

Wine Spirits



An Interview with Carl Nolet Jr. (left), Executive Vice President, Nolet Spirits USA, and Bob Nolet (right), Executive Vice President, Nolet Distillery

The Ketel One Guarantee



EDITORS' NOTE Proud to be part of the 11th generation of Nolet distilling, Bob Nolet studied business and gained work experience with an American drinks wholesaler. As his career developed, Nolet returned to Schiedam, Holland—the home of Nolet Distillery—and began learning every aspect of the family business from the ground up. During his tenure, Nolet received a letter from a well-known cocktail author and mixologist, urging him to introduce Ketel One Vodka to the growing cocktail scene in London. With this recommendation, the brand's expansion into Europe began.

Carl Nolet Jr. began learning the family's trade more than 25 years ago, and his experience and dedication to Ketel One Vodka have culminated in his role as the Executive Vice President of Nolet Spirits USA. In 1988, Carl Nolet Jr. began working at the family's distillery in Holland to learn the intricacies and techniques behind crafting Ketel One Vodka. In 1992, upon the successful launch of Ketel One in the U.S., Nolet moved to Los Angeles to further expand the brand's growing popularity.

COMPANY BRIEF Nolet Distillery (www.noletdistillery.com) is a family-owned company with roots going back 10 generations from father to son since 1691. The current Chairman is Carolus Nolet Sr.; his sons Carl Jr. and Bob both work at the company. The Nolet Distillery employs 180 people in Holland and the U.S., and continues to successfully produce premium spirits brands in Schiedam, Holland for distribution across the world. The history of excellence is continued today through Ketel One Vodka, among the world's leading ultra-premium vodkas; Ketel 1 Jenever, one of the leading jenevers in Holland; and the introduction of Nolet's Finest Gins.

What is the history of the distillery and how has the business evolved?

Carl: We are the 11th generation in this family business that started in 1691. Our process has evolved over the years, but our family has remained committed to producing ultra-premium spirits.

Bob and I have the responsibility of making sure that our business continues to thrive. Our commitment to excellence means the quality of our product needs to shine through in every segment of our business. To accomplish this, we focus on every aspect of production – from using quality ingredients to maintaining the cleanest distillery around and refusing to cut corners. This dedication to excellence drives everything our family does.

How do you honor the heritage while developing new products?

Carl: We are continually looking to expand the Ketel One portfolio. Before we came out with Ketel One Citroen, we started with extensive research. Combining our vast experience with this research allows us to ensure that our new products, like Ketel One Citroen and Ketel One Oranje, meet the standards as defined by our 300 years of tradition.

How do you maintain the quality of the product? Has technology changed how you operate?

Bob: Ketel One is created using a combination of fine craftsmanship and the most modern techniques available.

Each generation of Nolet distillers must create products for their time. Our father developed Ketel One because he knew vodka was a great martini base and he felt he could make a higher quality spirit that was specifically designed for martinis and drinking on the rocks.

He perfected the process of using column stills and blending that with our pot still batches, giving Ketel One its signature long and beautiful mouth feel without adding ingredients like sugar or glycerin. This was an innovation to make a better product and bring it to the market in a different way. We didn't advertise for the first one million cases, choosing instead to embark on a series of tastings to highlight the quality in our product to key decision makers around the world.

Carl: In the early '80s, our father analyzed the vodka category and quickly realized that, in order to gain market share, he needed to create a product that could be enjoyed neat or in a martini.

But for all of our history, our key has always been to focus on the bartender. In 1983, my dad came up with the Ketel One recipe, and in 1990, I came to the U.S. to find 25 bartenders and introduced them to the product. We explained to the bartenders – and, over time, to the consumer – that not all vodkas are equal. The way we make Ketel One, such as the fact that we use a coal fire when vodka is usually distilled ice cold, is what sets us apart from other vodkas.

As a result of our work, the top 50 bars in the world recently chose Ketel One as their number one vodka brand for today and, even more importantly, they chose Ketel One as the number one trending product in the category over the next 10 years. We have the love from bartenders around the world – providing excellent word-of-mouth for Ketel One.

What type of growth have you seen in the U.S. and other key markets, and will you be expanding into additional markets?

Bob: The U.S. is the most important market for us because it has a cocktail culture and American consumers know what they want – they order Ketel One on the rocks or a Ketel One Cosmopolitan. We attribute much of our success in the market to the bartenders' affinity for, and recommendations of, our product.

In terms of the rest of the world, customers in Asia look to American popular culture for trends and they see the cocktails the stars are drinking. As a result, younger generations in those countries are beginning to drink more cocktails.

Carl: As a family and a brand, we invest continuously in supporting bartender communities around the world. Today, bartenders can separate themselves and gain recognition around the world for the art of making unbelievable cocktails. We're committed to continuing to grow Ketel One's profile among this group.

How do you increase production as you grow without sacrificing quality?

Bob: Our father started the brand's expansion by exporting Ketel One to the U.S. and the growth has consistently been steady.

We have always invested in the distillery because it's such an essential part of the production of Ketel One. To ensure that we're in position to meet the growing demand, we have married our traditional processes with the best modern technology available today. We have put up new buildings to supplement the original ones. On one side of the plant, we have a coal fire still dating back more than 300 years, and on the other side, we have robots running the show. It's an ideal combination of modern technology and our family's ideals that have shaped our products since 1691.

Carl: Part of our history is that we own, and are very involved in the distillery. Every day, you can see someone from our family walking around to make sure everything is running smoothly. Additionally, one member of the family always has to taste the newest Ketel One batch before bottling. We're committed to retaining this process to ensure that every batch of Ketel One meets our family's strict standards.

If you ever find yourself in Holland, we encourage you to visit us at our distillery and see it for yourself. ●