

# Spirited effort

The first new distillery in urban Vancouver in 40 years cuts through the red tape and trailblazes a promising new path

By Neal McLennan

## The challenge

After a 2010 visit to craft-distilling-crazy Portland, Ore., product development consultant Charles Tremewen and his wife, Rita, became convinced that his hometown of Vancouver needed its very own urban distillery. The problem was that such a business hadn't existed in the city for more than 40 years, and finding a location in pricey Vancouver and then getting permission to install a still was going to be tricky in the bureaucracy-heavy jurisdiction.

The difficulty with being the trailblazer was that few people at the three levels of government he had to deal with had much experience in what he was proposing. Key throughout was building a level of trust between Tremewen and the governing bodies that are designed to protect citizens from the potential evils of liquor consumption.

## The strategy

The Tremewens had patience, patience and then more patience. When they started Long Table Distillery, they assumed the entire procedure would take 18 months. It took three years.

Perhaps the easiest to deal with was the federal government, which simply wanted to inspect and bond the pricey German-made still to ensure that appropriate tax was collected. The city was concerned that any working still had the unlikely but theoretical potential to go boom, so Tremewen was confronted with a difficult zoning designation that required rezoning applications, public consultations, seismic upgrades and a litany of development permits.

But it was the province of British Columbia that held the key to the operation: not only does it regulate liquor production, but it also controls liquor distribution – the former key to getting the distillery up and running, and the latter key to being able to make it profitable. The production aspect was straightforward: show them you're trustworthy by passing a background check, and prove that you're in compliance with the relevant municipal

regulations. But the distribution was trickier.

Key to the Tremewens' business plan was to have a modern tasting room in the distillery, located streetside. Patrons, Charles imagined, would belly up to a huge slab of redwood (the Long Table, which gives the company its name) to sample the liquid wares before buying a bottle or two. But under B.C.'s then-laws, the Tremewens would have had to distill and bottle the spirit and send it to the provincial warehouse, then buy it back and return it to the distillery, to sample and vend it 15 feet from where its journey started. Thankfully, the laws were changed before Long Table opened its doors.

Another key strategy was getting the final product into provincial liquor stores, where competition is fierce for shelf space. In their meeting with the buyer, the Tremewens focused on the importance of locally produced spirits being available in B.C., emphasized the unique attributes of their product and assured that they could produce the spirits in an adequate quantity to satisfy stores requirements. They left with the only answer their business plan allowed: a yes.



*When they started Long Table Distillery, they assumed the entire procedure would take 18 months. It took three years.*

## The results

In February 2013, Long Table Distillery opened at the foot of Vancouver's Hornby Street, with a view of False Creek and Granville Island. Its first summer saw a lot of excitement and foot traffic and a solid book of reservations for custom tastings. The company's first two offerings, London Dry Gin and Texada Vodka strained through limestone brought over from Texada Island, part of the Northern Gulf Islands, have taken their places beside major brands at provincial liquor stores and are selling well.

## The future

More products will be offered, including some cask-aged spirits and some interesting seasonal offerings like limoncello liqueur. And despite the new challenges (including a number of other small distilleries soon to open in the city), the Tremewens are confident that the continued evolution of the province's liquor regulations will enable them to increase profitability. "When it comes down to it, we're just a small business like any other," says Charles. With a product that goes better with olives. **UP**

