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Old World Inspiration Alive at Bently Heritage Estate Distillery in Minden



Christopher and Camille Bently enjoy breathing new life into old structures. In 2016, they renovated the Minden Farmer's Bank in the rural Nevada agricultural town, turning the 90-year-old structure into a contemporary company headquarters and a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) platinum-rated building. It won the USGBC Nevada LEED Project of the Year that same year.

The couple's latest venture, Bently Heritage Estate Distillery, is located in the farming community of Minden as well, (just 45 minutes south of Reno) and opened in February 2019. As with other projects, it's a nod to the past with a thoughtful eye on the future.

"I love old buildings. It breaks my heart when I see them replaced. These places in Minden were beautiful pieces of history, over 100 years old, that deserved a second life," Christopher says.

Bently Heritage is comprised of several facilities in total: a working farm and ranch, and two distillery buildings that only use estate grains grown on their own land. Bently gins and vodkas are sold in select West Coast groceries and cocktail lounges, and will soon be found in the Midwest and East Coast, too. At the same time, travelers from around the globe visit for tours, tastings and to be part of what some locals see as a history in the making.

A LOVE FOR SCOTLAND

Christopher and Camille frequent Scotland and love Scotch whisky. Their passion was a primary driver for the project. The Bently Heritage estate is located on the Bently Ranch, where they meticulously nurture rye, wheat, barley, corn and oats for the creation of distinctive gin, vodka, single malt whisky and bourbon. The distillery's Minden Flour Mill, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, has been fully restored back to operation and also houses the public house and single-malt whisky distillery. The Creamery building, originally built in 1916, was once home to the Minden Butter Manufacturing Company and now houses Bently Heritage's gin and vodka operations.

Bently Heritage facilities are sustainably developed: the ranch features the state's largest ranch composting site, the public house uses zero disposables, and other facilities use numerous built-in heat and water recovery systems.

"We were married in Scotland, we travel there every year, and we wanted to create something unique," Christopher noted. "Estate distilleries are very rare... but also, the seed, the grain, and how we process it, the building, the ranch — we knew these elements really set us apart."

DEVELOPING WORLD-CLASS SPIRITS FROM SCRATCH

In 2014, Bently's team created a small off-site distillery to experiment with growing and processing local grains, then began full building restorations in 2015. The distillery team is led by distillers John Jeffery and Ryan Quinlan, who respect the techniques of old-world masters while embracing innovation. Early on, the team realized that brown heritage corn, instead of sweet yellow corn, would be a wonderful — and novel — primary ingredient in the whisky production.

The distillers eventually developed 18 different bourbon profiles, from which three were chosen. Today, the future Bently Heritage single malt whisky and bourbon offerings are currently being aged to perfection.

"We have a more complex taste to our whisky; it's not short and sweet," Christopher said. "It has a wonderful rich character and we're very proud of it."

The distillery operates two rickhouses for aging spirits. One re-creates the climate of a small village, Ballindalloch, in Scotland. This is where the Bently's single malt whisky is currently being aged, likely for about 10 years. The second has a warm, humid environment that's ideal for the Bently's bourbon, which will age for about five years. The team prefers charred oak barrels for aging, but also experiments with different ones used for cognac, port wine or other bourbons. The distillers are also experimenting with barrel-aged gin on site.



Bently Heritage currently offers its Juniper Grove gin and Source One vodka varieties on the West Coast. Its American Dry gin is produced from five different botanicals in small batches and finished in copper stills. Its Atrium and Alpine gins offer bold citrus flavors, and all the gins have unique oat and/or wheat bases.

Its Source One vodkas are made with grains passed through a 44-plate copper still that was made specifically to strip out oils; the end result is a clean vodka of the kind preferred by cocktail enthusiasts. The single malt whisky stills are crafted by Scotland's seventh-generation copper still manufacturer, Forsyths. Built in and shipped from Scotland, they are one of many unique details adhered to for the distillery.

"I think that's what I'm most proud of. We had a lot of opportunities to compromise and save money, but we never did. We did it the right way, the beautiful way, the elegant way."

The Bently way.

To book a tour, tasting or to learn more, visit BentlyHeritage.com.

By Brian Sodoma, for Bently Heritage

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