

ENTERTAINMENT FOR ALL

PLAYBOY

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2018



The Craft Revolution Just Got Stronger

*Helmed by Hollywood doyens **Walton Goggins** and **Matthew Alper**, Mulholland Distilling adds fuel to the explosion in independent spirits*

BY JASON HORN PHOTOGRAPHY BY AUSTIN HARGRAVE

"I drink whiskey with my friends, vodka with people I don't know and gin with people I'm doing business with," says Walton Goggins as he settles into one of the Mulholland Room's vintage oversize couches. You probably know Goggins from *Justified*, *The Hateful Eight*, *Vice Principals* or *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, but the actor is also co-owner of Mulholland Distilling, a downtown Los Angeles-based booze brand that makes all three spirits. Friends, strangers and businessmen: Goggins has you covered.

The Mulholland Room, packed with shabby-chic furniture and locally produced art, serves as the office and private bar for the distilling concern, which is the brainchild of Goggins's

culture that seemed to happen in all aspects of life—beer, coffee, cocktails," Goggins says. "It feels connected to a simpler time, when things were handmade because that was the only way to make them."

Craft spirits appear to be following the path that craft beer carved out in the 1990s. According to the American Craft Spirits Association, the number of producers grew from 280 in 2011 to more than 1,400 in 2016. Their share of the overall American spirits market more than tripled over the same period, from 1.2 percent to 3.8 percent. Craft beer, meanwhile, claims more than 12 percent of the total market share for suds, suggesting that there's lots of room to grow for craft spirit brands.

partnerships with small beverage brands. This practice is fairly common: ACSA says the majority of its several hundred members are distillers, but membership is open to anybody with a distilled-spirits-plant license—the federal permit required if you want to distill, age, blend, flavor or bottle spirits of any kind. And it fits in with Mulholland's locally focused philosophy, Alper says. "What is the spirit of L.A.? It's taking the best from everywhere and putting it together."

As a well-known actor getting into the spirits business, Goggins joins celebrity booze entrepreneurs including George Clooney, whose Casamigos Tequila brand sold to British conglomerate Diageo for a staggering



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longtime friend Matthew Alper. After more than 20 years as a cameraman (working on everything from *Free Willy* to *The Avengers*), Alper happened to meet a distiller at a party in North Carolina. As he tells it, the distiller observed, "Y'all drink a lot in Los Angeles, but you don't really have a local spirit. Why is that?" That conversation took place in 2013. Goggins came onboard the next year, and by 2016 Mulholland had officially launched.

The brand may be small—its spirits are available in just over 100 L.A.-area bars, restaurants and liquor stores—but it's part of a mounting wave of independent booze producers. "There has been this explosion in craft

So what does "craft" mean in the context of spirits? The association defines it as an independently owned brand selling fewer than 750,000 gallons of alcohol—just short of 5 million standard-size bottles of 80-proof spirit—per year. (Jack Daniel's sold more than 30 times that amount last year.)

One surprising aspect of Mulholland Distilling is that it doesn't actually do any distilling. Goggins and Alper source their whiskey from MGP, an Indiana distillery that supplies dozens of craft labels, and the base spirit for their vodka and gin from a Missouri producer. The spirits are then blended and bottled at a facility near Los Angeles that specializes in

\$1 billion last year. But Mulholland's founders claim they aren't looking for a buyout. "I'm not George Clooney," Goggins says. "I'm an actor and I'm a storyteller. It took me a long time to get where I am. Mulholland Distilling is a creative experience I wanted in my life outside of my career."

Creativity and storytelling: two essential ingredients in spirit-making. Small production levels allow craft distillers (not to mention craft brewers, winemakers, chocolatiers and others) to tell their stories in far greater depth than the big guys. No wonder craft culture found a home in the myth-making mecca that is Los Angeles. ■