

YAHARA BAY



Two years ago, Madison's Nick Quint came out of retirement at age 61 to start Yahara Bay.

Yahara Bay Distilling in Madison is a substantially smaller distillery, putting out 90-gallon batches, but has a most unique product line.

They not only produces a line of vodkas, but gin and light and dark rums. And they go heavy on the apples, making an apple vodka, an apple brandy and an apple liqueur. There's also Lemoncella, an tart Italian liqueur. Excellent chilled.

Expect a dark chocolate liqueur and something called "cherry bounce" — cherries soaked in vodka with lots of sugar added—in the future. It's also ready to roll out the state's first aged whiskey and is working on an absinthe recipe of its own. Tequila could be in the future as well.

Yahara Bay products are found mainly in Madison area liquor stores, taverns and restaurants. Marketing Director Heather Oppor says it's a lot harder getting product statewide "until you get your feet on the ground.

Oppor says Quint started the still as a hobby but gradually became obsessed. He had advice from a cousin who has a micro brewery in Iowa.

Revenue is just under \$500,000 she says and sales doubled from 2008 to 2009.

Tastings in the store, which also feature art created by local artists, are regular. Oppor says the gallery is an extension of the view that artisan distilling is considered artwork on its own.