

Backyard secret to distillery's success

For this master distiller, the ingredient underpinning his popular spirits was surprisingly close at hand.

When it comes to making gin, the hero ingredient is always juniper. You simply can't make gin without it. However, in the world of craft spirits, distillers will often add a signature botanical to give their brand its own distinct flavour.

For master distiller Hilton Izzett, his signature botanical – rough honey myrtle – was literally growing in his backyard.

Izzett runs HHH Spirits, a boutique gin and whisky distillery enviably located on 15 hectares in Western Australia's picturesque Bickley Valley.

Knowing he wanted his signature botanical to come from where he makes it, Izzett took a stroll through his undulating property. He wondered, "Which one of you is going to jump out and tell me that you're my botanical?"

The purple flowers of the melaleuca scabra, as the shrub is also known, caught his eye.

Izzett took a leaf and rubbed it between his



Hilton Izzett runs HHH Spirits, a boutique gin and whisky distillery located in Western Australia.

hands. "The rough honey myrtle had an aroma that was just interesting. It was subtle, and it was like honey. These botanists are smart people; they named things for good reason."

He took some back to the workshop, tinkered with it and was pleased with the result. "The flavour that came out of it was delicious."

Miss Myrtle Gin has not only become HHH Spirits' signature botanical, it's also fast become its best seller, taking the crown from Wax Lyrical Blue, the distiller's colour-changing gin featuring blue pea flower and Geraldton wax, another plant specific to the region.

While Izzett proudly uses these local botanicals, his spirits are available Australia-wide through the group's website. For those travelling west, dozens of hotels and retailers stock the range, which also includes KLC Gin, with kaffir lime leaf and cumquat, and the more savoury-sweet Wax Lyrical Gin, which can be enjoyed neat.

With Bickley Valley being a destination for food and drink lovers, distillery tours and tastings are also available. "I don't call it a cellar door, I call it a roller door," Izzett quips of the "humble" workshop where these gins, and (coming soon) whisky, are made.

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Hilton Izzett

Not only does Izzett make the spirits, he also makes the stills. Zimbabwe-born, he has a background in civil engineering, although he moved into construction disputes, including arbitration, which is what he was doing when he first arrived in Australia.

A car-jacking in South Africa had prompted him to move to Botswana but when a violent home invasion there left him hospitalised, "that was the incident that created the impetus to leave Africa," he recalls.

After spending four years full-time on a single arbitration case "it was enough to drive a man to drink", he says of finally taking the leap and realising his long-held dream of distilling in 2018.

Unable to find a manufacturer of copper stills, Izzett used his engineering skills and started making his own. Word got out and for the past three and a half years, he's also been flat out making gleaming custom copper distillation equipment for colleagues around the country, under HHH Distill.

"The HHH spirits, just like their copper stills, are produced with meticulous attention to detail and it is all a true labour of love," he says. "Variety is the spice of life and, by golly, I have variety."



From the academic, technical and practical aspects, the experimental fun of developing new recipes, and being part of Australia's booming craft distilling scene, life as a master distiller is as sweet as the scent of Izzett's signature honey myrtle. "I have the dream job now," he says.



*Distilled
in the hills*

HHH IS A BOUTIQUE GIN & WHISKY DISTILLERY SET IN THE BICKLEY VALLEY OF W.A.

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