

# Fog's End Distillery Has the Can-do Spirit

Former Deputy Sheriff Brews Delightful Moonshine

BY TOM BENTLEY



Photo: Kelli Uldall

**Fog's End Distillery has the motto: "Everything in moderation, except excellence." The Gonzalez-based facility produces Monterey Rye and California Moonshine and the opportunity to hand-craft your flavor.**

If your thoughts after retirement move toward opening an ice cream shop, but you open a distillery, do you feel thwarted? Not if you're Craig Pakish, of Fog's End Distillery in Gonzales—what you feel is busy. Pakish retired after 28 years as a deputy sheriff for Monterey County, and was talked out of the ice cream parlor and into the distillery by a partner friend.

After their setup in the Gonzales warehouse in 2005 and qualifying for the labyrinthine series of local, state and federal permits to brew the booze, they first bottled some 100-proof moonshine in 2007. Pakish was initially the salesperson for the operation, selling to bars and restaurants in Monterey and nearby counties. When his partner left, Pakish became the sole face—and hands and arms and body—of the business.

What that means is that Pakish sources the

grain for the spirits, distills and oversees their aging, bottles them, and sells them throughout the area and beyond. A distilling day alone is not resting in a porch swing.

"Eight hours is a distilling day, but it's a 10-hour process from filling the still and turning it on and watching for the temperatures," says Pakish.

Dangerous acetones and methanol are the temperature-specific "heads" that have to be tossed from the distillate, as well as the later "tails," the fusel oils. The "hearts" are the good stuff. Besides the 90-proof moonshine he now produces, there's also his Monterey Rye.

"It's a specialty rye, not technically a whiskey," says Pakish. Because he uses a 50% grain and 50% sugar combination, and doesn't age in new oak barrels, the spirit can't be called standard rye whiskey.

He ages his spirits in large plastic barrels with

Napa-sourced oak cubes.

"With these little oak cubes, I get more surface-to-volume ratio to pull the flavor than a cooper's barrel," he says.

He's often tinkering with his recipes and aging, and invites groups of tasters to rate the various blends, only marketing the most favored liquor. He doesn't do much drinking himself.

"I'm a taster, not a real drinker," he says.

What he does do is work. His distilling days often begin at 2am, but he enjoys the solitude.

"I like the quiet time I get at 3am in the morning. No phone calls, no emails," he says.

And then there's his sales driving, which is around 2,000 miles a month. Fog's End is no ice cream parlor, but I had a snootful of that rye, and it is sweet.

See more about Fog's End Distillery and arrange for a tasting at <https://fogsenddistillery.com>. ■



**Craig Pakish was a deputy sheriff for Monterey County, and after retirement, thought of opening an ice cream parlor, but instead runs a distillery.**

*Photo: Kelli Uldall*