

NOTABLE EDIBLES

A TASTE OF SUMMER RAIN

Meet the California couple making liquor from an ancient citrus fruit.

A whiff of zesty, floral, citrus sweetness fills the air, as if by uncapping the bottle of Sukkah Hill Spirits' Etrog Liqueur, I've released a refreshing summer rain into my apartment.

Actually made from etrogs, an ancient heirloom citrus fruit that looks like a bumpy lemon, it has a pale yellow tinge. Slightly viscous, the flavor is mildly sweet and botanical—a subtle, yet sophisticated way to color citric-leaning cocktails like a G&T. It's a versatile addition to any home bartender's essentials, and if you want, delicious on its own, too.

The idea for the liqueur began when Los Angeles-based distiller Marni Witkini, a then school teacher turned stay-at-home mom, was looking for a way to repurpose etrogs left over from the Jewish holiday of Sukkot. She began making an infusion from a distilled cane sugar alcohol base (for as neutral a spirit as possible) and the fruit, eventually sharing it with friends. It was a hit, and so much so that her friends started gifting her more etrogs in hopes she'd keep at it.

"It's like bottling a perfume you can drink," her husband, Howard, says.

One year, while crafting the annual batch, Marni made a bunch of flasks and her children drew pictures of a "sukkah on the hill" for the labels. (During the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, a dwelling topped with branches and other autumnal harvest items, called a "sukkah," is built.) The family gifted the holiday bottles, and one of their friends passed on his (there's always that one, right?) to a spirits buyer for a supermarket chain. Impressed, the buyer called Marni and Howard up and told them that he'd actually carry the liqueur if they started producing it to sell.

Roughly six years later and Marni and Howard now have their own small distillery in Gardena, California, where they make two



liqueurs under the Sukkah Hill Spirits label and three whiskeys under the brand name CALI Distillery. In line with business's beginnings, they also make limited batches of experimental spirits, including a wine-barrel-finished whiskey currently in the works. While they are just starting to grow the brand in New York, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that they're already in other stores throughout the boroughs (a full list is available on their website).

Even though they've grown into a professional operation, the recipes and passion behind their products

haven't changed. Everything they make they design and create themselves, and Marni, known as the "Taste Mistress," approves it all. The couple carefully sources their ingredients from producers around the world, with the etrogs coming from a fifth-generation family farm in the Sequoia foothills, one of the few in the U.S. to grow the fruit.

"It's a very clean flavor," Marni says of the cane sugar base. "It doesn't add extra flavors or sweetness and lets the fruit and our spices shine."

—Bridget Shirvell