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# Let It Shine

Short Mountain Distillery revives traditional Tennessee distilling brilliantly

BY CHUCK RAINEY • PHOTOS BY RON MANVILLE



Ben Kaufman, Billy Kaufman and Jimmy Simpson

UNCLE DAVE MACON UNDERSTOOD THE VALUE OF SHORT Mountain Shine when he sang about it on the stage of the *Grand Ole Opry's* television debut in 1939. Today, Billy Kaufman is taking it a few steps further with the opening of Short Mountain Distillery. Stillhouse No. 1 began tastings, tours and distribution of the first legal moonshine to hit Tennessean's lips on March 24. Kaufman's goal is to preserve local heritage through community involvement, while supporting sustainable local farming and preserving natural resources. Above all, Kaufman is following in his family's tradition of living the "Golden Rule."

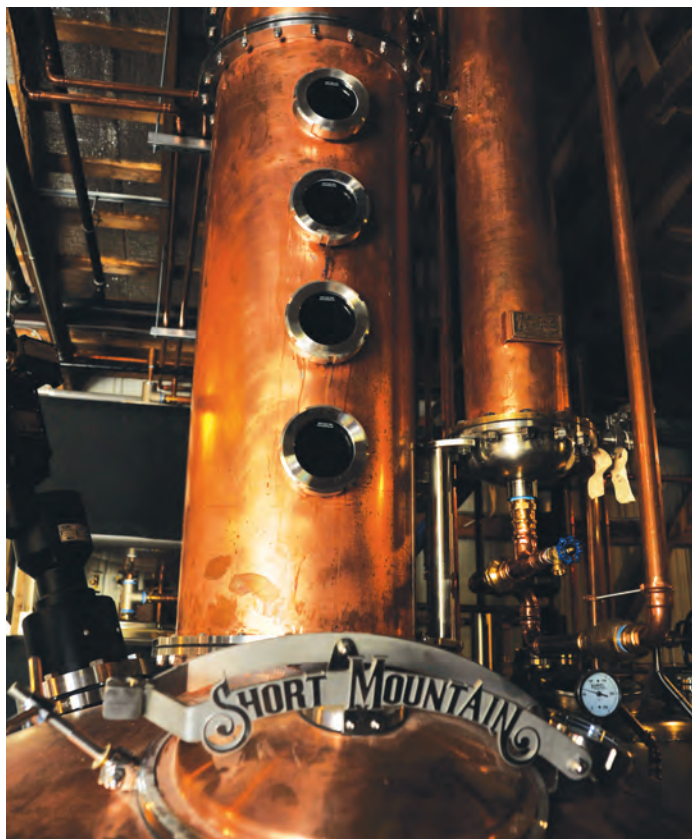
Stated many ways since the beginning of recorded time, the "Golden Rule," or ethic of reciprocity, is simply to treat others as you would like to be treated. Kaufman's 300 acre organic farm and the adjoining Short Mountain Distillery exemplify the concept in every possible way. Kaufman was working hand-in-hand with an expert from North Carolina during my visit. He was thigh deep in the cave spring waters wearing nothing but shorts and a smile as they applied an organic bentonite clay patch to the walls to naturally control the flow of water. A small amount of natural spring water is used in each batch of Short Mountain Shine, but great care is taken not to interfere with the downstream environment.

Authentic moonshiner Jimmy Simpson and fellow shiners Ricky Estes and Ronald Lawson were tending five batches of moonshine in the shiner's shack and using every bit of their combined 100 years of experience to ensure a quality product they could be proud of sending down the mountain. The final step in the process of making legal moonshine is entrusted to Master Distiller Josh Smotherman. His expertise is required to make the spirit conform to federal requirements without losing the essence of true Cannon County shine.

"Our process is not a white whiskey," explains Christian Grantham, COO. The final product is 105 proof moonshine, made like it has been for 150 years on Short Mountain. With a grain bill of mostly sugar, stone-milled corn and the family recipe of Jimmy Simpson, this is the real deal.

Stillhouse No. 1 is a converted pole barn renovated to fulfill the needs of a distillery. All of the labor, equipment, and materials for the endeavor were procured locally and only after all options were exhausted did Kaufmann seek products from outside the county and then the state. All major pieces of the distillery were manufactured in the United States by U.S. owned companies.

Middle Tennessee will be the first area to receive shipments from Short Mountain Distillery via Best Brands. Each bottle prominently displays the Golden Rule Coin, harkening back to the Kaufman's great-grandfather, who brought the prosperous Samsonite Company and its "Golden Rule" philosophy of business to Middle Tennessee. Each coin will be of limited printing and will have artwork on one side and the Golden Rule on the





other. These coins are expected to become collectors' items and will hopefully promote the ethic of reciprocity in all aspects of the bearer's life. No branding is displayed on the coin as it is meant to be given to others to impart the philosophy.

The antique-shop laden drive through Cannon County alone is reason enough to visit Short Mountain. Nostalgia grips you throughout the short drive and having an authentic taste of previously forbidden moonshine at the end of the trail is ample motivation. Prior to Prohibition, the county was home to 18 legal distilleries that were the mainstay for local agriculture. Breathing life back into that industry is a goal of the Short Mountain Distillery. Grains will come from local farms and Kaufman intends to coach these producers on sustainable farming techniques and organic methods.

Even after building the first of two still-houses, a parking lot for 60 cars and a path to lead you through a piece of local history, the land is relatively undisturbed. "Much of the work is done by hand to lessen the environmental impact," explains Grantham.

Long before you arrive on site, the fresh air and gorgeous scenery begin to take hold and cast away the cares of daily drudgery, taking you back to a simpler time. Genuine handshakes, friendly smiles and a piece of Tennessee tradition await you at Short Mountain Distillery. Picnic tables are scattered about the property in welcoming fashion. Bring a lunch, some cards, a checker board and stay awhile. You are welcome.

*Short Mountain Distillery, 119 Mountain Spirits Lane, Woodbury, facebook.com/ShortMountain and shortmountaindistillery.com*

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