

## Featured Innovator: Van Brunt Distillery

To continue our Rye showcase this month, the Grains team sat down with Daric Schlesselman, half of the husband and wife team behind Van Brunt Distillery which opened its doors in 2012. Van Brunt produces whiskey under the New York State Farm Distilling license which requires that at least 75% of the ingredients be sourced from New York.

Daric started out as a homebrewer while working in television when he came across the story of a distillery on the back of a European liquor bottle that sparked his imagination and he began thinking about small batch distilling. Initially he sought to make eau de vie, distilled spirits made from fresh fruit like apples or cherries, but without your own orchard, the sheer amount of fruit needed seemed cost prohibitive. However, distilling whiskey wasn't exactly a compromise for Daric. As a beer drinker, his palate was accustomed to malted grain flavors. Because of the burgeoning craft distilling sector, making whiskey also allowed Van Brunt to work with local farmers. In Daric's mind, using local and traceable grain pushes against the commodification of grain as well as industrial distilling and he was looking to add ingredients that impart flavor instead of just increasing the amount of alcohol produced.

Daric also noted that, though rye whiskey's bold spicy flavor often causes people to reach for a bourbon instead, the category is not to be overlooked. "Rye whiskey is a fantastic cocktail ingredient. Making a Manhattan with rye creates a balance between the spiciness of the rye and the sweetness of vermouth that isn't there when you use a bourbon." New York also has a great climate for growing rye. "If you're invested in thinking and acting locally, rye whiskey is a great way to do that." In fact, prior to prohibition, rye whiskey was most common style of whiskey in the Northeast, but largely disappeared after 1930. The market in the United States has shrunk over time, from over 100 major rye whiskey varieties to essentially 3, but the wave of new craft distilling, supported by programs like [Empire Rye](#), have presented the opportunity to bring that diversity of flavor and terroir back into the United States' liquor cabinet.

