

## MIXOLOGY



# Burlington, Meet Bolivia

## Singani 63 Arrives in Vermont

If this winter seems to have a bit more warmth to it, thank Steven Soderbergh and his passion for Singani.

The Oscar-winning director/producer, (“Ocean’s 11,” “Erin Brockovich” and “Traffic,” among many other films) found himself shooting “Che” in Bolivia several years ago, when he was introduced to Singani – a distilled spirit made from white Muscat of Alexandria grapes. The director fell in love with its unique aroma and flavors, and after championing the spirit and arranging to create and distribute his own brand – Singani 63 – he tasked Vermont’s Jonathan Brathwaite with spreading the Singani 63 gospel to the world.

But first, the Green Mountain State. Now available in state agency stores for the first time, the spirit provides an entry point into the previously unexplored



flavor profile of this traditional drink.

“It’s the national spirit of Bolivia and it has a history dating back 500 years, and yet, it’s never left landlocked Bolivia,” Brathwaite said from his home just south of Burlington. “Bolivians and their culture are very proud of what they make, and they make it very well, but it’s very internal. Bolivia is landlocked, so it’s very difficult getting things in and out. Even getting Singani 63 out of Bolivia, you have to go through Chile to get it to the port to get it to the U.S.”

Top taverns and restaurants throughout Vermont are now experimenting with the spirit and making it available to the curious, including Prohibition Pig, Waterworks, Bluebird Barbecue, the Guild Tavern, Hen of the Wood, Juniper Bar and Restaurant at the Hotel Vermont, and El Cortijo, among other spots.

The question remains, then: what is Singani 63? The short answer – it’s its own thing. It’s made from grapes, but it’s not a wine, a cognac or even a brandy – although it’s currently listed as a subcategory of brandy. Think floral, aromatic and above all, flexible. It’s got a bit of viscosity, so there’s softness on the palate,

## Vermont in the Spotlight

There are cities across the country known for their cocktail culture. Vermont, Jonathan Brathwaite says, is poised to join them all. “Vermont has everything going for it to be up there with Denver or Portland, Oregon, which are considered top cocktail spots in the country right now,” he said. An extremely healthy craft beer industry and a population that embraced the farm-to-table movement – before it even was a movement – shows a region known for being forward-thinking, Brathwaite said. “All of that plays right into the cocktail world,” he said. “We’re seeing it already. Vermont is pushing the envelope, wanting access to cool and exciting products, so you’re now starting to see that turn. And consumers are right there for it.”

## Nudging Singani 63

there are flavors of elderflower, a bit of pepper, touches of orange blossom and it's all bottled at 80 proof.

"When you taste it and when you smell it, the aromatic floral notes are very, very heightened and present," Brathwaite said. "It's remarkably smooth on the finish. There's none of that earthy bite. It's remarkably smooth. If you drink it neat at room temperature, you'll see it's very pretty and very aromatic and floral – almost perfumy. It lends itself beautifully to cocktails."

Made from Muscat of Alexandria grapes, Singani 63 (named both for Soderbergh's lucky number and the year he was born) is distilled two times in cognac copper pot stills. And because it has domain of origin, there are several laws that dictate whether or not it can be labeled Singani. The grapes must be grown in a 20,000 hectare square, ("It's ultra-terroir," Brathwaite said. "More even than Champagne or cognac.") at more than 5,200 feet above sea level. As a result, the grapes flourish during warm days and cool nights, developing a much thicker layer of skin, where the aromatic notes are heightened. That environmental element plays a major role in its unusual and identifiable character.

"The challenge is how to get the most out of that one grape," Brathwaite said. "Our distillery is also at this high elevation – 6,000 feet above sea level – which lowers the boiling point. It seems like a small thing, but it makes a dramatic difference. It allows us to burn off the more aggressive, harsher notes but allows the delicate, aromatic notes to sustain."

Brathwaite brought Singani 63 to the U.S. from his home base in Vermont – which allows him to travel to and from New York City with ease – and put it in the hands of some of the top mixologists in the world.

"The feedback has been pretty extraordinary," he said. "I say this with all due respect, but it's very rare to school the professors. But to bring something that has a history of 500 years, something they've never heard of and that has snuck under the radar, it's truly the exception in terms of quality, craft and uniqueness."

The Singani 63 flavor profile is approachable, and continues to open up during the tasting. It is, in a word, Brathwaite says, "exceptional."

"The fact that Steven has spearheaded this is an exciting story, as well," he said. "This is a very legitimate and passion-driven story, and I say that because our industry is filled with celebrity affiliation. This has never been what the story of Singani 63 is. This is someone who had certain means who fell in love with something and knew it was something truly exceptional. And Steven prides himself on finding or being involved in things that he feels are exceptional. He's never one to pigeonhole himself into one type of film or television. That's why this fits well into who he is as an artist and who he is as an entrepreneur as well. It's been an exciting journey." ☒

While Singani 63 can be sipped neat or on the rocks, it lends itself well to cocktails – many of them.

"It's a very bold idea, but you can have one spirit, one great craft spirit that can be your go-to, and you can throw a great cocktail party and make all these cocktails for you and all of your friends, and it will be fantastic and you're going to have a great story now," Brathwaite said.

The Vermont resident prefers "boozy, spirit-forward" cocktails himself – his drink of choice at the moment is the Negroni – but it can stand-in for vodka, rum, tequila or gin.

"You don't have to do that much with Singani," Brathwaite said. "You can use Cocchi Americano and char- treuse and nudge it in one direction and heighten those aromatic notes."

### Moscow Mule

- 1½ ounces Singani 63
- ½ ounce lime juice
- 1 bar spoon combier
- Crème de Pamplemousse Rose
- 2 ounces ginger beer
- Candied ginger
- Sprig of mint

Shake first three ingredients with ice then strain into copper mug with ice. Top with ginger beer and garnish with candied ginger and mint.



### ON OUR COVER Negroni

- 1 ounce Singani 63
- 1 ounce sweet vermouth
- 1 ounce aperol
- ¼ ounce combier
- Orange twist

Stir all ingredients over ice, then strain into a rocks glass over an ice cube. Garnish with an orange twist.



### Bolivian 63

- 2 ounces Singani 63
- ¾ ounce fresh lemon juice
- ¾ ounce simple syrup
- Champagne or prosecco

Mix ingredients and then top with the Champagne or Prosecco, adding a lemon twist.

