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a dose of hops, which contributes bitterness. Wash traditionally lacks hops, meaning it's a raw ingredient. Translation: You do not want to drink un-hopped wash.

Another crucial distinction is that distilleries are concerned about starch conversion — unlocking the sugar in grains to create the most alcohol possible. Contrasting that, craft brewers use the available grain palette, not caring that darker-roasted grains offer fewer fermentable sugars. It's all a tradeoff for flavor. This means that whiskey and bourbon require a slumber in charred oak barrels to transform the rough-edged white dog into a smooth sipping spirit.

But in recent years, brewers have begun pulling double duty as distillers, and distillers have begun relying on brewers' tricks of the trade. For example, New Holland Brewing (Holland, MI) offers a line of beer-inspired *brewers whiskeys*, and Kentucky's *Corsair* brews imperial stouts that are distilled and run through a hop-stuffed distillation column. On the other hand, California's Charbay Winery & Distillery distills Bear Republic's bottle-ready Racer 5 IPA, while Japan's Kiuchi Brewery turns its aromatic Hitachino Nest White Ale into Kiuchi No Shizuku. Here are five of our favorite spirits blurring the line between beer and booze. What are yours?

St. George Spirits

Single Malt Whiskey

Sierra Nevada supplies the Bay Area's *St. George* with a smoky, caramel-licked ale, which is distilled down and aged in a mixture of bourbon, port, French oak and sherry casks. The blended result is beautifully smooth and fruity, featuring notes of nuts, vanilla and chocolate.

Ranger Creek Brewing & Distilling

.36 Texas Bourbon Whiskey

Situated in San Antonio, the self-proclaimed "brauettillam"

Take our advice here. Also, eat a salad before.

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Situated in San Antonio, the self-proclaimed "brewstillery" has devised a nontraditional Texas-style bourbon made with a measure of rye. While the big-barrel release is still aging, Ranger Creek has released this bold, small-barrel version with a spicy bite and sweet flavors of caramel and maple syrup.

New Holland Artisan Spirits

Brewers' Whiskey Double Down Barley

The Michigan spirits makers use 100 percent two-row barley (the preferred brewing grain) to concoct this small-batch delight that's double distilled, then sent into heavily charred American oak. There's a nose of fresh, woody oak and rich flavors that dart from toffee to dark fruits.

Charbay Winery & Distillery

Doubled & Twisted Light Whiskey

One of our favorite bitter beers is Bear Republic's Racer 5 IPA, a citrusy, pine-laced pleasure usually at home in our fridge. So imagine our excitement when Charbay used its as the base for this unaged whiskey chockfull of green, herbal notes and a sweetly floral complexity.

Kiuchi Brewery

Kiuchi No Shizuku

Kiuchi's Hitachino Nest White Ale is a killer witbier spiced with coriander, orange peel, nutmeg and even orange juice. Distilled and aged in oak, Kiuchi No Shizuku (its name means *first drip from the distillation kettle*) calls to mind coriander and citrus, with a sweet, slightly woody finish.

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Lately, these industries have intermarried as brewers, armed with resources and beer-making expertise, have begun to open spirits operations. "The future is to build a brewery that doubles as a distillery," says Bill Owens, 73, president of the American Distilling Institute. "One day you're kegging beer, and the next you're brewing wash for whiskey. That synchronicity appealed to Zac Triemert, 37, president and cofounder of La Vista, Nebraska's Lucy Bucket Brewing and Stillas Distillery. In the early 2000s, while brewing beer at Omaha's Upstream, Triemert developed an affinity for whiskey. Discovering that it's basically distilled beer "sent me on a path," he recalls. He moved to Scotland to earn his master's degree in brewing and distilling at Edinburgh's Heriot-Watt University. He returned to Nebraska in 2006 with his sights set on founding a combo brewery-distillery, but quickly discovered craft distilling was illegal in Nebraska.

Undeterred, Triemert penned a craft-distilling bill that Nebraska's legislature approved. Roadblocks removed, he quickly launched Lucy Bucket, releasing The Prohibition Lager in November 2008. Getting Stillas—Gaelic for happiness—going proved tricky. Triemert needed to navigate income government regulations, including one requiring breweries and distilleries to be in different buildings or divided by a wall. (His solution was a 12-foot ball chain link fence separating the businesses.) A year after his first beer, Triemert debuted his inaugural Stillas product, Joss Vodka, brewed with Nebraska wheat. The Cuban-style rum Chava should appear by year's end, but he's waiting till 2013 to release his passion, an American-style single malt whiskey. "We have access to specialty malts to add more dimensions, or what I call knobs, to the whiskey," Triemert says. "We try to turn every knob from our ingredients, to the wood we use, to how we make our cut and how long we mature our spirits, to create a one-of-a-kind whiskey."

Lucy Bucket isn't navigating the spirits world alone. At its 18,000-sq-ft distillery in Troutdale, Oregon, brewpub chain MadMenamins uses its unhopped Hammhead Ale to fashion Hoghead Whiskey, while the Ranger Creek Brewing & Distilling "brewdistillery" in San Antonio, Texas, makes an as-yet-unreleased Texas bourbon crafted with rye. At its Portland pub, Oregon's Rogue Ales distills the Hazelnut Spice and Dark Rums. Similarly, Brett VanderKamp, president of New Holland Brewing, wanted to create an interpretation of rum from the early colonial days of America. "I wanted to make a nice rum in the Great Lakes region," explains VanderKamp, 38, whose brewer focuses on bold beers such as El More Ocho Mexican Spiced Ale and oak-aged Dragon's Milk Ale. He launched New Holland Artisan Spirits in March 2005.

"We had years of experience in mashing and fermentation," VanderKamp says. "Very effectively, we're able to get the wash to the distillery." New Holland's portfolio includes the aromatic Knickerbocker Gin, the Freshwater Rum series and spirits inspired by brewing. "We said, 'Let's take 50 gallons of white dog, throw hops in there and see what happens,'" VanderKamp recalls of the genesis of Hatter Royale Hoppula, an unaged whiskey spiced with Centennial hops (like New Holland's Ragtop Mad Hatter IPA). The experiment boasts floral, citrus aromatics that recall legals, so it's only fitting that "it makes a hell of a margarita," VanderKamp says. "It's a direct link to brewing," as is his Brewer's Whiskey line. The limited releases have included the Double Down Barley, Watkey Rye and the Malthouse, which contains six varieties of barley. "We see the natural extension of whiskey coming out of a brewery," he says. "It's a nice way to take the best of both worlds."

Sent Out for the Wash
While brewing wash can help distillers stand out, many lack the space, equipment or skills to make beer. In lieu of learning or installing costly infrastructure, many distilleries contract breweries to create their whiskey base, a relationship that ensures a high-quality ingredient. "I met people, 'hell a brewer. Those guys know how to make wash,'" A.C.'s Owens says. When Denver's Stranahan's Colorado Whiskey launched in 2004, it sourced wash from Flying Dog Brewery, then Oskar Blues. Washington's Ellensburg Distillery produces Gold Buckle whiskey with wash cooked by neighboring Iron Horse Brewery. And though Sierra Nevada Brewing supplies a smoky wash for California-based St. George Spirits' whiskey, master distiller Lance Winters created the recipe. Credit his brewing savvy.

While working at a Bay Area brewpub in the mid-'90s, Winters, 46, brought home beer to distill on the copper still concealed in his garage. "They were making really good spirits, but I had no idea why," Winters recalls. Eager to learn more, and to transition into distilling, he sought out St. George owner Jürg Rupp. Winters' résumé—a whiskey sample—named him a month-long tryout that quickly became permanent. Winters' brewing knowledge proved invaluable when he formulated the wash for his Single Malt Whiskey. "Having been a brewer gives me a broader palette and access to different aroma and flavor profiles," Winters says. Elementally, distillers are concerned about starch conversion—unlocking grains' sugars to create the most alcohol possible. Contrasting that, craft brewers create flavorful beers with any available grain, not caring that, say, rye-roasted grains offer few fermentable sugars. "As a brewer, you trade off efficiency for flavor," he explains.

He distilled 18 different beers, pinpointing preferred flavor components, then wrote a recipe for Sierra Nevada. "By starting with a brewer's background and a diverse range of grains, you have the potential to make an amazing whiskey," Winters says.

Distill the One
One of bourbon and whiskey's defining flavors is wood. Over the years, distillates aging in charred casks develop notes of lush vanilla, pepper spices and, above all, oak. Although all-american oak can easily differentiate, say, sweet wheated bourbons such as Maker's Mark and a spicy Rittenhouse Rye, these spirits share a baseline barrel-aged profile. "I'm sick of oak-casked whiskey," says Charbay's Karakasovic. "What's important is not the barrel, it's what's in the barrel." He and other distillers are abandoning the time-honored traditions of Tennessee and Kentucky and taking cues from craft brewing.

Since unveiling his plainer-based spirit dubbed, simply, Whiskey, Karakasovic has continued dabbling with beer. In 2008 he released Whiskey & Beer (aged for six years in American oak and four years in stainless steel), and now distills Bear Republic Brewery's hoppy Ripper IPA. "I don't need to set up a brewery when I have Bear Republic 20 minutes away," he says. Tanker trucks transport Bear Republic's piney IPA to Charbay, where it becomes Doubled & Twisted Light Whiskey—so-called because the liquor coming off the still lands on steel like a chain. ("Light whiskey" is a substitute for "white dog," a term for unaged whiskey that Karakasovic detests.) Aged in barrels for one day to appease government regulations, O&T drinks truly and floral, with a greenness familiar to any hop head. "People by Doubled & Twisted for the first time and say, 'Oh my God, it tastes like the beer, but it's whiskey,'" Karakasovic says.



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Though the debut DAT was basically unaged, future releases will sleep in neutral, reused oak casks and stainless steel for 17-24 months, six years and 12 years. "When you barrel-age distiller's beer for more than 12 years, it turns into one big pile of oak extract," he says. "I believe my whiskey can handle the 12 years of aging and not turn into oak extract. The oak meshes with the whiskey and doesn't become the dominant top note." Not content to work with just one beer, Karakasovic has started distilling the Bear Republic's Big Bear Black Stout too. "It uses six different grains, two different adjuncts and two different hops," he says. "How many distiller's beers can say that?"

Not many, but the distilled-beer category is rapidly growing. Germany's G. Schneider & Sohn has its banana-noted Schneider Aventinus wizenbock distilled into Doppel Aventinus by the nearby Schramm distillery. Fellow German brewery Uerige distills its strong brown ales Sticke and Doppelsticke, respectively, into Sticum and Sticum Plus. Japan's Kiuchi Brewery turns Hitachino Nest White Ale into Kiuchi No Shizuku. Yet few spirits manufacturers have embraced craft beer quite like Derek Bell, the owner and distiller of Corsair Artisan Distillery in Knoxville. "When you look at the palette the distilling world uses, the palette typically consist of corn, rye, wheat and malted barley," explains Bell, 38, a former homebrewer. "Contrast that to craft brewing, where brewers use dozens of malts and adjuncts. With distilling, I think like a brewer. The better the ingredients you put into the whiskey, the better it will be."

This sparked many of Bell's genre-blurring distillates. His Wormwood Vlt started as a Belgian witbier spiced with orange peel and coriander, before Bell added wormwood, a traditional absinthe ingredient. A pumpkin beer he brewed every fall inspired his Pumpkin Spice Moonshine, one of several spirits that, echoing breweries, will be released seasonally. The Rye and Hopped Whiskey is a potent Russian imperial stout with a heady, hoppy nose and cocoa component, bitterness disappears during distillation. "Hops make this a very different whiskey, which appeals to craft beer drinkers," says Bell, who just released a collection of his official recipes in 40 Whiskeys. In the book, Bell is careful to point out that home distilling is illegal, one of many challenges facing the budding field.

"It's probably easier to open a nuclear reactor than a small distillery," AC's Owens says of the maze of permits and regulations. Time is another major concern, since barrel-aging whiskey is a years-long endeavor. "Sharing that with your bank becomes, 'You want to do what? And you're waiting how long before this product comes out?'" says New Holland's VanderKamp, whose Zappelin Blend whiskey rests for at least three years in oak. "Yet from off the shelf, many beer-based whiskeys are more flavorful than their only competition. Aging is great, Corsair's Bell says, because barrels will fix some minor problems, "but sometimes you lose the flavors that you've worked so hard to make unique." This can be a tough sell to consumers conditioned to see a spirit's age as a measure of quality. Education is a struggle, but it's a battle that brewers are used to fighting.

"I love that we can help shift the idea of what whiskey can be," VanderKamp says. "Maybe that's crazy, but years ago people said the same thing about craft beer."

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