



TASTER'S CLUB

Taconic Distillery: A True New York Spirit



New York's Hudson Valley isn't terribly far from New York City as the crow flies, but oh, what a difference those few dozen miles make. This fertile region is famous for its bucolic scenery, quaint villages, and, more recently, an incredible farm-to-table food culture that celebrates the best of New York's thriving agricultural community.

Whiskey, of course, is an agricultural product, albeit one that's lost some connection with its country roots. But [Taconic Distillery](#) in Stanfordville, New York, is one of a new wave of craft distilleries dedicated to reviving whiskey's early link with life on the farm.

Named for the Taconic Mountains, a ridge of the Appalachian Mountain range running along the eastern border of New York, Taconic Distillery is [a family affair](#), owned and operated by husband-and-wife team Paul and Carol Ann Coughlin. After living in nearby Connecticut for years and working in demanding office jobs, Paul and Carol Ann began thinking about a career change. "We just wanted to start a business," explains Carol Ann. The family already owned a 113-acre former cattle farm in the Hudson Valley, and when New York passed its Craft New York Act, they realized that distilling might be the answer.



The Craft New York Act is one of the most progressive pieces of distilling legislation in the United States, allowing distilleries to sell cocktails, offer tasting flights, sell retail bottles, sell at farmer's markets, and even sell beer and wine made in New York, as long as they use primarily New York state-grown ingredients in their products. [Taking effect in 2014](#), the Craft New York Act ushered in a new era of farm-to-glass distilling in New York, which now has the most distilleries of any other state.

Buying from local farmers just made sense to Paul and Carol Ann. "Farm to table restaurants are so popular in our area," says Carol Ann. "You can order a simple meal and the food is so delicious, because it's all fresh." If it works for restaurants, why wouldn't the same principles work for distilling?

The early days were modest. "We started first working out of our little barn," says Carol Ann, "and really selling door-to-door to bars and restaurants and liquor stores in Dutchess County." Their first product, Dutchess Private Reserve Bourbon, was an immediate hit, and Taconic soon found themselves outgrowing their 600-square foot production space. "It was elbow-to-elbow," laughs Carol Ann.

So Taconic decided to expand, constructing a new, much larger facility on the farm to house their production, aging whiskey, and a new tasting room with an expansive patio overlooking the Hudson Valley's gorgeous patchwork of farmland.

With more space to experiment, as well as a brand-new continuous column still built by [Vendome Copper & Brass Works](#) in Louisville, Kentucky, Taconic's product portfolio grew as well. They introduced a rye whiskey, paying homage to the classic whiskey styles of the Northeast, as well as a handful of more experimental limited-edition offerings, some of which are only available in the tasting room.

One particularly popular experiment, a bourbon whiskey finished in casks that previously held maple syrup, was so popular it went on to become a regular seasonal release, available during the cooler months.

The idea for the double barrel maple bourbon came about when the Coughlins were trying to figure out a secondary use for their bourbon barrels, which, by law, can only be used once to age bourbon. Once again, New York's agricultural traditions provided the answer. Maple syrup, produced throughout upstate New York by tapping sugar maple trees and evaporating the sap until it becomes thick and sweet, is delicious on its own, but even more delicious aged in a bourbon cask. The Coughlins partnered with a local maple producer to make a barrel-aged maple syrup, then gave that barrel a third life by finishing bourbon in it once more. "People really love it," says Carol Ann. "It's become an annual thing."



Inspired by the maple bourbon's success, Taconic has continued experimenting with cask finishing, including one project we were thrilled to share with club members this summer: a Cognac cask-finished bourbon. To make it, the Coughlins take three-and-a-half-year-old bourbon and fill it into used Cognac casks for another six months of maturation, adding a new dimension of flavor and color. "We've tried it with Cabernet barrels, too, which is also delicious," says Carol Ann.

Today, Taconic's come a long way from door-to-door sales. Their whiskeys are distributed in 14 states, with more on the way, and Carol Ann says visitors come from all over the world to visit their on-farm tasting room. "I always try to ask people where they came from, and I hear all different stories," she says. "It's really fun."

But despite the growth, Taconic is still keeping the focus close to home. "We still hand-bottle and hand-label everything," says Carol. "We buy all our grains as locally as we can, and employ local people." They've even enlisted their daughters, two of whom go to college in Washington, D.C., to represent Taconic whiskeys at events and festivals. Talk about a family business.

Taconic Distillery, 179 Bowen Road, Stanfordville, New York. 845-393-4583.
www.taconicdistillery.com. Open Saturday and Sunday afternoons, closed in January.