



For Media Inquiries:
Alexandra Sklansky
GATHER PR
Alexandra@gatherpr.com
516.428.7210

AMERICAN CRAFT SPIRITS ASSOCIATION ANNOUNCES 2017 CRAFT SPIRITS AWARDS

Recipients Selected from a Record-Breaking Pool of Entrants Across 39 States

NASHVILLE, TN (February 16, 2017) – The American Craft Spirits Association (ACSA) today announced the winners of its Fourth Annual Judging of Craft Spirits, who were honored during the Awards Dinner as part of the Fourth Annual ACSA Distillers Convention and Vendor Trade Show at the Renaissance Hotel in Nashville, Tenn. Winners were hand-selected among a record-breaking pool of more than 550 entrants – up more than 20 percent over last year.

During the event, which was generously sponsored by Republic National Distributing Company (RNDC), the nation's second-largest wholesale wine & spirits distributor, ACSA proudly bestowed the evening's ultimate honor, the Best in Show Award, to Long Road Distillers (MI) for their Long Road Aquavit. RNDC's Sly Cosmopoulous revealed the six 2017 Best in Class distinctions, the highest honor in each of the six judging categories, to a mix of both established, award-winning distilleries and younger newcomers. These winning distilleries were each presented with hand-carved barrelheads courtesy of Thousand Oaks Barrel Co.

In addition to a revised judging structure, ACSA also introduced a new award distinction: the ACSA Achievement Award, which honored Harry Kohlmann, Ph.D., of Park Street Imports in Miami, FL. Voted on by the Board of Directors, Kohlmann was chosen for displaying an untiring effort and unwavering dedication to helping promote the craft spirits industry through research, analysis, and creation of the Craft Spirits Data Project. Together with ACSA and the IWSR, he worked tirelessly to develop and launch this inaugural release of economic data for the craft spirits industry.

Earlier in the day, the 2017 ACSA Distillers Convention and Vendor Trade Show, which attracted close to 1,000 producers and suppliers, formally kicked off with a proclamation from Mayor Megan Barry and welcome remarks by Ted Townsend, Chief Operating Officer from the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development. Ken Grossman, Co-founder and Owner of Sierra Nevada Brewing Co. delivered the morning's keynote speech, which was followed by a Town Hall meeting.

Best Of Class Winners in each category included:

Whiskey: Sonoma County Distilling Company, Sonoma Straight Rye Whiskey Cask Strength, California

Gin: Tattersall Distilling, Tattersall Barreled Gin, Minnesota

Rum: Artisan Grain Distillery, Gold Rum, Iowa

Vodka & Grain Spirits: Du Nord Craft Spirits, Letoile Du Nord, Minnesota

Brandy: Huber's Starlight Distillery, Apple Brandy, Indiana

Specialty Spirits: Long Road Distillers, Long Road Aquavit, Michigan

This year, entries were submitted from 39 states across the country in six main categories: Whiskey, Gin, Rum, Vodka & Grain Spirits, Brandy, and Specialty Spirits. In addition to the Best of Class Distinctions, the judging panel awarded 20 Gold, 66 Silver, and 222 Bronze medals.

The complete list of winners will be available on the ACSA website, www.americancraftspirits.org.

About the Judging

The 4th Annual American Craft Spirits Competition, held in affiliation with Artisan Spirit Magazine, was judged on January 17 and 18 at Starlight Distillery in Borden, IN. Maggie Campbell, Privateer Rum (MA), served as Spirits Judging Chair, with Dan Farber of Osocalis Distillery (CA) and Ted Huber of Starlight Distillery (IN) as Co-Chairs. Spirits were judged by a panel of 31 judges, including Ashley Barnes, Steve Beal, Christian Butzke, Ph.D., Christopher Carlsson, Martin Cate, Andrea Clodfelter, Wayne Curtis, Dave Dafoe, Dan Farber, J.P. Fetherston, Russell Glass, Paul Hughes, Ph.D., Logan Hunter, Monique Huston, Misha Kwasniewski, Ph.D., Brenna McHugh, Fred Minnick, Reid Mitenbuler, Kara Newman, Brett Pontoni, Clay Risen, Dave Scheurich, Kendra Scott, Gary Spedding, Ph.D., Matt Strickland, Dylan Turner, Liza Weisstuch, Lisa Wicker, Richard Wolf, Amy Zavatto, and Jason Zeno. The judges represented a diverse range of spirits experts within the industry, including retailers, bar industry leaders, wholesalers, educators, and journalists. ACSA takes great pride in conducting a rigorously professional judging program in accordance with a series of detailed protocols.

This year, ACSA fine-tuned its judging methodology to ensure it continues to be one of the most valuable judging competitions in the industry. Scoring was substantially revised this year to hone in on attributes that more clearly define quality in a product's category. Specifically, ACSA worked to create a scoring card that would generate meaningful, detailed feedback for entrants. The spirits were scored on appearance, aroma intensity, aroma complexity, palate concentration, palate complexity, body, character and nature of alcohol, texture, and finish. Finally, each judge was asked if they would pour the spirit for a peer. Prior to the tasting panels, judges participated in a palate calibration seminar at Moonshine University in Louisville, KY, to bring a more narrowed focus to the tasting approach. This calibration seminar helped to ensure that scores across all judges and panels fell close to one another.

Scoring and Medal Criteria

The scoring of spirits was based on a 100-point system with 10 main categories of consideration: Appearance (10 points), Aroma Intensity (10 points), Aroma Complexity (10 points), Palate Concentration (10 points), Palate Complexity (10 points), Body (10 points), Alcohol (10 points), Texture (10 points), Finish (10 points), and Pour for a Peer (10 points). Spirits were then assigned a medal based on the average score determined by the following benchmarks: 70-79 = Bronze; 80-89 = Silver; 90-100 = Gold.

Best in Class / Best in Show

The top awarded spirits were then judged a final time in consideration of a Best in Class / Best in Show distinction. The judging chairs collected votes from each panel member for their favorite spirits. If the results were conclusive on the first vote, the results were then recorded. If the results were inconclusive, the judges used a ranked scoring, allowing three points for first place, two points for second place and one point for third place. The spirit that received the highest score in each category was then named Best of Class.

About ACSA

The American Craft Spirits Association is the only registered non-profit trade association representing the U.S. craft spirits industry. Its mission is to elevate and advocate for the community of craft spirits producers, and membership in ACSA is open to anyone.

ACSA is governed by a Board of Directors elected by the eligible voting members of the Association. Voting members must be independent, licensed distillers (DSPs) annually removing fewer than 750,000 proof gallons from bond (the amount on which a Federal Excise Tax is paid.) For information about ACSA, call 202-669-3661.

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