



Qi Spirits

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE SPIRIT OF TEA®

San Francisco, Calif., March 1, 2006 -- Qi Spirits launches its first product, Qi Lapsang Souchong Tea Liqueur, in Northern California this month. Qi (*chee*) means life force, or the energy in all things. Qi Spirits' mission is to create the world's finest artisan spirits made from tea. Qi Tea Liqueur is craft-distilled at St. George Spirits in Alameda, California, and has its corporate office in San Francisco. Qi Spirits is a partnership between distiller Lance Winters and entrepreneur Brian Backus, with John Scharffenberger on the Board and serving as Master Taster.

Tea is the most widely consumed prepared beverage on earth, and has been prized for its properties of comfort, warmth, health, and flavor for thousands of years. Over the millennia, tea was traded along the 10,000-mile route known as the Silk or Spice Road, which spanned from the east coast of China all the way to Spain and Morocco. Along the way, different teas were blended with local herbs, fruits, and spices, creating a wonderful palate of flavors with regional characteristics.

Qi Spirits brings the rich variety of tea to the world of distilled spirits. The first production of Qi is made with Lapsang Souchong tea, which is smoked over cedar-fires in Fujian province in eastern China and marks the beginning of the Spice Road. The cold-

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infused tea is artfully blended with rare fruits, exotic spices, wildflower honey, and barrel-aged chardonnay brandy to create a uniquely flavorful and smooth liqueur. All Qi varieties will be craft-distilled in the Old World tradition, and as Qi follows the flavors of the Spice Road, hand-selected herbs and spices will be blended with teas popular in those regions.

Qi is distributed in Northern California by artisan wine and spirits broker Bock Vines & Wines (www.bockwines.com) and found at retailers such as K&L, Royal Liquors, and Swirl on Castro in San Francisco, Caddell & Williams (Alameda), and Piedmont Grocery (Oakland). Qi is poured at a growing number of restaurants such as A Côté in Oakland and San Francisco's Bacar, Citizen Cake, Frisson, Range, Slanted Door and Solstice. A 750-milliliter bottle has a suggested retail price of \$42.00.

History

The story of Qi Spirits is the story of three men who share a common love of authentic, robust flavors and craft-distilled spirits: Lance Winters, the distiller at St. George Spirits; Brian Backus, an entrepreneur with a love of small batch hand-made spirits; and John Scharffenberger, the founder of Scharffenberger Sparkling Wines and co-founder of Scharffen Berger Chocolate Maker.

In 2002, Brian Backus brought an idea he had been nursing for years to John Scharffenberger - why not update the ancient tradition of herbal liqueurs? In the West, the tradition dates back at least as far as that great doctor of antiquity, Hippocrates, who made a medicinal liqueur of fermented honey and cinnamon called *Hippocras* that was still popular during the reign of Louis XIV. "Most digestive liqueurs were created in the monasteries of France and Italy, and none had been created in the last hundred years, much less in the United States," says Brian. "And yet the world of flavor has exploded since then, and the average palate is wildly more sophisticated than it was a hundred years ago, much less in medieval times." Brian reasoned, "Why not update this tradition, with the whole new world of fruits, herbs and spices on hand?"

John was intrigued, and encouraged Brian as he infused milk thistle, nettle, angelica root, and dozens of other medicinal herbs and spices, blending them in a wide variety of formulas. John laughs, “While the results were interesting, they were never going to win a popularity contest. Some were so bitter they would curl your hair!” He recognized that to get to the next level and make something not only digestive and original but also enjoyable, it was time to approach an experienced distiller.

In early 2003, John introduced Brian to Lance Winters, distiller at St. George Spirits in Alameda, perhaps the finest craft-distillery in the Americas. John explains, “Lance is somewhat of an alchemist, with a background as a nuclear engineer he understands the technology and chemistry unlike most distillers. And he is truly an artist of flavor, with a great love and appreciation for the myriad of aromas and flavors plants provide, and the ability to blend those flavors to create exceptional spirits.” “I get really energized working with like-minded people,” says Lance, “Brian and John had me at herbal liqueurs.”

Lance and Brian went to work, tasting through hundreds of herbs, spices and flowers, with John tasting the blends and suggesting subtle changes. Somewhere along the way, Lance had the inspiration to include tea, that quintessential Eastern herb with a rich history of its own, and an incredible variety of mature flavors. The team finally arrived at the exotic flavor profile of Qi late in 2005.

Product

Qi is a semi-sweet liqueur that is 40% alcohol by volume, and only 2% sugar by weight (wildflower honey), versus the usual 20-30% sugar by weight of most liqueurs. Qi is a blend of smoky Lapsang Souchong tea, rare fruits, exotic spices, and barrel-aged chardonnay brandy. The nose is smoky and sweet, with hints of vanilla and citrus. On the palate, an initial burst of peat yields to the warmth of semi-sweet vanilla and honey, and finally lingers for a long smooth finish of smoke and mandarin blossom.

Enjoying Qi

Qi is a wonderful sipping spirit, with the richness and complexity of a fine cognac or single malt, but with the smoothness and accessibility of premium vodka. Qi also blends beautifully in exotic cocktails, pairing especially well with citrus and bitter flavors, as well as teas and coffees. A growing list of cocktail recipes can be found at www.qispirits.com/cocktails.htm.

Qi is also an exceptional cooking companion. The smoke makes Qi ideal for meat broths and glazes. The honey and spice make Qi an exotic addition to a wide variety of desserts, such as crème brûlée, ice cream, and various cakes and tarts.

However you choose to enjoy Qi, may it bring the spirit of tea to your day.

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