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Wisconsin Spirits, Meet New York Cocktails

By ROBERT SIMONSON

Fedora, the snug basement restaurant in Greenwich Village, has named one drink after a town in south-central Wisconsin — the Lake Delton Mule — and another, the Root Beer Butterfest Float, for an annual dairy festival in Reedsburg, Wis. Fedora's nearby sister restaurant, Perla, serves a cocktail called National Lampoon's Wisco Vacation, no explanation needed.

Wisconsin has exercised an inordinate influence on New York dining and drinking of late. Fedora and Perla are part of a downtown collection of restaurants that has been named Little Wisco for the high number of employees who hail from the Badger State, where Gabriel Stulman, one of the partners, attended college. Then there's the Butterfly, a supper-club-like TriBeCa restaurant from the Wisconsin native Michael White, where diners can get bratwurst sliders, patty melts and old-fashioned (made with brandy, just as they are in "America's Dairyland"), and 5 oz. Factory, a Greenwich Village spot that traffics in cheese and frozen custard, two Wisconsin specialties. (I, too, hail from Wisconsin, for the record.)

And now, two decidedly Wisconsin spirits have arrived from Death's Door Spirits, a craft distillery in that state. Wondermint is that thing that no one in the craft spirit movement had yet thought of: artisanal peppermint schnapps. And Kringle Cream is a rum cream liqueur made to taste like a kringle, a large-form Nordic pastry associated with Racine, Wis.

Both are proudly provincial and, frankly, a tad down-market.

Brian Ellison is the founder of Death's Door, which also makes gin, vodka and unaged whiskey. "It felt like, at least in Wisconsin, there were a certain amount of people and accounts that we just aren't approachable to because of our seriousness," Mr. Ellison said. "I thought we should look at some more irreverence, and touch on products that would harken to personal history and be more personable and fun."

Kringle Cream was released last October, and by the end of the year, Death's Door had sold 11,000 cases throughout the Midwest. "I can't tell you how long it took me to sell 11,000 cases of gin," Mr. Ellison said with a sigh.

In New York, he first took the two items to Brian Bartels, the bar director of the Little Wisco restaurants and a native of Reedsburg.

"I don't think it's anything we're trying to force-feed anybody," Mr. Bartels said of his and his colleagues' home state. "We are just proud of our heritage and our upbringing. We're pretty humble. We get to do these small little spots that feel connected to friends and family."

There's a bit of family in the Root Beer Butterfest Float, which is made from Kringle Cream, Root liqueur and club soda, and accompanied by a sort of Rice Krispies treat made with butterscotch chips, chocolate chips and peanut butter. They're called Ma Bartels's Krispie Treats. Yes, the recipe is from Mr. Bartels's mom.