

Bringing Coffee, Whisky & People Together

By Daniel Rodic

It was holiday time at the DeMarco house. After family dinner, Jackie and her father decided to de-clutter the liquor cabinet. Having been in the business for over 35 years, at numerous distilleries across the continent, the collection was extensive. Nostalgically discussing each bottle, Jackie made the unassuming comment that she finds there is a lack of variety in the Canadian whisky market, compared to the extensive craft whisky movement booming in the US.

This unassuming comment quickly evolved into a lengthy discussion on Canadian whisky that carried on late into the evening. After an equally long discussion about the market, reflecting on how Canadian whisky is consumed and how it has progressed dramatically in the past few years, the idea solidified. Jackie's proposal to her father was to create

a new way of drinking Canadian whisky that veteran whisky drinkers have never experienced before, and that is also something newcomers to whisky find exciting and easy sipping. Ultimately, she proposed a whisky that brings people together, regardless of gender, age or experience. To explain a bit of background, Daniel DeMarco has been a distiller for over

35 years. In 2006, after completing 27 years heading up production at Hiram Walker and Sons Ltd. in Windsor Ontario, he decided to get involved with the design and construction of countless craft distilleries across North America. He paired this work with periodic projects for many commercial brands as well. His daughter Jackie, having grown up curious about her father's profession, started out by occasionally visiting the Hiram Walker distillery as a child, which later progressed into helping her father out with floor plans, visiting distilleries on both sides of the border, and suggesting ideas for new clients. After working in marketing post University, she was eager to apply her knowledge of both the manufacturing side and commercial side to spark innovation in her favourite spirits category, Canadian Whisky.

Driven by this new idea, Jackie proceeded to convince her father that this could be something big in the Canadian Whisky market. After many long discussions and consideration, they agreed that the next step was approaching long time Master Blender and family friend, Steve Wright. As the former Director of Global Product Development for Allied Domecq Spirits & Wine, Steve has extensive experience developing new spirits products for global brands and has been involved in consulting and developing products for the craft spirits producers since 2006.

After hearing Jackie's proposal, the brainstorming began. The end result was coffee. It made perfect sense, two iconic Canadian favourites; handcrafted brewed coffee, paired with a rich blend of Canadian whisky. Having already spent years experimenting with coffee and spirits, Steve was in the perfect position to develop the first ever Coffee Blended Canadian Whisky.

The development trials began. Steve created hundreds of samples, screening coffee bean varieties from across the globe, testing different brewing methods and formulating the ideal blend of whiskies to integrate with the coffee. The tasks of tasting, tweaking and retesting by the team took an exhilarating year and a half to complete, and finally Kavi Reserve was born.

"Our goal is smooth whisky start, mellow coffee finish and our mantra is indulge your coffee spirit" says Jackie. When asked how he describes Kavi Reserve, Steve explains, "Kavi Reserve is really the seamless integration of cold brewed coffee and Canadian whisky.





The coffee is not meant to overpower the mouthfeel and character of whisky; it's meant to compliment it in the finish."

Having tasted it on multiple occasions, it is just that. The aroma speaks to the unique blend of coffee beans and the cold water brewing. It showcases notes of toffee, cocoa and pronounced oak. On taste, the Canadian whisky (a custom blend specifically made to marry with coffee), hits your palate first, with a light oakiness, followed by a subtle sweetness that carries a hint of vanilla. Now, the most exciting part, the "finish", when the cold brew coffee comes through. It can be described as perfectly balanced, with an exceptionally smooth finish and warming glow of blended coffee and whisky.

"We are finding that Kavi Reserve is achieving exactly what we set out to do. We have veteran whisky drinkers that love it as something different from their traditional Canadian whisky, as well as numerous newcomers to the category who find the coffee comforting while developing their palate" stated Jackie.

Having performed thousands of tastings since they launched Kavi Reserve in the summer of 2017, Jackie describes that she never gets tired of the look on people's faces when they try it for the first time. "You can see the reserved, almost skeptic expression turn into a look of complete pleasant surprise and enjoyment. It's that moment that makes the hours and work that went into creating Kavi Reserve and the continued hours that go into running the business worthwhile."

Beyond the product, it was fascinating hearing such a unique story about the sharing of knowledge and experience from one generation to another. Listening to how Dan, Steve and Jackie work together, it is evident that they understand how important it is to combine their collective viewpoints and skill sets. Dan notes, "What makes working with my daughter so gratifying is both passing on the experience and knowledge that I've gained over my career, and watching the unique way she has run with it." Jackie sums it up by saying, "I know working with your dad isn't for everyone, but I'm extremely lucky that our perspectives and skill sets really compliment one another. It took me a while to appreciate it,

but now I realized how privileged I am to have a teacher like this just a phone call, or visit away. Also growing up with Steve as one of my dad's best friends, I truly have two people that I can rely on throughout this journey introducing Kavi to the world."

Kavi Reserve is currently distributed in Ontario and Manitoba. The team is working on expanding into additional provinces and possibly some states in the near future. Kavi Reserve is made at Wolfhead distillery in Amherstburg, Ontario, founded by Tom Manherz, who also joined the team as a co-owner. I'm looking forward to sipping more coffee blended whisky and keeping an eye on how this exceptional liquid continues to impress as it makes its way across North America.

