



Red Bank resident MJ Towler, aka the Black Wine Guy, went from a wine newbie to the **first African American fine and rare wine auctioneer** in less than three years.

TOWLER'S TOP WINE TIPS

- 1 **Get to know importers** (always listed on the bottle). Even if you are not familiar with the wine, you can usually trust the importer. **Know your trusted brands, regions and winemakers next.**
- 2 **It is OK not to like a wine.** It's an experiment to help you determine what you like, but try more wines.
- 3 **Know what you like** and be able to describe some of the characteristics. It will help when buying wine in a restaurant or store.
- 4 **Take pictures.** You likely won't remember the label later. Take fun notes you will remember and that will help you describe the wine.
- 5 **Drink what you want.** It is your enjoyment. But try more wines.

after graduating from Rutgers Law School-Camden, a friend named John Kapon, third-generation member and now CEO of America's oldest wine merchant Acker, got Towler interested in wine, and he never set foot in the legal field professionally.

With stints over the years in retail and wholesale, he also became the first Black American fine and rare wine auctioneer over 20 years ago. That led him to Santa Barbara, Calif., for nine years, where he developed a real fondness for Central Coast wines. "It is often the first region you fall in love with that sticks with you," Towler said. Additional stints in the education and personal development fields have also been instrumental in shaping his personable, professional approach.

Today, Towler still stays actively involved working with a boutique importer, but his focus is on The Black Wine Guy Experience brand. He has done live formats of the podcast and is hoping to develop a pilot for a television show. He admits that despite his far-flung exposure to wine, as a homegrown resident of the state, he wants to learn more about what is happening here. Our conversation closed with Towler saying, "We need to get together. I need to try these good New Jersey wines!" Here is hoping New Jersey tries The Black Wine Guy Experience, too. ❖

Drink Spotlight

Sip on this
**DISTINCTLY
JERSEY
WHISKEY**



Photo courtesy of All Points West

All Points West's Malt and Grain Pot Still Whiskey is a hybrid of Irish whiskey and bourbon.

March is a big month for Irish whiskey, but how about Irish American whiskey? All Points West (APW) in Newark produces this award-winning spirit that is a modern take on history in a glass.

In 1909, the British government outlawed the use of American corn (the main base grain for bourbon) in pot still whiskeys made in Ireland and Scotland, deeming them "too American." Around that time, Newark attracted many Irish, Scottish and German immigrants, drawn to the booming beer production in the city. With 26 breweries in operation by 1920, there was a serious taste for that then-traditional style of whiskey.

A century later, APW revived the "outlawed" style, producing it completely in-house in Newark, and in 2019, it won a gold medal and "Whiskey of the Year" honors at the USA Spirits Ratings competition in San Francisco. Using primarily Irish and German malt with American corn and New Jersey water — and aged in American oak barrels for a minimum of 33 months — this sipper is a hybrid of Irish whiskey and bourbon. Or just think of it as a most enjoyable spirit.

Available in 375-milliliter (around \$30) and 750-milliliter bottles (around \$50), at the distillery and at retailers throughout the state. ❖

— Hank Zona