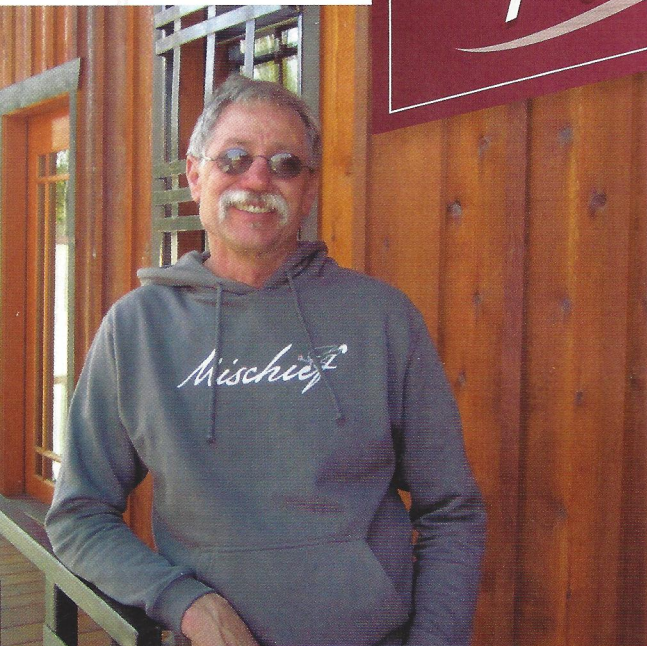


# Best of Industry Influencers

BEST OF  
THE PACIFIC  
NORTHWEST



Mike Sherlock

## FREMONT MISCHIEF DISTILLERY

BY PAUL CLARKE

It would be hard to find a more archetypal Seattleite than Mike Sherlock. For almost 30 years, Sherlock fished for salmon in Bristol Bay and for crab in the Bering Sea. He also owned a shipyard near Gasworks Park that built and outfitted everything from skiffs to factory trawlers, and he still runs a houseboat business in Ballard that constructs floating arts and crafts-style residences. But it's the latest addition to the resume of this quintessential Northwest resident that underscores a new and growing direction in the region: Mike Sherlock makes whiskey.

This wiry, walrus-mustached distiller who seems to be tinkering with many projects at once is also making gin and two types of vodka. He may produce rum and other spirits that spark his curiosity and seem interesting enough to produce and sample with his Seattle neighbors. "It's neat, letting people see that there are tastes they never knew were out there," Sherlock says.



### LOCATING THE LOOPHOLES

Sherlock's Fremont Mischief Distillery officially opened its doors last November, joining dozens of other startup distillers across Washington that have been licensed since the state's craft-distillery law passed in 2008. But Sherlock's whiskey-business experience goes back two decades. In 1992, Sherlock and his fish-business partners visited customers in China, and brought a case of bourbon to help make the relationship a warm one. Within a year, Sherlock had contracted with a distillery in Canada to custom produce a 100-percent rye whiskey based on a recipe from an ancestor who was a farm distiller in eastern Oregon. Aged eight years in barrels previously used to mature bourbon, Sherlock's rye whiskey began flowing to his customers in China in 2002.

Ever the do-it-yourselfer, Sherlock took advantage of Washington's craft-distilling law and brought his project home in 2009. Two years later,

his whiskey became available in his hometown for the first time. Now with the help of his son, John, Sherlock is making and aging his whiskey in Seattle, including the eight-year-old spirit (still with his Canadian-made product) that is the distillery's eponymous whiskey. A younger expression of the whiskey, John Jacob, appeared in stores last year. Sherlock also makes a winter-wheat vodka and a London dry-style gin, and plans to release a rye vodka this summer.

### COMMUNITY IMPACT

As might be expected from this Northwest native, supporting the region and the community is important. The rye for his whiskey and vodka comes from Methow Valley, near Winthrop; the winter wheat for his vodka and gin is grown on Whidbey Island; and Sherlock says almost all the items sold in the distillery's tasting room were produced within 100 miles of Seattle.

Fremont Mischief also donates a portion of the profits from its vodka and gin to the National Domestic Violence Hotline. Some of the proceeds from a specially-packaged line of Fremont Mischief whiskey also go to the Freedom Isn't Free Foundation, which supports wounded veterans and the families of fallen soldiers.

Sherlock may have almost 20 years of experience in the whiskey business, but he's still relatively new to distilling. This may be a good thing. With the excitement of something new comes an enthusiasm for experimentation that may benefit local drinkers in years to come.

"It's like wizardry," Sherlock says. "You check out different recipes. You try your own take on it, and you're creating something you can sit back with and enjoy—and you know somebody else is gonna do the very same thing." ●

