

Pat Scanlan and Mark Kleckner at Scanlan's potato farm at Chaparral Ranch in Woody Creek.

pat scanlan & mark kleckner

A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP THAT WILL LEAVE YOUR TASTE BUDS TINGLING BRINGS A HIGH-SPIRITED BUSINESS TO BASALT. BY "MALIBU" KELLY HAYES

As they sip beers and eat burgers at the Woody Creek Tavern, Pat Scanlan and Mark Kleckner look more like bootlegger bikers than businessmen. But beneath the black tees, tattoos, and day-old stubble are the entrepreneurs behind the most anticipated spirits distillery to hit Colorado. Scanlan and Kleckner have serious plans to shake up the world of premium liquor with their newly minted Woody Creek Distillers in the Basalt Design Center.

Their base of operations says it all. Clean, green, and ultraefficient, the distillery is an exquisite combination of tasting room, show place, and spirits factory. Designed by local firm Rowland+Broughton Architecture and Urban Design, the two buildings that once housed a furniture store now scream "contemporary Colorado." Beetle kill pine serves as siding, while environmentally friendly, faux-wood vinyl flooring, steel, and glass create a welcoming environment for tasters. The centerpiece is a series of German-made copper stills manufactured by Carl ("the Maybach of stills," says Kleckner) that sit behind glass walls, their pipes gleaming in the sunlight from clerestory windows that rim the roofline.

Woody Creek Distillers concept is attuned to the times. Take the best of local agricultural, combine it with Colorado Rocky Mountain water, use

top-of-the-line technology, and distill the finest spirits possible. Distilling is where micro brews were in the '80s, says Scanlan as he describes his inspiration to get into the business of high-end liquor. Sensing an opportunity, Kleckner researched the business, even serving an apprenticeship at Spokane Washington's respected Dry Fly Distilling, while Scanlan got his hands dirty, planting potatoes at his Woody Creek Ranch.

"Everything about potato vodka is painful. Painful and expensive," Pat explains with a shake of the head, referring to the crop of starchy Stobra potato varieties (native to Poland) he planted. After two years of testing different potato varieties, they finally got a quality crop that is the base of the distillery's first production of Woody Creek Colorado vodka.

Also in the works is a whiskey made from Olathe sweet corn, a gin to be infused with Rocky Mountain botanicals such as locally harvested juniper, and brandies and eau de vie from Colorado fruits. The plan is to expand production, cultivate a relationship with a distributor, and patiently grow the business as a "top high-end, small-batch distillery in America." At the tasting room, patrons can sample the spirits alone or in craft cocktails while learning about the art of distilling. Just be sure to wear a black tee. *Woody Creek Distillers, 60 Sunset Dr., 970-279-5110; woodycreekdistillers.com* **AP**