



Bert "Tito" Beveridge in the still room (above); the Tito's Handmade Vodka family (top right)

Handmade Vodka

**An Interview with Bert "Tito" Beveridge,
Founder, Tito's Handmade Vodka**



intention to create a smooth and pure vodka that women, with their refined palate, would love to sip. Tito's Handmade Vodka has been awarded 95 points by Wine Enthusiast and was recognized with the "UCC Chairman's Trophy" at the 2010 Ultimate Cocktail Challenge for the World's Best Vodka Tonic.

How challenging has it been to build this brand?

I didn't know anything about the liquor business and I went out to try to sell my infusions, which I had been making for friends as holiday presents. It seems like there are nine million flavors of vodka now, but in 1993, Stoli had just come out with around 10 flavors and everybody was bringing them in.

At the time, there were 80 vodkas on the market, so it was a crowded category. I spoke with a liquor store owner and he told me, if you're going to focus on vodka, you have to stand out. So the idea for my vodka was that a girl would want to drink it and that a guy would buy it for a girl and he'd drink it too.

I made beer and wine in college, and I had always wanted to build a still, so I did and started cooking different grains. After a lot of persistence and struggle, I became the first legal distillery in Texas. While I didn't realize it at the time, I was also starting an American craft distilling movement. Since then, 600 distilleries have popped up in the U.S.

How do you cut through all the noise and position Tito's among the other brands?

I was never in the adult beverage business before and never opened a distillery before. I had not studied business in college. But I did know how to get stuff done. When I started, I was a one-man show. I would distill it, bottle it, put it on a truck, and sell it. I didn't have credit so I returned after 30 days on the road to cash my checks and send out money for supplies, meet the trucks and unload them, and start all over again. I also did all the regulatory stuff and financing, and most of my own marketing.

I focused on making vodka that I like to drink, which has flavor and is clean and smooth. I also like a nice easy buzz and I like it clean in the morning. We do what we do and don't worry about what anyone else is doing.

This business is so competitive. These little distilleries are now raising money locally. But when I started, I couldn't raise money for six years.

However, I try to focus on doing one thing and doing it right, and I don't know how to be fancy. People understand when you give them filet mignon at a meat loaf price – they understand a quality product at a more than fair deal.

Is distribution all across the U.S. or are you focused on specific markets?

We have distribution in every state, but just because you have a distributor doesn't mean you're distributed in this business. We're working our way through the system slowly. We have been trying to get into some of the chains.

Is the product best consumed straight or mixed?

It depends on the person. When I'm at the distillery, I drink it warm and straight because that's how you taste everything that is in there.

At a bar or restaurant, I usually drink it in sparkling mineral water with a wedge of lime and a wedge of orange. I do that because it will hydrate me – there is no sugar or sodium.

What does the phrase "handmade" mean to you and how important is it to your process?

When I began, I noticed that boutique wineries had been returning to doing things in a more old-fashioned way and that breweries had come back to doing things in a time-honored way. I thought I would go back to the old-fashioned way of doing things. It requires more of an artisanal craftsman style using a pot still. I'm now using pot stills every which way – I realized you can do a lot of things with a pot still depending on how you build it.

It's handmade in that you're cooking it in a pot still. You're sitting there with a test tube, taking it to your mouth, and saying "yay" or "nay."

Is this brand here to stay?

Tito's has always been one of the underdog brands. I poured my heart into this brand and I like drinking vodka. I'm fortunate that it happens to be right in the middle of the bell curve of what everybody else likes to drink, as well. Even though there is no pressure for distributors to sell my product, I have managed to make enough friends and have enough converts that want to help me because they like me. I also have a bit of a cult following. You either know about Tito's or you don't – and if you do know, you're drinking it, and if you aren't drinking it, it's because you haven't been exposed to it yet. ●

EDITORS' NOTE Tito's Handmade Vodka founder and master distiller Bert "Tito" Beveridge is a pioneer in the world of micro-distilling. A native Texan and entrepreneur, he attended The University of Texas at Austin, where he earned degrees in Geology and Geophysics, with a minor in Math. He began his professional life as a Geophysicist. In the early 1990s, Beveridge enjoyed infusing flavored vodka in his spare time, creating much-loved batches for friends. His path soon became clear and he decided to create his own vodka company. In 1995, Beveridge fought to create the permit process in Texas to establish his legal right to open the state's first distillery. With the unwavering dedication of a small, handpicked staff and with friends who pitched in to help build Tito's first distillery shack, he turned his dream into a reality. It took the company more than eight years to turn a profit. Today, Tito's Handmade Vodka is one of the fastest-selling and fastest-growing micro-distilleries on the market and remains one of the purest spirits available.

COMPANY BRIEF Tito's Handmade Vodka (www.titosvodka.com) is a slow, six-times distilled personal recipe offered at the fairest price possible. Tito perfected his 100 percent corn mash recipe by employing the same pot still methods applied to fine single malt scotches and the highest-end French cognacs. The clear, odorless, and unmatched smoothness of Tito's Handmade Vodka is the cleanest expression of the spirit and one of very few suitable to be enjoyed neat. It was Tito's