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## **This 9th Ward distillery makes gin with a sense of place in a location hard to believe**

BY IAN MCNULTY | Staff writer

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Odd bits from Mardi Gras floats and stage productions decorate the tasting room at the Ninth Ward distillery Borasso Spirits. (Staff photo by Ian McNulty, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

The tree gin, made with cypress, magnolia and long leaf pine, gives a gentle whiff of Louisiana woodlands. The Southeast Asian gin with ginger, star anise, lemon grass and lime leaf brings to mind a fragrant Vietnamese kitchen. Both are found in a setting that seems the epitome of funky, gritty New Orleans.

Borasso Spirits is a tiny new distillery and tasting room tucked into a heavily industrial corner of the 9th Ward. Arriving here may take a leap of faith; the reward is a taste of distinctively local spirits in a setting with its own character.



Ewan Willey created his distillery and tasting room Borasso Spirits in New Orleans, producing small batches of gin and rum. (Staff photo by Ian McNulty, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

It's not the only place to enjoy food and drinks in the area. For one frame of reference, N7, the restaurant and wine destination, is just a few blocks down Montegut Street. But the defining feature here is the North Claiborne Avenue overpass, which thumps and bumps away as traffic passes just overhead, adding its beat to the old tunes playing through a vintage jukebox. Freight trains moving through the adjacent Press Street railroad yard occasionally boom and clang.



The tasting room at Borasso Spirits in New Orleans, which serves small batch productions of gin and rum. (Staff photo by Ian McNulty, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

The distillery occupies part of a warehouse that was once used to store stage sets. Today, the tasting room looks like it could be a stage set itself. Partial walls frame a space under the metal roof high above and old bits of Mardi Gras floats and found objects decorate the space.

Borasso Spirits was created by Ewan Willey, and he built out the space himself. His fiancée, the longtime local bartender and artist Laurie Fewell, has a hand all across the operation.



Ewan Willey discusses his production methods while Laurie Fewell mixes cocktails at the Ninth Ward distillery Borasso Spirits. (Staff photo by Ian McNulty, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

Most of the city's small breweries and distilleries occupy old industrial buildings, and in many cases have transformed once-obscure locations into new social spaces with their beer gardens and tasting rooms. That's what Borasso Spirits is out to do here with its own form of homespun hospitality between the tasting room bar and a clutch of sofas.



Music plays from a vintage jukebox at Borasso Spirits, a distillery and tasting room in the Ninth Ward. (Staff photo by Ian McNulty, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

Willey plans to use the space to host bands, art markets, food pop-ups and other happenings.

The distilling operation occupies a series of rooms Willey built in the warehouse. The scale production is tiny, in batches of about 30 cases at a time.



Botanicals are steeped for gin produced at the Ninth Ward distillery Borasso Spirits. (Staff photo by Ian McNulty, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

Willey's aim is to make spirits that are unusual, give a personal aspect and relate to Louisiana.

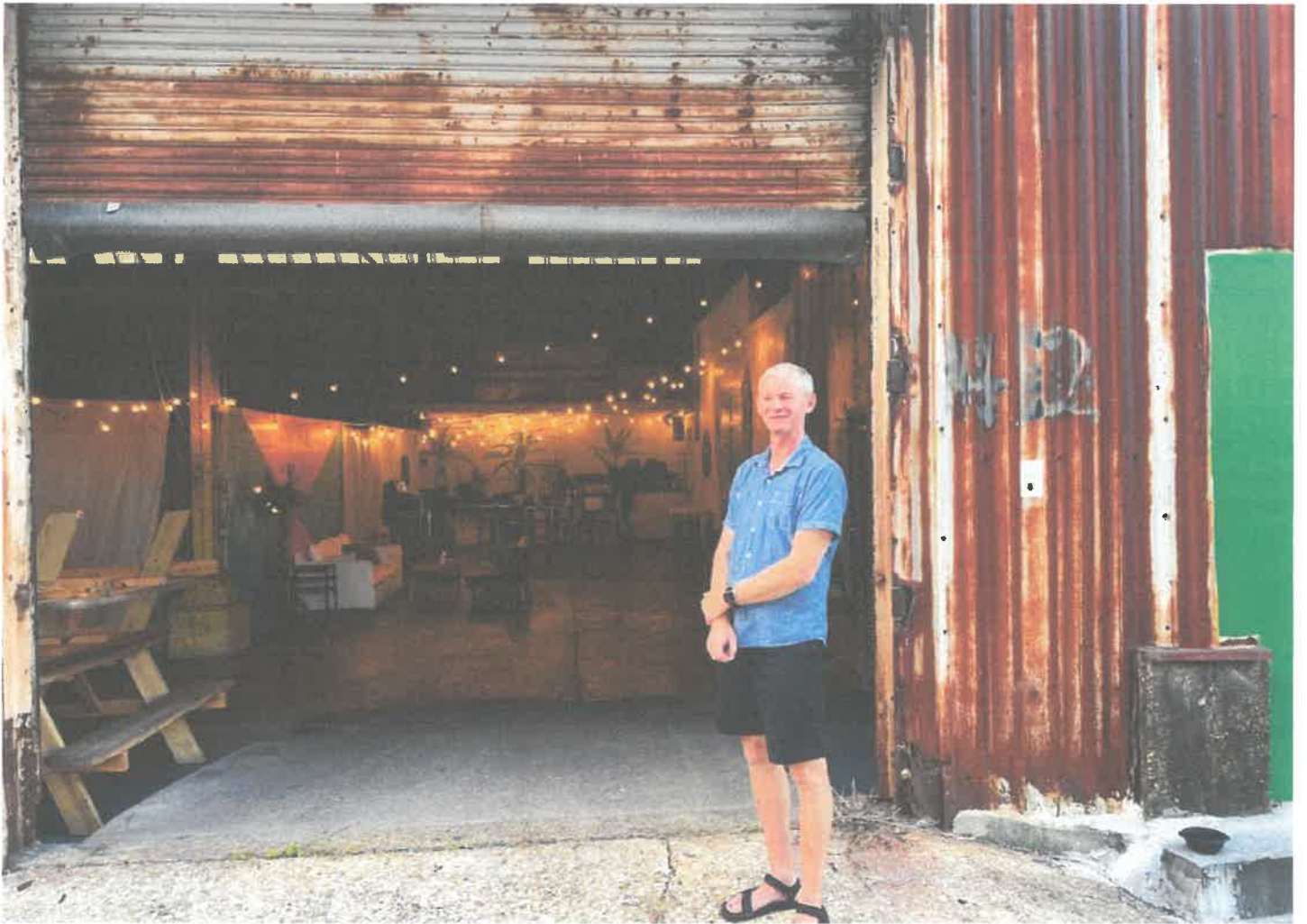
"A local spirit should have a local character," he said. "I love this place. I want to add something to it and bring something out about it."





Borasso Spirits is a New Orleans distillery and tasting room producing rum and gins using local ingredients. (Staff photo by Ian McNulty, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

Willey plans to start distribution to restaurants bars and retailers, though for now the only place to get Borasso is at the tasting room, either by the bottle or in drinks.



Ewan Willey created his distillery and tasting room Borasso Spirits in New Orleans, producing small batches of gin and rum. (Staff photo by Ian McNulty, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

Borasso is now producing those two gins named above, and a white rum, made with Louisiana sugar cane. It's straightforward, earthy, readily sippable and particularly good when mixed with some grapefruit soda for one of the house cocktails in the tasting room, dubbed the Paleauxma.

There's a vodka in the works, and a soju, and Willey is also making an absinthe with a partner under another label called Fog.



Borasso Spirits is a New Orleans distillery and tasting room producing rum and gins using local ingredients in the Ninth Ward. (Staff photo by Ian McNulty, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

Gin is the starting point, because Willey feels like it has the most to say.

“There’s so much you can do to be different from anyone else; there’s so much room for imagination,” he said.

*Borasso Spirits*

*1500 Montegut St.*

*Tasting room hours: 4-9 p.m. Thursday to Sunday (later hours on Friday and Saturday)*