government affairs chair on the board of the American Craft Spirits Association, where she was once president. She explains that after Jamestown's founding, whisky was distilled using pot-stills—primarily by women—as men worked the fields. By 1800, there were 3,500 farm-based rye distilleries in Virginia alone, whereas today there are approximately 2,700 distilleries in

all of America. Large-scale production dominates the industry, she points out. With that in mind, the Harrises were motivated to resurrect the Virginia rye whisky tradition connected to its true agricultural roots and terroir, an art which had been lost to time.

But nothing was certain when Harris, a trained chemical engineer, ditched her 20-year professional track to chase a dream of making beautiful rye whisky—though the move to distilling came naturally. Scott, a long-time software engineer, also kissed the traditional workplace goodbye, contributing a savvy



head for tech and business to Catoctin—a perfect complement to Harris's skill set.

Catoctin Creek Distillery's The Virginia Rye Whisky is Virginia's most-awarded whisky and has resurrected the state's faded reputation as a champion of the spirit. The distillery recently turned 15 years old and celebrated by releasing Rabble Rouser Rye, a 6-year-old whisky started back in 2017.

Meanwhile, Catoctin Creek Hot Honey Rye has quickly won a permanent line extension, injecting a fresh spin on the classic Roundstone Rye. Starting with their beautiful 100-percent rye whisky,

Harris weaves in three types of local Virginia honey (wildflower, clover, and buckwheat) and an infusion of chile peppers. "Because we use real honey," she says, "the aroma and flavor of honey are dominant in this whisky, and the honey gives a very pleasant viscosity and mouthfeel. Just as you're savoring the whisky, the peppers come in with a surprising and delightful bit of heat."

Catoctin's success is partly due to Harris's patience and method, which eschews big-industry column stills. Similar to Scotland's traditional small-batch process, she slowly cooks mash in pot-stills for nine hours—much longer than is typical—to give sugars and carbohydrates time to break down and allow the rye's chemical composition to fully alter (called the "maillard reaction"). She says this slow method produces rich, creamy, smooth whisky—a bit like how cooking tomato sauce on low heat for hours will yield a superior sauce. The tradeoff is absolutely worth it: "We believe as a craft distiller, we have to be willing to do things the big guys won't do, which is what sets our spirits apart from theirs," Harris says.

Take a pilgrimage to the distillery in the heart of charming Purcellville to truly appreciate the Catoctin spirit through a tour (free), a tasting, and a chat with the Harrises, if you're lucky. catoctincreekdistilling.com

HOT HONEY RYE MANHATTAN

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

- 2 ounces Catoctin Creek Hot Honey Rye
- 1 ounce sweet vermouth (Harris recommends Carpano Antica)
- 2 dashes chocolate bitters
- Garnish:** Brandied cherry

Combine rye, vermouth, and bitters in a cocktail tin with ice and stir well with ice. Strain into a cocktail glass, and garnish with cherry.

*Regarding "whisky" versus "whiskey," it depends on country of production: Scotland, Canada, and Japan omit the "e" while the US and Ireland include it. At Catoctin Harris refers to her product without the "e" in acknowledgment of her and Scott's Scottish heritage.

JENNIFER SIGAL

Natalie Noel
NOËL FAMILY DISTILLERY
Louisiana

Tequila anyone? NOËL Family Distillery is a newly opened, woman-led distillery in Donaldsonville, Louisiana, with CEO and product visionary Natalie Noel at the helm. Adding pop to the moment, NOËL is the only distillery in Louisiana to offer 100-percent blue agave tequila.

Based in the small town where Noel was raised, NOËL started in 2018 as a far-flung project with her dad, Chip, a retired pilot. Armed with an MBA from Louisiana State University and a decade of business experience, Noel was primed for the challenge. The dream team would make use of Noel's business prowess and Chip's penchant for distilling. Their family land had sugar cane, so rum was a given. Vodka was on their minds, too, as was tequila—specifically made with top-quality 100-percent Blue Weber agave sourced from Mexico.

It took six challenging years to make the dream a reality. Noel found the perfect partner—a women-led distillery in Mexico. However, she explains that Louisiana has laws prohibiting you from serving, tasting, or selling in-house anything you don't manufacture in your building, something they didn't know at the outset. "This means the tequila can only be sold to our distributors," she acknowledges. But she attributes the distillery's success to sheer perseverance, adequate funding, patience, and most importantly, teamwork. It would have been easy to quit many times, she reminisces, but she and her dad kept each other's spirits high.

Running the distilling business plays



to all of Noel's strengths. Tech savvy and creative, she loves bringing products to market—especially tasty ones. The small and nimble enterprise enables her to enjoy maximum freedom and flexibility, and she leverages her years of experience in brand development, social media marketing, and content creation to infuse emotion into the distillery's marketing. In her words, "I think my ability to define our unique flavor profiles, clever product offerings, and fun branding has helped us come out of the gate swinging." noeldistillery.com

**CINNAMON
TEQUILA SOUR**

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

- 2 ounces NOËL Tequila Blanco
- 2 tablespoons simple syrup
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 egg white (optional)

Combine all ingredients in a cocktail tin with ice. Shake for 30 seconds and pour over fresh ice into a rocks glass.



Lynne Dant
LOG STILL DISTILLERY
Kentucky

A 350-acre bourbon paradise, Log Still Distillery graces the pastoral rolling landscape of Gethsemane near Bardstown, Kentucky. Chock-full of distilling history, the idyllic footprint continues to be anchored by bourbon, in part due to cofounder and investor Lynne Dant. Until recently, Dant, a chemical engineer and fifth-generation distiller, served as master distiller of Log Still.

The family is tight-knit, and Dant followed in the footsteps of relatives who have long been connected to this storied land. While her cousins, Wally and Charles, head up other aspects of the operations, Dant brought not only her engineering background but also 28 years of global business experience in manufacturing, marketing, and sales to help transform Log Still into a Central

Kentucky destination offering lodging, world-class entertainment, and a picturesque wedding venue.

Yet at the heart of the bustling enterprise is and always will be whiskey, a craft that combines poetry and science. Hailing from the state that produced the country's first poet laureate and a family that has bourbon running through its veins, Dant has the DNA as well as the training for creating aromatic, tightly balanced spirits.

During her tenure as one of the few women in Kentucky leading a distillery, Dant crafted the soulful Monk's Road Fifth District Series, which offers a nod to the historic tax district and leans into the craft of traditional Kentuckian bourbon. The result was award-winning 6- and 8-year-old bourbons with bold spice and smoky tasting notes. Log Still's Monk's Road Wheated Bourbon was recognized in 2023 at the ASCOT Awards. logstilldistillery.com



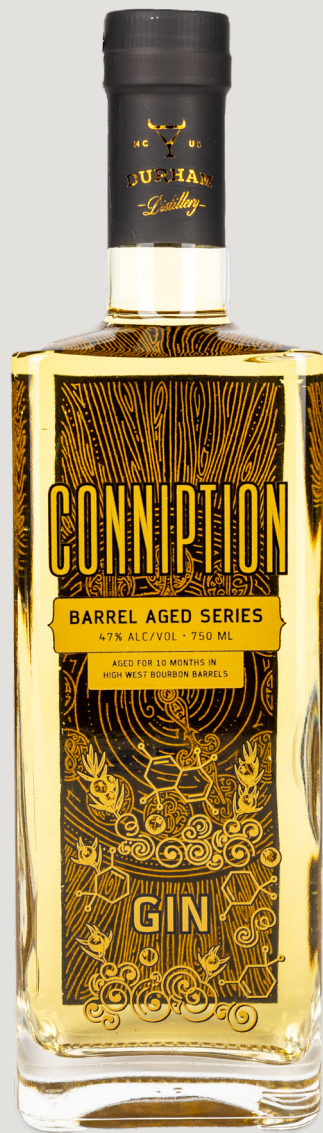
**APPLE CIDER MAPLE
OLD FASHIONED**

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

- 1½ ounces Monk's Road Wheated Bourbon
- 1 ounce maple syrup
- 1 ounce apple cider
- 2 dashes orange bitters
- Garnish:** Apple wedge or orange peel

Combine all ingredients in a cocktail tin, add ice, and stir until mixed well. Strain into rocks glass and add large ice cubes. Garnish with apple wedge and/or orange peel.

C/O LOG STILL DISTILLERY. OPPOSITE: C/O NOËL FAMILY DISTILLERY



Melissa Katrincic

DURHAM DISTILLERY
North Carolina

Considered a rock star in the world of gin, Melissa Katrincic is the CEO, siren, and storyteller behind Connption Gin, produced by Durham Distillery in Durham, North Carolina.

Katrincic enjoys the rare distinction of being among the few female gin tasting judges in the country and the first American woman to be admitted into The Gin Guild in the UK. As Durham Distillery's cofounder and president, she blends colorful traditions of the past with modern science to release some of the country's best gin.

Her partner in bringing to life this award-winning gin is her chemist husband, Lee, who geeks out on the nitty-gritty science behind crafting the elixir, playing around with botanicals to produce a pleasurable gin experience.

It's working. Connption Gin recently enjoyed some serious celebrating after being recognized at the London-based 2024 World Gin Awards. Three were honored: Kinship, an indigo-hued gin

thanks to the use of butterfly pea flower, won "Best in the US"; Navy Strength, a favorite American piney, complex gin, which was recognized for its sixth year; and Barrel Aged, a gin aged for 10 months in bourbon barrels.

In so many ways, it seems inevitable that Katrincic, who comes from a long line of female power, would become a Southern goddess of gin. Her family honored daily happy hour with firm traditions. The end-of-day gin martini was made with flourish and precision, and Katrincic recalls enjoying gin-soaked martini olives as a child, plucked from her grandfather's glass.

In addition, she says, "I grew up in a family of strong women. My mother, sister, and I all graduated from women's colleges and were encouraged to take on leadership opportunities. It provided the backbone of my journey as an entrepreneur and [it's] why I am so passionate about advocating for other female entrepreneurs and encouraging more women to get involved in the spirits, wine, and hospitality industries."

To share the love of gin with travelers from around the world, Katrincic recently announced the upcoming opening of Connption Cocktails & Cuisine in Raleigh-Durham International Airport. durhamdistillery.com

COFFEE NEGRONI

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

- 1 ounce Connption Navy Strength Gin
- ¾ ounce Campari
- ¼ ounce Damn Fine coffee liqueur
- 1 ounce sweet vermouth
- Garnish:** Lemon peel

Combine all ingredients in a cocktail tin filled with ice. Stir to chill. Strain into old fashioned glass with ice. Garnish with lemon peel.



Marlene Holmes

MILAM & GREENE WHISKEY
Texas

This personality-rich boutique distillery, established in 2018 in Blanco, Texas, won the lottery when Marlene Holmes came aboard as master distiller. After 30 years at Jim Beam, often working directly with master distiller Booker Noe, the veteran distiller was ready for a change. And she's found it at Milam & Greene Whiskey, where the intimate size offers a breath of fresh air, allowing her to be experimental and in the weeds at every stage—aging, blending, batching, proofing, sourcing, and finishing.

Holmes joins founder Marsha Milam and CEO and master blender Heather Greene to form the dynamic leadership team at Milam & Greene. In fact, two-thirds of the independent company is made up of women. All told, though young, the distillery draws from more than 60 years of experience.

Far from the large-scale, tech-heavy

processes necessary in big global brands, Holmes relies on the distillery's own mash bill and a secret yeast recipe to produce the award-winning liquor, which is made using the same copper pot-stills and classic column stills that are found in both the wild beauty of Texas Hill Country and in Holmes's native Kentucky.

In collaboration with Greene, who was named 2023 Blender of the Year, Holmes brings gorgeous whiskey to life. Among them is the creamy, rich Single Barrel and the ruby-hued 94-proof Straight Rye Whiskey Finished in Port Wine Casks. The latter was a double-gold winner in 2020 at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition, and in 2021 captured top prize at the Craft Spirits Awards. In addition, the Wildlife Collection Series, which just added Mockingbird Single Barrel Bourbon,



offers limited editions honoring Texas wildlife.

Though Holmes shares a cocktail recipe using one of her favorite whiskeys, she does enjoy sipping whiskey neat. "I've tasted bourbon for years in the process of making it—in its raw, first-run green form to white dog before entering the barrel to tasting it regularly as it ages. I enjoy an evening sitting back with a good magazine sipping on that neat taste we've so delicately nurtured and watched for the right time to take to the bottle," she explains. "But when I go out with friends or to dinner, I want to experience the mixology using a good bourbon like ours. And it does make a difference." milamandgreenewhiskey.com

GREAT BEAR OLD FASHIONED

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

- 2 ounces Milam & Greene Port Finished Rye
- ¼ ounce simple syrup
- 5-6 dashes Hellfire bitters
- Garnish:** Luxardo cherry and orange peel

Add ingredients to a rocks glass, add large ice cube or sphere, and stir well. Garnish with Luxardo cherry, then spritz a slice of orange peel and drop in the glass.

C/O MILAM & GREENE WHISKEY. OPPOSITE: C/O DURHAM DISTILLERY