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Behind the Scenes of Rhine Hall Distillery in West Town

Submitted by Joe Piehl on Sat, 02/01/2014 - 10:45am

As a Wisconsinite, my first brandy Old Fashion was a rite of passage. Made with good brandy, Angostura bitters, a bit of muddled sugar, a few cherries and a splash of 7-Up, after that first sip family gatherings were never the same.

So when the Rhine Hall Distillery [1] started offering distillery tours, I had to stop by their West Town location and see what they?re up to.

Surrounded by a number of small start-ups in West Town, the distillery and tasting room are owned by the owned by the father-daughter team of Jennifer and Charlie Solberg and its roots date back to the 1970?s.

Before starting a business in Chicago, Charlie played professional hockey in Austria, at a rink named Rhine Hall, while raising a family just across the border in Germany. Surrounded by an abundance of fruit and knowledgeable friends, Charlie and his family learned how to make apple brand as a hobby.

Over time they developed a delicious recipe and brought that experience back to the Midwest. Again surrounded by fresh water and delicious fruit ? this time Michigan apples ? the Solbergs continued to make apple brandy.

Now their family operation is growing at a tremendous pace and there are no complaints to be heard.

While the distillery might not be geographically convenient for the Lincoln Park or Lakeview crowd, hearing the story of Rhine Hall from Charlie and Jennifer is worth the trip.

With side stories about 4am trips to Michigan for apples and how their original apple grinder used to be powered by a bike, you?ll leave with a better sense of who they are, their vision for the future and the unique challenges they faced up to this point.

It?s too early to say if apple brandy is going to be the city?s favorite spirit of 2014, but like an Old Fashion in Wisconsin, Chicago won?t be the same after you try Rhine Hall?s apple brandy.

Rhine Hall Distillery tours are offered on Saturday at 4:00pm for $7.

The tour is 30 minutes long and includes a tasting of their apple brandy. Cocktails are also available before and after the tour for $8 and a bottle of apple brandy to go is $28.99.

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Links:
[1] http://www.rhinehall.com/