

Synthesized Spirits

Local foragers and farmers provide the vital ingredients used in this Elk Rapids distillery's signature cocktails

By Dianna Stampfler

The owners of Ethanoløzy launched their small distillery in Elk Rapids with a keen understanding of how to achieve success in Michigan's competitive craft beverage industry.

Nick and Geri Lefebvre, the distillery's husband-and-wife entrepreneurs, say creativity and uniqueness are the building blocks of their business near Traverse City. From day one, they've focused on creating a company that's deeply connected to the people and the land of northern Michigan, while producing stellar spirits and artistic cocktails that entice their tasting room guests to keep coming back for more.

The distillery's distinctive Ethanoløzy name comes from the words "ethanol" — the base molecule in beer, spirits, and wine (and also the intoxicating agent in all of those libations) — and "ology" — a study or branch of knowledge. "Simply put, we're the science and art of distillation," Nick says.

Nick manages the business side, from booking bands and marketing to serving on the board of the Michigan Craft Distillers Association, while Geri oversees production. At the onset, Geri dove head-first into learning the ancient alchemic art of distillation, craving a deep understanding of the process and seeking to blend that knowledge with her desire to create products with regional roots.

Drawing on the rich microclimate created by their proximity to Lake Michigan, Ethanoløzy believes that each farm, field, season, and barrel has terroir (the characteristic taste imparted to a product by the environment in which it is produced), which gives the finished product (the spir-

it and the cocktail) its own distinct flavor profile.

Local foragers and farmers provide the vital ingredients used in the signature cocktails that make up Ethanoløzy's seasonal menu. The Lefebvres say they've strived to develop and maintain relationships with their agricultural neighbors.

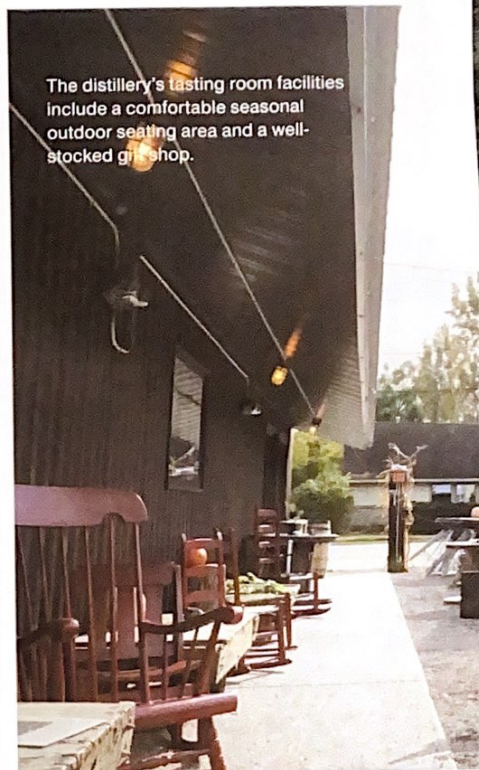
Ethanoløzy's small-batch spirits — vodka, gin, whiskey, and Mel® — are authentically crafted on a custom 500-liter distillation system. By focusing on just one product at a time, Geri is able to give her full attention to each batch.

Mel (Latin for honey) is Ethanoløzy's proprietary spirit, a single distillation made of 100 percent northern Michigan cherry blossom honey from Cherry Ke Farms in nearby Kewadin. Never filtered, this 80-proof spirit is lightly aged in new American white oak barrels, which results in its heavenly "Nectar of the Gods" taste.

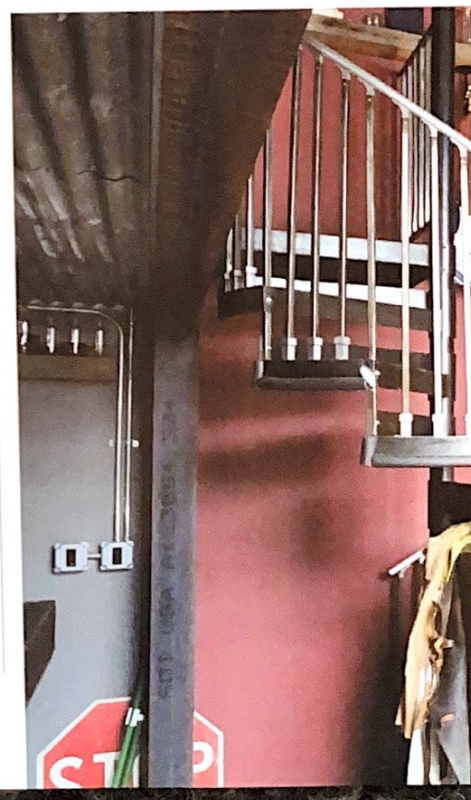
"The idea for Mel sprung from our commitment to local agricultural products," Nick says. "Naturally, we live in the largest production region of tart cherries in the world, and every single cherry is naturally pollinated by a honeybee. These factors led us down the path to producing a honey distillate, and it's been an integral part of showcasing our creativity, our commitment to local agriculture, and producing exemplary spirits.

"The spirit is like nothing else in the world and has beautiful notes of banana, caramel, and cherry blossom, with a viscous mouthfeel and a long, caramel finish," he adds. "The spirit's floral notes are similar to a Japanese single malt, with the sweetness of a bourbon, yet without the grain bite."

Private tastings of each of the com-



The distillery's tasting room facilities include a comfortable seasonal outdoor seating area and a well-stocked gift shop.





pany's spirits are available during guided and grain-to-glass distillery tours (limited to eight people), which are offered from 2-5 p.m. on Thursday, Friday, and Sunday.

For those who may be interested in learning more about the entire process of distilling spirits, Ethanology's immersive "Barrel by Name" program provides that opportunity. Geri leads the immersive program, which allows customers to learn every aspect of the spirit-creation process, from the selection of grain to its milling, mashing, fermentation, distillation, barrel-aging (complete with a brass plate adorned with the individual's name placed on the cask, chosen by the guest), and bottling. In the end, each guest receives a case (12 bottles) of spirits from their own barrel.

Ethanology's Spirit House tasting room is located just east of U.S.-31 in Elk Rapids. It's open Thursday through Sunday, year-round, with live music on Friday and Saturday nights. Winter visitors will find a new front bar area inside, as well as an encapsulated and heated outdoor Cocktail Courtyard with a clear acrylic roof, which gives the space a greenhouse vibe. The Yurt Village, with wood-burning stoves, blankets, and fun games, is available by reservation only.

"We visit Ethanology often and have property in Elk Rapids, so it's a place we stop by whenever we go north," says Allison Wong of Grand Rapids, who started going to the distillery when it opened in the early summer of 2017.

"It's a perfect Michigan setting with bonfires, wood pergolas, rustic décor, and even live music — exactly what we expect in northern Michigan," Wong adds. "The staff is top-notch and it's truly an experience watching these mixologists craft drinks from several unique ingredients that all come together for a delicious drink. We love taking friends and family there to experience it all." ~

PLAN IT!

Ethanology Spirit House & Distillery
ethanologydistillation.com

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