



MAN OF THE YEAR
At his All Points West distillery, Gil Spaier holds a bottle of the history-inspired liquor that won three awards, including 2019 Whisky of the Year.

• ARTISANS

WINNING WHISKEY ARCHITECT

Sliding his love of structure from old buildings to old potions, Gil Spaier brings renown to Newark's Ironbound. *By Eric Levin*

MAYBE IF he had never read Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*, which stopped him on page 11 with a gritty ode to old industrial Newark and its "soft water," Gil Spaier would still be a practicing architect and not an award-winning whiskey maker.

But the passage piqued Spaier's interest in the waves of immigrants who had pioneered and staffed Newark's breweries in the Ironbound, the neighborhood into which he and his wife had just moved.

Fast forward 16 years. In Au-

gust, Spaier's barely two-year-old craft distillery, All Points West, located in the Ironbound, won three awards in the prestigious annual competition run by USA Spirits Rating.

His 92 proof Malt and Grain Pot-Still Whiskey won a gold medal, was named Whisky of the Year and, for its understated bottle design and informative labeling, earned Best Spirit of the Year by Packaging.

Spaier, 46, a Long Island native, might still be restoring townhouses on Manhattan's

Upper East Side and adapting old structures to new uses if he hadn't, about six years ago, gotten a perfect result the first time he tried baking bread.

"I got excited about baking," he says. "I started working with sourdough starters, and my wife bought me a grain mill. The moment she did that, the idea came to me to stop making bread and start making beer."

He quickly escalated to distilling spirits, his preferred drink. "There are styles of beer," he explains, "but they don't go

from creme de violette to vodka to rum to whiskey."

The name All Points West comes from a catchphrase of the old Jersey Central Railroad, which connected Newark to the American interior. (The water in the Ironbound has been completely free of the lead contamination that has affected other parts of the city.)

"What I love about this neighborhood, on the Eastern terminus, is that it's so immigrant," he says. "So I wanted to make something that could elucidate that history a bit."

He comfortably slid from researching the evolution of architectural styles to doing the same with whiskeys. The history is long and dizzyingly political. It reaches back to 1785, when British tariffs on malted barley led distillers in Ireland to add unmalted grains, eventually including American corn, to their recipes. Those new whiskeys, made in old-fashioned pot stills, "became the most popular whiskeys in the world," Spaier says. The breaking point came in 1908, when the Brits banned the use of American corn in pot-still whiskeys.

Planning All Points West, Spaier says he seized upon "the idea of making Irish-style pot-still whiskeys with corn, which hadn't been done commercially since 1908. I'm the first commercial whiskey to do that in 110 years."

Since winning his awards—and acclaim in August from the Manchester [England] Whiskey Club—Spaier has gently increased production in response to a surge in sales. "I'm lucky this didn't happen a year ago," he says, "or I would have been out of inventory." The whiskey is available at the distillery and at about 45 Jersey retail stores.

"More important than sales is the validation of the idea that this would be an interesting whiskey," he says. "All the difficult months of putting every penny into barrels and not knowing where this was going to end has actually resulted in something. Which is great."