

Yankee Wine and Spirits



126 Main St., No. 1, Montpelier • (802) 223-2331 • Store Manager: Brent Marcellus

A good percentage of store owners and managers may have come from a background in retail. There are likely very few who come from making hand-crafted furniture.

But that's exactly what Brent Marcellus was doing just prior to finding himself in the aisles of Yankee Wine and Spirits. As it turns out, his former career was perfect training.

"I didn't necessarily have a strong interest in spirits or liquor beyond the casual indulgence," says Marcellus, the co-owner and manager of the downtown Montpelier store. "I was actually more interested in furniture making at the time."

The pursuit to make a suitable living as a solo woodworker proved to be a bit of a challenge for the longtime Vermont resident. It was during an Easter visit to his brother in upstate New York that his future took a distinct turn from the workbench to the liquor business.

Written by Bill Burke
Photos by Matthew Thorsen

"My father said, 'if I buy a liquor store, will you run it?'" Marcellus recalls. "I said I would."

His step-father, Scott Cameron, then added another detail to the deal: "By the way, you're not going to just run it, I made you a partner." Coincidentally, Marcellus and his father

acquired the shop from another father/son team: local restaurateur and store owners Paul and William Sykus – also former owners of the Lobster Pot in Montpelier.

"When I was given the opportunity to get into an industry as rock-solid as the liquor industry, I couldn't pass it up," Marcellus says. "To have to not worry about what it was I was going to be doing over the next year or so was an absolute thrill. It's as recession-proof as you can get."

Marcellus worked with Sykus for six months before taking over the store four years ago. A few tweaks and additions, and the Cameron/Marcellus team has managed to grow the store 30-40 percent each year.

"We've put together a comfortable atmosphere," he says. "It's a place where people can come in and ask questions, instead of running in and getting out the door as fast as possible."

Part of the store's key to success is the team's knowledge of liquor – from how it's made to the differences between each brand to what it pairs well with. That expertise helps the store's five workers know what to recommend and to whom.

"We have one of the better Scotch selections," Marcellus says of the store's specialty. "We are a 'push' store, so we get three bottles of everything new to the state's list. Not all stores are like that. We don't have to shop



Brent Marcellus

around through the listings to find things like this to put up."

Marcellus says customers have recently shown particularly keen interest in Blanton's Bourbon, and the rare and hard-to-find Pappy Van Winkle bourbon – something that's only available through a state-run lottery. The store also works regularly with local producers to offer tastings and informational nights to customers.

"If I had to pick one Vermont distiller as a favorite, it would be a toss-up between Barr Hill Gin and Mad Hill Distillers' Revolution Rye," Marcellus says. "The Revolution Rye is hands-down one of the best ryes being made in Vermont right now, and the Barr Hill Gin is its own unique, delicious, raw honey gin.



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"The [Barr Hill] Tom Cat Gin is really growing in popularity like gangbusters this year, too. It attracts a lot of whiskey drinkers who don't normally drink gin. They get a chance to try it and they see there's a lot to be interested in."

In addition to long aisles packed with a variety of rums, vodkas, whiskeys, gins and tequilas, the brick-front, bright store – nearly 2,000 square feet right along the downtown's main thoroughfare – also stocks more than 1,000 bottles of wine. And Marcellus, who spends "as much time as possible" bobbing up and down on Lake Champlain aboard his 1988 Sea Ray Sundancer, enjoys providing customer service for what he terms a "diverse clientele."

"We have our regulars – a really large cross section of the community," he says. "We'll have an older crowd, but later in the day we'll get a lot of younger people. We'll have legislators or state workers on their lunch hour; There are people on their way home or even fishermen from under the bridge.

"Everybody comes here, and everybody is welcome." ☺

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