

**Copper Barrel Distillery**  
**words & photos: Ellen Gurley**



North Carolina is still in the middle of a craft beer boom. I don't see an end in sight for this. While we are all enjoying the growth in that movement, there is something else creeping up to gain our attention: distilleries. Let it be known that they've always been there but with the relaxation in statewide laws, we are now seeing distilleries popping up all over the place. Right in the heart of North Wilkesboro is a place that knows what it means to have always been around but just now being allowed to announce themselves. The city didn't just create NASCAR but it was the moonshine capital of the world. (Google it, NASCAR literally was bourne out of running moonshine out of the county.)

Copper Barrel Distillery is the brainchild of George Smith. He used to work for a fortune five hundred company but accepted a modest package to leave and he was on his way to join others in the alluring life of distilling. Upon joining the Charlotte Bourbon Club and having become the President, Smith met a lot of people through classes and bourbon dinners. When Bill Samuels, Jr. (who was the president and of CEO of Makers Mark for thirty seven years) was in Charlotte signing autographs, Smith met him and he told him that he was thinking about opening a distillery himself. Forming a relationship with Samuels, he introduced Smith to "everybody" he "needed to know in the business". During a trip to visit Samuels in Kentucky, he decided that THIS was really happening. He was starting a distillery.

At the North Carolina Main Street Conference, wanting to learn about grants that were available to new businesses, Smith was approached by the mayor of North Wilkesboro asking him about these plans for opening a distillery. The mayor insisted that Smith come to North Wilkesboro and open his distillery there. Now, mind you, this was just one out twelve cities who were inviting Smith to come and Smith visited ALL of the cities that invited him and he ultimately chose North Wilkesboro. The mayor, delighted with Smith's choice,

asked him who his master distiller would be. Smith not knowing yet was in for the best piece of advice yet.



Smith was told that he needed to meet a Buck Nance. Buck's father Floyd was a moonshiner back in the day making Buck second generation. Let it be known that before Smith met Buck, he had tried well over two hundred moonshines from all across America and had a pretty idea for what he wanted to go with and what direction he was fixing to go with the taste. Upon meeting Buck, he brought out a bottle of his stuff and Smith was impressed beyond words asking if it could be reproduced this way exactly each time. And Buck assured him that yes, yes it could be done. Buck told him "not only that, George, I can teach you how to do it". Setting up and installing the system at the distillery, Buck realized he wanted to work there full time. Smith gladly accepted and the rest is history.



Buck and George are happily partnered in the newest regional distillery and, ladies and gentleman, this is the stuff you want. They directly inject steam into the mash to perform the distillation (a system invented by Floyd Nance in the early 1900s). (Fun fact: ideally you should have some copper in the process to strip out the carcinogens.) Copper Barrel Distillery's moonshine comes in many flavours with real fruit in the jar from recipes that were all perfected by Buck over many decades and will soon be available in ABC Stores. Make that drive and get some moonshine to bring back home to keep you nice and warm this winter.

[CopperBarrel.com](http://CopperBarrel.com) | 508 Main St., N. Wilkesboro, NC 28659 | 336-262-6500