

Driving to Petaluma on a crisp Winter morning, I entered [Stillwater Spirits](#), headquarters for **ADI's** ([American Distilling Institute](#)) week-long, hands-on distilling workshop. Held just twice year, it's led by Bill Owens, **ADI's** founder and President. The group is limited to an ideal size of about 15 participants, both new to distilling and seasoned distillers. He also opened and ran [Buffalo Bill's Brewery](#) in Hayward for over a decade, is a seasoned photographer, has written numerous books on distilling, including online courses, and leads these trainings. His books are among the most detailed and practical out there on distilling, whether moonshining for fun at home, or starting your own business and launching product.

The week is jam-packed with classes covering the likes of Anatomy of the Still, Fermentation, Distillation, and Licensing Your Distillery. Hands-on options are plentiful, from actual distilling to barrel charring and bottling. The schedule also includes copious amounts of fun, with excursions to Bay Area greats like [St. George Spirits/Hangar One Distillery](#), breweries like [Anchor Steam](#), [Moylan's](#), [Magnolia](#), and some of San Francisco's best mixology bars. A Petaluma hotel one block from **Stillwater**, meals, transportation, classes and daily tastings are all included in the \$3500, 6-day workshop. Whiskey is a huge focus but brewing is covered, too. After all, Bill is a beer master, as the delicious beer he was working on attested to (which we were lucky to sample in varying stages of development).

Bill's ADI staff, including **Andrew Faulkner** (Media VP) and **Nancy Fraley** (Research) are not only well-informed, leading tastings and assisting throughout the week, they're passionate drinkers who will joyously discuss the ins-and-outs of various spirits with you. **Stillwater Spirits'** Jordan Via is an expert instructor and generously made their distillery and equipment available. And there are a number of other guest instructors all week long. Of course there's the immense knowledge and experience of Bill himself, who's there introducing sessions, leading excursions and, thankfully, making beer.

It's impressive to see the range of attendees: men and women from as far as Australia or Montreal, distillers behind a few of the biggest products in the US (some of my favorites!) who are looking to make new products, and first-time distillers getting ready to launch. They were clearly having a good time together, most apparent during a blind bourbon tasting when their tasting note descriptors got ever more colorfully creative as the afternoon progressed.

ADI is an unmatched source for everything distilling. On their site you can find distilled spirits laws and regulations or lists of state alcohol boards. **ADI's** discussion boards stay active with discourse from around the world as members share trials, errors, questions and successes with one other. Online courses are helpful for those who can't make it out to California for a hands-on workshop, while **ADI's** Directory of Craft Distillers is a great resource, networking tool and listing for your own business.

It was a privilege to take a peek into the world of distilling and overwhelming amount of years and work it takes to launch the products we all enjoy. As a drink writer, I was inspired meeting the staff and distillers attending, to hear what brought them here and see first-hand why what Bill/**ADI** provides - education on every aspect of distilling and much-needed community around it - is invaluable.

- Virginia Miller

The Perfect Spot (<http://www.theperfectspotsf.com>); *San Francisco Bay Guardian* (<http://www.sfbg.com>)