



## **FOUNDERS BIOS**

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### **LANCE WINTERS** **MASTER OF QI, PRINCIPAL**

Lance Winters, 40, has been distilling fine spirits for 15 years, from vodka and whiskey, to eau de vie and now liqueur. His unique talent is in possessing both the craft-distilling technical expertise and the artistry with flavor to produce truly extraordinary spirits. Lance was a nuclear engineer before following his passion for craft-distilling, but the same mad-scientist instincts drive him to invent new techniques and to push the flavor envelope to new frontiers. Watching Lance in his laboratory is like watching a medieval alchemist at work, but in his case, the product he's after is liquid gold.

Lance's specialty is inspiration from wonderful flavors and aromas, so he was excited when Brian Backus and John Scharffenberger brought him the idea of creating a new herbal liqueur. "The stuff Brian and John made was pretty raw," Lance remembers, "but there were hints of exotic new flavors I knew I could focus, draw out, and blend with other distillates to create something unique and delicious."

Lance loves to create experiences that one will remember for a long time. He delights in crafting spirits which he feels are "like high quality perfumes, something transformative." Lance's talent for blending produced the unique flavor nuances of Qi, and his deep distilling expertise ensures the quality, integrity, and consistency of production.

In addition to making Qi, Lance is distiller and co-owner of St. George Spirits, one of the premier craft-distillers in America, and the parent company of wildly successful Hangar One vodka. *Inc. Magazine* recently named him the "coolest whiskey maker in America." Lance lives in Oakland.

### **BRIAN BACKUS** **PRESIDENT, PRINCIPAL**

Brian Backus, 41, discovered fine wines and spirits as a child, sneaking unfinished glasses of wine from the table at family dinner parties. Even then, he was discriminating as to which glasses he would finish. By 13, he was collecting wine (as an investment), and he still has some of the superb Bordeaux he purchased in the 70s. It was after college, however, on a 16-month fellowship in Europe, that he discovered the fine art of craft-distilled spirits. In particular, a summer in Scotland touring the whiskey distilleries opened his eyes to the realization that rich flavors and subtle variation are not confined to fine wines.

Since that time and perhaps inspired by his own last name, Brian longed to produce craft-distilled spirits. In his early 20s, back when Mill Valley was still a hippie haven, he was experimenting with a kelp-based

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whiskey he called Mill Valley Moonshine. Suffice it to say that he needed to meet Lance Winters to produce anything fit for human consumption.

Brian grew up in the relative shelter of La Jolla, California, but from early childhood his dance-therapist mother whisked him off to exotic locales to study tribal dance, be it the jungles of Latin America or rural Africa. In addition to dysentery, this gave Brian an early gastronomic exposure to an incredibly broad range of fruits, spices, and flavor combinations. He went on to become a field biologist studying birds in Papua New Guinea, which gave him a further love for the abundance and variation among plants (and animals) in diverse and healthy ecosystems.

Before co-founding Qi Spirits but after his stint as a biologist, Brian was in children's media for 15 years, as an award-winning producer at Disney, the artist behind Kidlandia ([www.kidlandia.com](http://www.kidlandia.com)), and the founder and CEO of the media software company Linkscapes. Brian holds an MBA from Harvard, an MFA from USC, and degree in biology from Harvard. Brian lives in San Francisco.

## **JOHN SCHARFFENBERGER**

### **MASTER TASTER**

John Scharffenberger, ageless, is a culinary entrepreneur of the highest order. He co-founded Scharffen Berger Chocolate Maker, one of the fastest growing premium bean-to-bar dark chocolate companies in the country and consistently rated America's finest dark chocolate. Before that, John founded Scharffenberger Cellars, one of the premier sparkling wine-makers in the U.S. John's refined palate has played a critical role in the development of Qi Spirits from the very beginning, and he introduced Brian Backus to Lance Winters.

John grew up in Southern California, and moved to the Bay Area to attend the University of California at Berkeley. During college, John worked as a live-in estate gardener in Claremont. Once he graduated, he found other work in horticulture, working at wineries and managing agricultural lands. After graduating with a combined major in botany, cultural anthropology, food history and geography in 1973, he moved to Mendocino County. There he started Scharffenberger Cellars, his own wine-producing company using traditional European methods, to produce a better-tasting sparkling wine than the ones he had found in the United States. He sold Scharffenberger Cellars to LVMH in 1995.

When John's friend and former physician Robert Steinberg approached him about joining his chocolate making venture in 1996, Scharffenberger seized the opportunity. Scharffenberger found chocolate in the same situation as sparkling wine. "There were only 12 companies making chocolate in the U.S.," he says. "Nobody was doing a good job of it." John took a personal approach, from sourcing the best beans to roasting to the finished chocolate. John was ranked in the top 10 of *Fast Company* magazine's 'Fast 50' - a worldwide search for ordinary people doing extraordinary things. He sold Scharffen Berger Chocolate Maker to Hershey's in 2005.

For the same reasons he was drawn to sparkling wine and to premium chocolate, John was attracted to the idea of updating the concept of an herbal liqueur. "The good stuff was all old and European," he says. Like his previous ventures, Qi merges Old World technique and hand-selected ingredients with updated flavors for the modern palate. John divides his time between Berkeley and Philo, California.