

# North Vancouver distillery named best whisky maker in Canada



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1 / 3 Sons of Vancouver Distillery co-founder enjoys the aroma of one of his award-winning whiskies. | Paul McGrath / North Shore News

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The end of Dry January can't come soon enough.

North Vancouver's Sons of Vancouver Distillery has picked up a host of Canadian Whisky Awards, including the vaunted Canadian Whisky Producer of the Year.

“It’s really cool, man. It feels like big things are happening,” said co-founder James Lester. “And the team is also very excited.”

Opened just over a decade ago – when craft distilling was still a bold concept – Sons of Vancouver has racked up dozens of awards including the 2023 Canadian Whisky of the Year and 2025 Rye Whisky of the year.

Canadian Whisky Producer of the Year is a big one though, Lester said. Nominees are only considered after they’ve earned themselves a crowded trophy case of individual whisky awards. And it’s only the second time in the awards’ history that the title has gone to an independent producer.

“This really just shows that it’s not an accident. It wasn’t a flash in the pan sort of situation. I feel like it’s some real credibility in the industry, especially amongst the big names – the Crown Royals and Wiser’s – who’ve won this in the past.”

Among other awards this season, Sons took a gold in the Best Cast-Strength Whisky category for their almost-60 per cent alcohol First Crack on the Crème Brûlée.

“It’s a pretty stiff category,” Lester said. (Pun actually not intended.)

“In whisky, wheat tastes like vanilla icing sugar. It tastes like custard. We really leaned into that wheat content when we were blending it to try and bring out that creaminess of the crème brûlée. The oak cask gave it that caramelized sugar nose.”

Sadly, as is often the case with small batch spirits, the entire run available to the public was sold out before competition judges held their blind tastings. Sons of Vancouver’s wheated rye whisky however, which won the Best New Whisky award, offers a similar experience and is still on the shelves, Lester said.

The marquee award for Sons of Vancouver comes at a difficult time in the industry. Much like craft brewers, distillers are seeing declining sales. Lester said it could be on account of the rising cost of living and consumers having less disposable income, or people becoming more health conscious and drinking less. Or it could simply be that the boom in craft spirits that occurred during the pandemic is over.

“I have friends who were down 30 per cent last year, and they’re down 30 per cent again this year,” he said.

Sons of Vancouver has been weathering the storm, Lester said, thanks to their decision to branch out into making whiskies. And the awards, no doubt, haven’t hurt. The distillery also picked up the Best Whisky Aged 8 Years or Under award and Blending Team of the Year along with numerous gold medals for individual whiskies.

“We’re pretty lucky.” he said.

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