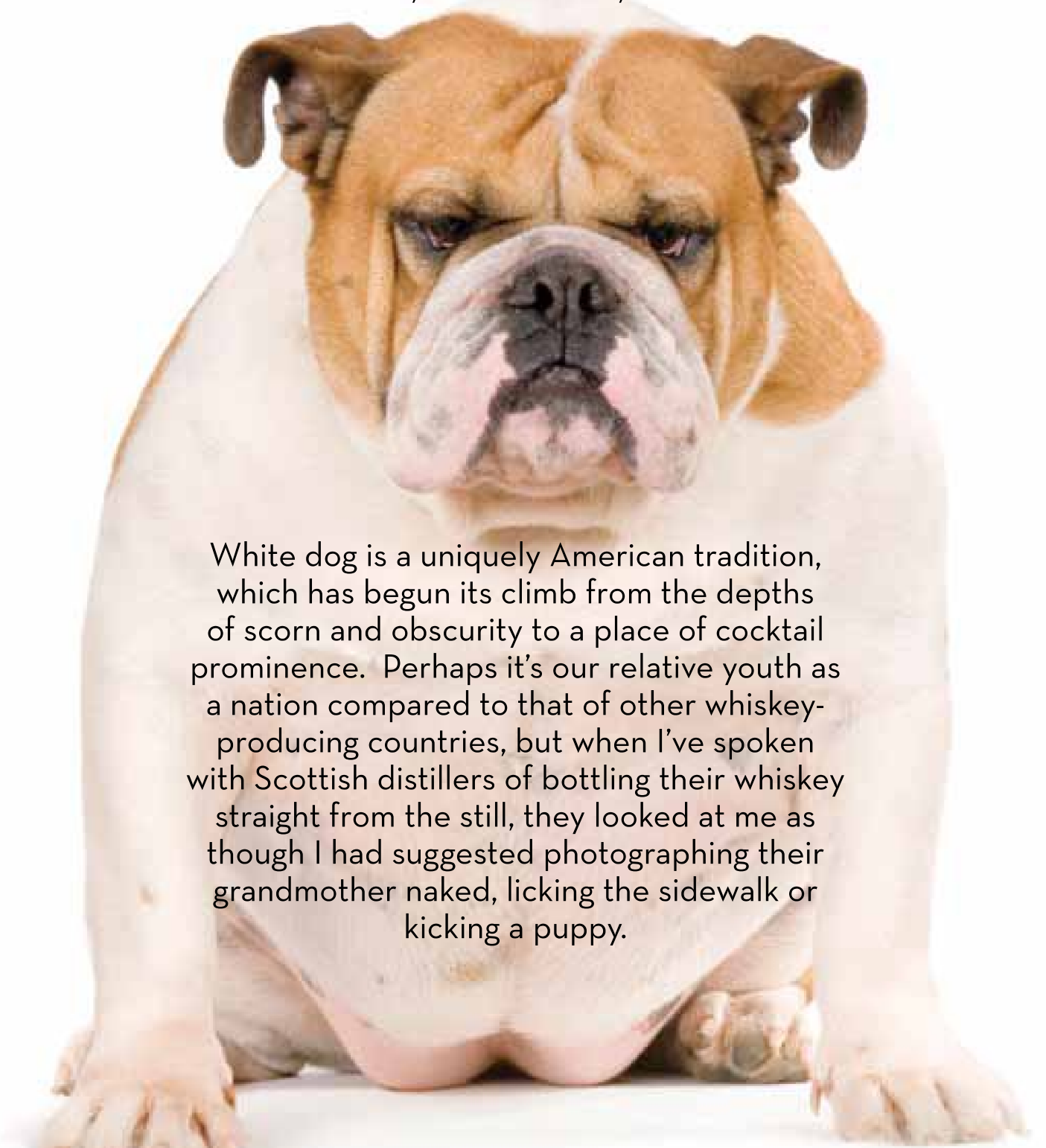


# Taming the White Dog

## Unaged Whiskey

By M. Quinn Sweeney



White dog is a uniquely American tradition, which has begun its climb from the depths of scorn and obscurity to a place of cocktail prominence. Perhaps it's our relative youth as a nation compared to that of other whiskey-producing countries, but when I've spoken with Scottish distillers of bottling their whiskey straight from the still, they looked at me as though I had suggested photographing their grandmother naked, licking the sidewalk or kicking a puppy.

**W**hiskey, legally defined, is a spirit distilled from fermented grains (essentially beer) and aged in wooden barrels, usually for years. While neutral spirits like vodka are distilled over and over again to remove any trace of their base ingredients, whiskeys are distilled fewer times to preserve the tastes and aromas of impurities that add character and connection to the roots of the mash. White dog, also known as white lightning, white whiskey, or green whiskey, is the common term for whiskey that forgoes barrel aging, and so lacks the vanilla and caramel notes we expect.

Mixologist Bobby Heugel explains that “the grains used to produce the spirit are more noticeable, and the subtle flavors of these grains, usually hidden by the overbearing taste of oak, anchor the spirit’s bold, agricultural flavors.”

Unaged whiskey has gotten a bad rap. Traditionally relegated to the dominion of hillbillies and moonshiners, it was believed by some to cause blindness with its harsh flavors and high proof. Until recently, your only opportunity to sample quality unaged whiskey would have been on a distillery tour, and most often only tasting one component of what would go into the final product, not the finished spirit straight before it goes into the barrel.

Despite being viewed by some as the Crystal Pepsi of spirits, a number of well-crafted white whiskeys are showing up in high-end liquor stores and are starting to gain recognition in cocktail bars around the nation. The initial surge came from micro-distilleries like Tuthilltown and Death’s Door, but there has been a response from prominent whiskey makers, including Buffalo Trace and Hirsch. Maker’s Mark has even teased with tastings of their

unaged distillate, but as of yet, is refusing to sell it in stores.

Doubled and Twisted may be the most fascinating example of the category, in both its story and flavor profile. At the Napa micro-distillery Charbay, Marko Karakasevic creates his light whiskey from a specially brewed India Pale Ale, believing that great beer is the foundation of great whiskey, which he distills twice in a copper pot still. Reduced to its bottle strength of 99 proof, Doubled and Twisted sits in oak barrels for only a single day before being aged in stainless steel tanks for three years to mellow the whiskey without the added color or flavor from the wood. It was Karakas-  
evic’s “master’s thesis” and the culmination of his 26-year apprenticeship. As the thirteenth generation in a family of distillers and vintners, he was required to source, distill and bring to market a completely new spirit of quality equal to or better than his predecessors, and unlike other whiskeys, D&T retains distinct notes of beer, lending it malty richness and hopped flavor. On the day he met those criteria, his father slapped him on the back and said, “Congratulations, you’re a goddamn Master Distiller. Let’s drink some and smoke cigars.”

**M**any classic cocktail recipes are rooted in white dog’s prevalence during prohibition. The time and space required for barrel aging whiskey put renegade distillers at greater risk of being raided, so raw whiskey was common in the speakeasies. To temper the fire of the immature spirit, and often to cover off-putting flavors in poorly produced moonshine, bartenders got creative with recipes to make a more palatable drink like the Old Fashioned, which masked rough spirits with sugar, fruit and bitters.

On the modern mixology side, white dog has become enticing to bartenders for its unique properties. Traditional whiskey cocktails made with white dog can often be created with less of other ingredients because the overwhelming oaky flavors no longer compete. Bill Norris (the bar manager of FINO in Austin) points out that it can bring together the characteristics of both white and brown spirits. Its flexibility allows it to be used in whiskey cocktails or in drinks made with white spirits like gin and vodka.

White dog isn't yet readily available in all parts of the country, but if you come across a bottle in a respectable establishment, ask your barkeep to use it in a Manhattan, Sazerac or Whiskey Smash.

## THE YELLOW LAB

Courtesy of Bobby Heugel  
at Anvil Bar & Refuge in Houston

- 2 oz Buffalo Trace White Dog
- 1 barspoon turbinado simple syrup (2 parts turbinated sugar - available commercially as Sugar in the Raw - added to 1 part boiling water and allowed to cool)
- 1 barspoon Luxardo Maraschino
- 2 dashes Truth Celery Bitters

Stir and strain into a cocktail glass.  
Garnish with a lemon twist.

The Ploom logo is a stylized white 'ploom' text on a dark background. The background image shows a person's profile in silhouette, exhaling a plume of white smoke from a device. The scene is lit with warm, bokeh-style lights in shades of red, orange, and yellow.

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