

Rice and Shine: BEDLAM VODKA

Bedlam Vodka is the result of a unique confluence of cultures: It's an American rice spirit with a distinctive Irish provenance.

Produced by Graybeard Distillery of Durham, NC, Bedlam, which launched in May, is one of the few products made from rice in a category dominated by potato, wheat, rye and corn. But don't confuse it with another, more prominent rice-based spirit: With an alcohol content of 40%, Bedlam is most certainly not saké, says Graybeard CEO Brandon Evans, noting that his vodka is made from long-grain white rice (as opposed to the varieties specifically used for the Japanese rice wine) and has a vastly different flavor profile.

The recipe, Evans explains, was developed by his head distiller's family in Ireland, who used rice to make a homemade spirit during the potato famine of the 1840s. "Through time, other vodkas being made—the wheats and—ryes overshadowed this particular recipe, and now we're trying to bring it back to the forefront and disrupt the industry," he says.

Key to that strategy is taste and drinkability. "Traditionally, vodka has been seen as 'odorless and tasteless,'" Evans notes. "We're trying to buck that trend and let people know that vodka doesn't have to claw its way down your throat. You can actually sip and enjoy a drink of vodka. It's okay if vodka has a body and nose to it."

Bedlam (SRP \$21.95) is currently available only in North Carolina but aims to expand regionally before scaling up to national distribution by year's end, targeting on- and off-premise retailers via an event-driven tasting campaign for media, bartenders, store owners and influencers. But even as the brand grows, Evans' focus is on keeping its historic Irish recipe intact. "One of the main ways we can do that is to remain grain-to-glass," he says. "There are some brands out there that have strayed from that, but no matter how large we scale, we will retain that ability." —*Carolyn Horwitz*



GRAYBEARD DISTILLERY

TASTING NOTES

Bedlam Vodka awakens the senses from the get-go. The nose is rich with mellow tropical fruit, from mango to banana. The palate allows for more neutral tones but feels warm and glides along at a giddyap. It may not cause bedlam on the palate, but it sure prepares you for more excitement. **93** — *Meridith May*