



Allowing distilleries to serve cocktails on-site is beneficial for people in the booze business, including Lisa Simpson, above, of Liberty Distillery. JENELLE SCHNEIDER PHOTOS/PNG

DISTILLING the essence of CRAFT

British Columbians' love of local food and drink helps fuel small-batch distillery boom

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When it comes to handcrafted booze, B.C. is worth toasting.

The craft beer industry now boasts around 80 breweries, with experts predicting 20 or so new companies will open in 2014 alone.

Nipping, or better yet sipping, at its hoppy heels is the small-batch distillery business.

Across the province, handcrafted vodka, gin and other specialty spirits are helping to quench British Columbians' increasing thirst for more local products. Craft distilling in B.C. refers to products that use 100 per cent B.C. agricultural inputs and are fermented and distilled on site.

There are now 18 distilleries turning out signature spirits to a welcoming crowd of cocktail lovers. B.C.'s

oldest operating small-batch distiller is Okanagan Spirits in Vernon and Kelowna, which began in 2003 — but most of these booze businesses began just in the last year or so.

"I think people are really ready for it," said Lisa Simpson, director of operations and co-founder of Liberty Distillery on Granville Island.

"It's been a long time coming and I think the craft brewing industry has really helped lay the foundation for the positive response we are getting. People are educated and into the local movement and are becoming a lot more conscientious about what they are drinking and eating and who they are supporting."

That sentiment is echoed just across False Creek at the family-run Long

Table Distillery on Hornby Street.

"When we sell things that are produced here instead of other parts of the world we support local economies and I think people really buy into that concept and they like it," said Long Table owner/distiller Charles Tremewen, whose products are now in more than 80 government liquor stores as well as in private outlets.

"For us that's something that we really promote. That is part of our three mandates: Handcrafted, small batch and local. That's who we are."

Adding to the allure of this new alcohol business is the "come by and see us" attitude. As part of a broader update of the province's outdated liquor laws, recent changes in reg-

ulations have allowed distillers to expand their tasting rooms into lounges where they can serve cocktails made from their own products to up to 35 people.

"They are totally enamoured with the concept," said Tremewen, whose Friday gin-and-tonic nights starring Long Table's London-style dry gin are very popular with the after-work crowd.

Over at Odd Society Spirits, the local aspect seems to be an even more intimate affair as the distillery has fully embraced the East Vancouver neighbourhood in which it operates.

"Our neighbourhood has gone crazy," said Gordon Glanz, co-owner and co-distiller at Odd Society with Joshua Beach.