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TRUTH IN ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT:

WHISTLEPIG
STRAIGHT RYE
WHISKEY

BOTTLED IN VERMONT, YES
BUT
MADE IN CANADA
BY CANADIANS
USING GRAIN GROWN IN CANADA



WhistlePig Farms Is Not A Distillery

November 13, 2013

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Please note: This article will be updated based on new information that current versions of WhistlePig come from whisky that has been re-gauged into other barrels and aged for four additional years in Vermont. It's fair to say they have added new dimensions through on-site maturation. Their licence to distil is being held up by objections from a neighbour but that seems very likely to pass soon. In the mean time they are growing their own rye on 1200 acres of farm, and having others distil it so they can learn more about it and hit the ground running when they receive permission to distil it. My stance has softened greatly given that current versions of WhistlePig are stepping stones to Vermont-distilled rye whisky made from Vermont-grown rye grain.

There are two kinds of distillers: Those who distill whisky, and those who buy whisky. Usually, bottlers make no pretenses about selling whisky made by others. However, there are some who pretend to make whisky and divert attention from the reality through marketing campaigns.

A smartly dressed young man was pouring WhistlePig rye at Whisky Live recently. I've been a fan of WhistlePig from the day in 2010 when it was released. Sure, I have several bottles at home but I couldn't pass up the opportunity for another wee sip. I savoured my sample, revisiting the big hearty full-bodied all-rye. Other than Masterson's, it's probably the best rye whisky on the market anywhere, today. The only puzzle? Why do the people who bottle WhistlePig insist on

pretending that it's American whisky when it isn't?

WhistlePig is distilled in Canada, from 100% Canadian rye grain, then matured and blended in Canada. Dave Pickerell, the distiller they hired to find a source of good rye whisky has gone on record saying that Canada makes the best rye whisky in the world. And one blind tasting competition after another confirms Pickerell's opinion. So, why are the bottlers of WhistlePig so evasive when asked about its origins?

"It's made in Vermont," the young man informs me.

"Actually it's made in Canada," I respond, helpfully. He's young, perhaps he doesn't know.

"Yes but, we grow our own rye."

"Yes but you haven't been around long enough to turn it into 10-year-old whisky."

"Yes but we send the rye to Canada."

A deliberate non sequitur – I roll my eyes.

"We're building our own distillery next year."

Super. So now we know that until 2024, at least, they will not have any home-distilled 10-year-old rye ready for bottling.

"Your latest release is 11 years old, right?"

"Yeah but we're pouring the 10 tonight."

"Great, I love it, can I have a taste?"

In a recent issue of [The Bourbon Country Reader](#), Chuck Cowdery talks about the phenomenon of distilleries that consist of little else but a bottling machine and labeler. They buy other people's whisky and pretend it's their own. "This they [do] with varying degrees of guile," Cowdery tells us. And, most importantly, "No one has converted their products from sourced to home made. No one."

As I said, I have been a fan of WhistlePig from day 1. Unfortunately the guile with which this wonderful whisky is marketed also began on day 1. Rather than tell us that WhistlePig is sourced whisky, the marketing folks invented a new evasive term. They called their whisky "found" as if somehow it had been lost. Sorry boys, distillers in Canada keep track of every barrel of whisky they make, and every drop of whisky in each barrel. If they don't, government excise officers will close them down. As romantic as the image might be, there are no lost barrels of whisky waiting to be found.

According to their website, "WhistlePig was released in the summer of 2010 to great critical acclaim, earning 96 points from Wine Enthusiast, their highest rating ever for a rye whiskey, a "highest recommendation" from Spirits Journal, as well as accolades from The Wall Street Journal, GQ, Forbes, Maxim, Imbibe Magazine, and many others."

While we are delighted that Wine Enthusiast seems to agree with Dave Pickerell, that Canada makes the best rye whisky in the world, we wonder what the editors of "Wine Enthusiast, Spirits Journal, The Wall Street Journal, GQ, Forbes, Maxim, Imbibe Magazine and many others" would think if they knew that the bottlers of WhistlePig had duped them into believing they were publishing stories about American whisky? Do they know yet that the whisky they wax rhapsodic about is actually 100% Canadian? I doubt it.

So let's be clear. WhistlePig is wonderful whisky. It wins one award after another. Yes, it is bottled in Vermont, but it is distilled in Canada by Canadians, from Canadian rye grain, then matured and blended in Canada by Canadians before being shipped in bulk to Vermont for bottling. Great whisky? Yes! American straight rye? Absolutely NOT.

The folks at WhistlePig have made bold statements about growing their own organic rye and distilling it into whisky. Well, there's a reason why Canada makes the very best rye whisky. Pickerell himself warns that whisky made from Vermont-grown rye will never match that which they purchase from Canada, but the people who run the farm are insistent.

Fear not, with less than 100 acres of arable land WhistlePig farms will never produce more than a tiny portion of its grain requirements anyway. Add to that their idea of growing "organic" rye and their expected production will become even more inadequate. But the biggest impediment is this: The best whisky rye grows on marginal land and in harshly cold

climates. Sorry WhistlePig, Vermont's climate is just too pleasant to grow the spicy rye needed to make whisky as good as that you have been buying in Canada.

Oh, and truth in labeling? It's there in tiny letters on the back.

[More information about WhistlePig here.](#)

Comments

30 Responses to “WhistlePig Farms Is Not A Distillery”

1. [jf pilon](#):

May 7, 2013 at 7:43 pm

Exactly! Well put, Davin. That answers my question from last Sunday's Tweet Tasting (#DavinTT).

[Reply](#)

2. [Brian](#):

May 7, 2013 at 8:17 pm

Is there really a marketing advantage to calling yourself American, despite the facts?

Why can't Whistlepig tell the whole story and explain that they go out and find wonderful whisky and you can trust their judgement that they've put together a solid product?

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3. [Ernie Ayres](#):

May 7, 2013 at 8:27 pm

I agree that even though the whiskey is good, just don't lie (or fudge) about the source. Of all of the sourced whiskey companies I've talked with, Chattanooga Whiskey <http://www.chattanoogawhiskey.com/> was the only brand to say upfront, “Hey, we source our whiskey for now.” They've done quite a bit to change the laws in Tennessee so a distillery could be opened in Chattanooga. They've got a building, a huge fan base and great people working for them. They will succeed, I believe, as the first sourced whiskey to turn 'legit'. Here's a link to my review of the whiskey and an interview with Joe Ledbetter, owner of Chattanooga Whiskey. <http://whiskeynose.com/chattanooga-whiskey-interview-review/>

Thanks for bringing up this touchy topic that most people want to walk around. Here a link to my review of Whistle Pig's 100/00. <http://whiskeynose.com/whistlepig-100-straight-rye-whiskey-review/> Keep in mind that I didn't realize the depth of their deception at the time.

[Reply](#)

o [Davin](#):

May 7, 2013 at 9:20 pm

Hi Ernie,

Thanks for chiming in and for including those links. In Canada a few craft distilleries have gone from sourced to home-distilled whisky successfully. The difference is that they started distilling first then added sourced whisky while they wait for their own whisky to mature. I'll be watching Chattanooga with interest.

[Reply](#)

o [Brian](#):

May 8, 2013 at 2:41 am

Pendleton also manage to put it right on the label: “Canadian Rye Whisky”

It's pretty small font, but it's at least something.

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