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Moonshine: It's not just for lawbreakers anymore

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Photo: Todd DeFeo

Wednesday, September 18, 2013 - Sightseers' Delight by Todd DeFeo

Todd DeFeo



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CONYERS, Ga., Sept. 18, 2013 – To many, moonshine isn't a trend or a fad. It's been a part of life for generations.

But, in recent years, moonshine has veered into the mainstream. The drink often known as shine, hooch or white lightning is now available in bars, liquor stores and distilleries open on Main Street, though many would argue true moonshine cannot be purchased in a liquor store.

Shows like Discovery Channel's "Moonshiners" have helped feed into the growing popularity of moonshine. The show follows the escapades of distillers in a handful of southern states, including West Virginia, Tennessee and Virginia.

"It's not a surprise that moonshine is finding its heyday, again, since drinking is now considered chic when responsible," April Masini, an advice columnist, told Sightseers' Delight.

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Moonshine generally applies to high-proof whiskey – generally made with corn, but also use apples or peaches – that is illegally produced. The term originated because the beverage is often made at night by the light of the moon.



The Original Moonshine, Clear Corn Whiskey by StillHouse Distillery

“Moonshine played a big part in making the U.S. the great country it is today,” Steven Ray Tickle, one of the shiners featured on “Moonshiners,” told Fox News recently. “It was one of the first things taxed to help form our government.

“Back in the day, politicians didn’t take a salary so moonshine helped bring in money to pay for what was needed. I would say it is an American institution,” Tickle added. “And now, people are not supposed to have it and they’re not supposed to drink it. ... But that’s what makes audiences so intrigued.”

In 1791, farmers upset over a new federal tax levied on whiskey protested, an insurrection known as the Whiskey Rebellion. While the tax was later repealed, the Rebellion started a long tradition of illegally produced moonshine.

With the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1919, the production and distribution of alcohol was illegal. But, that didn’t stop moonshiners from producing or distributing their wares.

It was during that time that Dawsonville, Ga., a small town in the North Georgia mountains, turned into an epicenter of moonshine production. The cat-and-mouse game between the so-called “trippers” who transported moonshine and the “revenueurs” chasing them served as the precursor to modern-day NASCAR, leading many in the area claim Dawsonville as the (unofficial) “Birthplace of NASCAR.”

Today, the city hosts an annual [Mountain Moonshine Festival](#) every year on the fourth weekend in October to celebrate its one-of-a-kind history.

While laws have allowed shiners to distill and distribute legally, there are still plenty of illicit manufacturers opting to produce hooch off the radar. Illegally produced moonshine is cheaper because it is untaxed.

While legally produced shine is more expensive because of the taxes, there is still enough of a market for distillers to produce legal incarnations of the drink, though this isn’t technically moonshine. To appeal to a more mass audience and to take the edge off of a beverage that can be harsh to drink, some producers have developed fruit flavored versions.

“There’s a boom in alcoholic beverages – especially for women,” Masini said. “Take a look at the commercials for Bravo’s Housewives franchise shows and you’ll see commercial after commercial advising you how to ‘drink like a lady’ by purchasing hard liquor and wines that are being marketed directly to women.

“Moonshine used to be reputed for its hard kick, but give it five minutes to find a niche market among women, artisan-style, craft-cocktail makers, and celebs who want in on the market that will one day be advertised, ‘When you’re finished reading Goodnight, Moon to your kids, and they’re tucked in bed, enjoy some Moonshine at home – you deserve it,’”



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- Yes
- No
- Not sure what it is, how it works, what it costs

Masini said. "Cue the happy family with the beautiful, young wife/mother sipping in front of the fire after a long, productive day, with her handsome hubby, kids toys littered in front of the roaring fireplace."

If you have never tried refined Moonshine, following are StillHouse Distillery Moonshine Tasting Notes and a cocktail recipe from the [Bourbon Buzz](#) website.

It blends the recipe of centuries ago with the smooth, refined flavors that appeal to today's palate:

- Nose – Freshly snapped cornhusk, but only after a bare drizzle of pure water is added to open the nose.
- Taste – Smooth, mellow and elegant. A mid warm sweetness of unrefined raw sugar, retaining the richness from freshly picked corn.
- Finish – A pleasant and tempered clean finish, void of impurities, with a diffused and balanced lingering of warmth.
- Versatility – the subtle, distinctive character is most noticeable when sipped just shy of neat with a splash of pure water. When well bruised with ice, it transforms into a creamy, voluptuous, satiny texture. The mixability of this spirit is most friendly to any fruit that has medium or strong acidity, but is also well-matched with most mixers within the bartender's repertoire.

Signature Cocktail: The Shiner

1 1/2 parts Original MOONSHINE
Juice of one-half Lime
3 oz of club soda
Pour Original MOONSHINE and lime juice into an old fashioned glass over ice cubes. Top with club soda and stir. Garnish with a slice of lime.

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