

JILL KUEHLER, FOUNDER & DISTILLER, FREELAND SPIRITS, PORTLAND, OREGON



Based in Portland, Oregon, Freeland Spirits was founded by Jill Kuehler in 2017. With a background in food and agriculture, Jill fell in love with small scale agriculture while working for the Peace Corp in Guatemala. She then moved to the Pacific Northwest to work at a family farm and later to Portland where she worked with Zenger Farm, an urban farm that promotes and educates about sustainable food systems.

Drinking whiskey with her friend Cory Carman one night, they discussed how they wanted to know more of the agricultural story of their whiskey. Where did the grain come from? Who grew it? From there, a dream was born to start a distillery featuring the best of Oregon agriculture. Cory, who owns Carman Ranch, said that

she could grow the grain on her grass-fed beef ranch. Jill named her company Freeland Spirits after her grandmother who had never touched a drop of booze. With a background in chemistry, Molly Troupe, aka Mythical Molly, is the youngest female Master Distiller in the United States. Today Freeland Spirits has an exclusive female production team that also includes brewer and distiller Lee Hedgemon and Kira Duncan.

Freeland Spirits offers a range of spirits including Gin, Geneva, Dry Gin, and Bourbon, as well as canned cocktails. "Each product is a way to highlight an aspect of the Pacific Northwest," Jill explained. Each product is made with a local partnership or has a community aspect to it. The Gin has fresh, Pacific Northwest ingredients such as cucumber, rosemary, mint, and thyme. The Bourbon is finished in used Pinot Noir barrels from Elk Cove Winery in the Willamette Valley. Geneva is made with Oregon-grown grain and Willamette Valley hazelnuts. For the canned cocktails, the Gin & Rose Tonic blends gin with Portland Syrups' Rose Tonic and the French 75 blends Freeland gin with Chardonnay from Chehalem Winery.

There are few women in distilling. What types of challenges have you faced?

We are at a great place today. We have proven ourselves. The biggest challenges were before opening the door. First the idea was in my head and I had no one to share it with and then when I did, people



were skeptical. Then, for a capital-intensive business, finding capital was brutally painful, as I think it is for anybody regardless of your gender. But when you look at 5% of business loans going to women, and less than 2% venture capital going to women, the fact is that people give money to people who look like themselves. Until there are more people on the other side who are women or people of color, it is just going to be an uphill battle for a long time.

What do you see as the future for women in distilling?

The future is so promising. We have an intern program focused on women and people of color and we had over 100 applicants for our first position. We get requests daily from women wanting to learn how to enter the industry. In addition to Molly, our distilling team includes a woman of color and a transgender woman. I am ready for the day when that is normal. Diversity benefits all industries and I want to see women in all aspects of our business.

