Cider, Calvados Stoke American Apple Beverage Trend

Michelle Locke, The Associated Press

Call it a rise in core demand.

Hard cider already has taken a slice of the adult beverage market in recent years, and now apple spirits of all kinds are showing their appeal as Americans rediscover classics like calvados and increasingly embrace products like apple gins and vodkas.

Sales of hard cider have seen robust growth during the past five years. And seeing the success of craft ciders, other new apple-based boozes have entered the market, things like Karner Blue gin, which is distilled from apples, not grains, at New Hampshire's Flag Hill Winery and Distillery. Karner blue is the state butterfly in case you were wondering. And there are apple vodkas such as Core Vodka from Harvest Spirits Farm Distillery in New York State.

Meanwhile, there's the granddaddy of the apple spirit world, calvados, which was back in the news this year as coverage of the 70th anniversary of D-Day included mentions of the spirit that is a specialty of the Normandy region of France. In 1944, farmers offered soldiers tots of the powerful stuff during the liberation effort and returning veterans remembered June 6 with calvados toasts.

Tourists often picked up a bottle when visiting Normandy, but up to now it hasn't been very well known in the United States.

But interest has grown. Guillaume Drouin of the Normandy calvados producer Christian Drouin says Eastern Europe and the U.S. are growing markets and "calvados is being discovered more and more."

Helping that trend is an evolution in quality that has boosted what was once viewed as a regional and rather rustic spirit. Christian Drouin specializes in aged calvados, using port and sherry casks to impart extra flavours during the aging. The company was founded by Drouin's grandfather, who patiently distilled calvados for two decades before releasing his first product.

Today, Christian Drouin products range from a white apple brandy, Blanche de Normandie, which can be drunk as an aperitif or used in cocktails, to aged products like the 15-year-old Couer de Lion Pays d'Auge Hors d'Age.

America has its own apple tradition, applejack, which dates back to colonial times. The return to brown spirits, as well as the popularity of craft and classic cocktails, also have been good for the market, says Lisa Laird Dunn, vice-president of Laird & Company. "It's been phenomenal," she says. "We've actually had to allocate our

brandies because of the popularity."

The country's first licensed distillery, Laird & Company in New Jersey, has been making apple spirits for centuries; the first official record of sale from the distillery is in 1780, says Laird Dunn.

Applejack originally was made by freeze distillation, leaving the cider outside in winter and periodically removing ice to concentrate the alcohol. Today, modern distilling processes are used and Laird's applejack is a blend of neutral grain spirits and apple brandy. The company also produces aged apple brandies as well as Laird Bottled in Bond Straight Apple Brandy which is 100 proof and popular with bartenders for making cocktails.

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CALVADOS CIDER SIDECAR

Start to finish: 5

Servings: 1

2 ounces calvados

1 ounce apple cider

1 ounce orange liqueur

1/2 ounce lemon juice

Combine all ingredients in an ice-filled tumble and stir gently.

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