

# AS AMERICAN AS APPLE CIDER

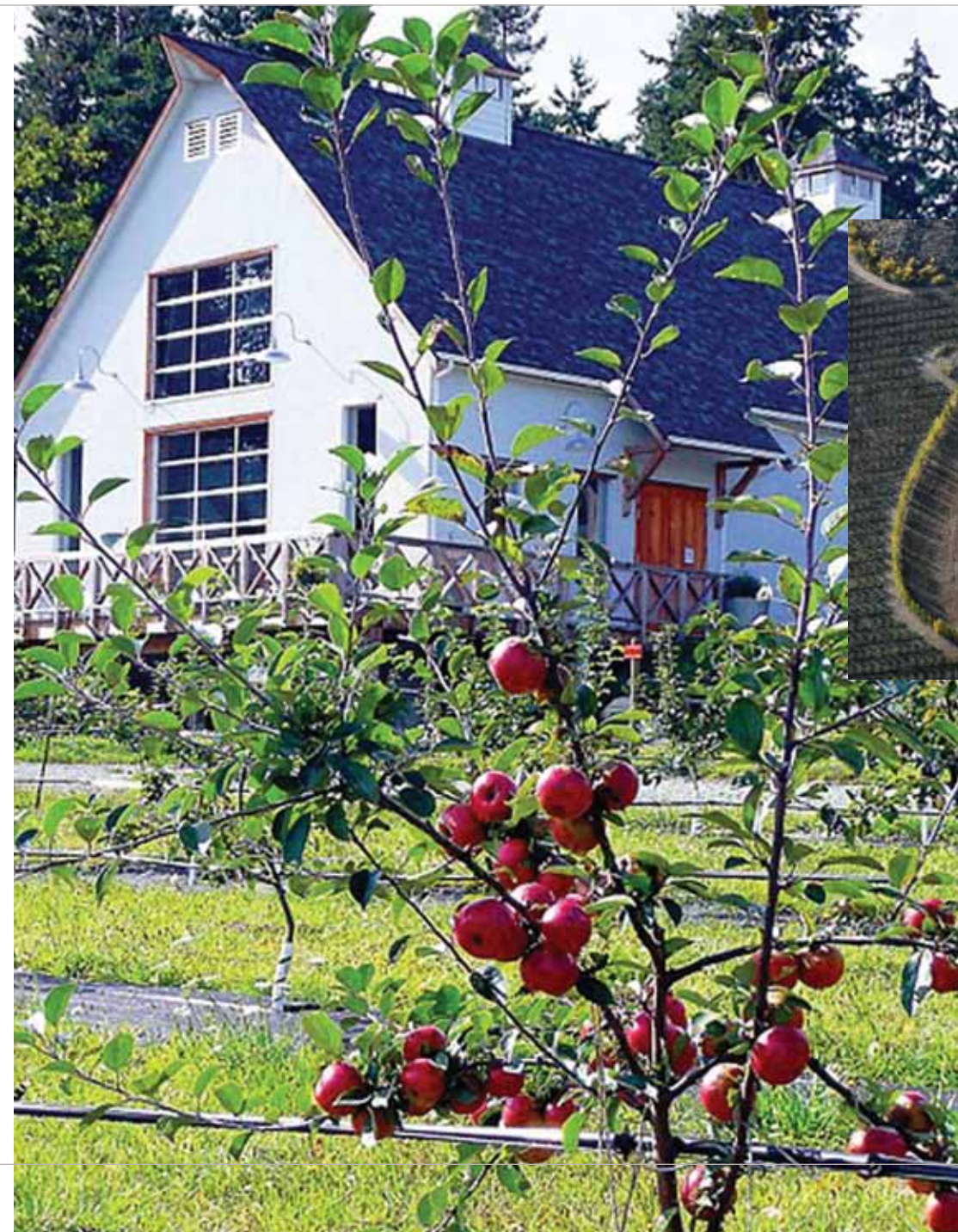
IF "AN APPLE A DAY KEEPS THE DOCTOR AWAY,"  
SO DOES A BOTTLE OF CIDER | BY ALEX HENDLER

Back in America's early days, an eccentric named John Chapman brought apple trees to the wild Northwest Territory (later known as Ohio, Indiana and Illinois) so the good pioneers could enjoy a glass of cider in the evening after a hard day of pioneering. Chapman, aka Johnny Appleseed, was the "American Dionysus," as author Michael Pollan reports in *The Botany of Desire*.

Now, a whole new group of Pacific Northwest artisan cider pioneers are doing their best to restore the time in North America when a glass of cider meant something with a little more kick than a refreshing glass of non-filtered apple juice offers.



“FOR EVERY PALATE, THERE PROBABLY IS A CIDER,” SAYS JIM BOVINO, SALES MANAGER OF FINNRIVER FARM & CIDERY, LOCATED ON THE OLYMPIC PENINSULA. “TRY ‘EM ALL. YOU’LL FIND ONE YOU LIKE.”



A far cry from the mass-produced “hard ciders” most commonly found as an alternative to your local pub’s beers on tap, this new wave of ciders shares a kinship with fine winemaking. The cider makers are very conscious of the apples they put into their beverages, striving to find that perfect balance between tannins and acids, and experimenting with different blends.

The result? A wide range of different flavors and styles that includes dry, bubbly and dessert ciders. “For every palate, there probably is a cider,” says Jim Bovino, sales manager of Finnriver Farm & Cidery, located on the Olympic Peninsula. “Try ‘em all. You’ll find one you like.”

Finnriver’s Artisan Sparkling Cider features dessert apples crafted using the méthode Champenoise for a crisp, clean champagne-style cider, while the Farmstead Sparkling Cider features 30 percent cider apples crafted using the méthode Ancestrale, in which the lees (dead yeast) is left inside the bottle for a dry, distinctive rustic flavor.

After accidentally disgorging a bottle of Farmstead last year, the Finnriver folks liked what they tasted so much they decided to release a champagne-style Farmstead this year.

Up on the Saanich Peninsula (just north of Victoria), Vancouver Island’s Sea Cider Farm & Ciderhouse produces a number of different ciders, with the Rumrunner being perhaps

the most notorious. Named in honor of the Prohibition-era Canadians who mercifully guided boats full of moonshine down the Puget Sound, and in honor of the Newfoundland Screech Rum barrels in which it is aged, the Rumrunner is a beautiful, amber, semi-sweet aromatic cider with hints of molasses, brown sugar and apple skins. It clocks in at a 12.5 percent alcohol level, which is relatively high for ciders that are normally found in the 5 to 7-percent range.

“Across the board, there’s been a leap forward in the past year or two in terms of quality and production,” says Alan Shapiro, founder of Cider Summit Northwest, which premiered last year with 50 different ciders and is gearing up

for its next event this September in Seattle. “It strikes me a lot like the craft beer movement 25 years ago.”

#### CIDERHOUSE RULES

With its cool, marine temperature and long summer days that help boost the sugar content for higher alcohol content, the Pacific Northwest coastal region is ideal for growing cider apples. But further east in Washington’s Yakima Valley, Tieton Cider Works has had good luck growing beautiful cider apples in their high-elevation orchards.

And what colorful names the cider apples have, often reflecting the name of the grower or region in England

or the colonies where they were first cultivated hundreds of years ago—names like Harry Master's Jersey, Kingston Black, Yarlinton Mill, Brown Snout, Chisel Jersey, Somerset Redstreak and Hewes' (or Virginia) Crab, for which famed cider maker Thomas Jefferson devoted a whole orchard at Monticello. Jefferson wrote that crushing the juicy Hewes' Crab for cider was like "squeezing a wet sponge."

Pacific Northwest cider makers are not afraid to squeeze a few sponges themselves, changing their methods from year to year as their apple orchards mature and the fruit's character changes, and as they learn new techniques for making cider.

"Craig has just a love of the land that is incredible," says Tieton Cider Works' Sharon Campbell of her orchardist husband. "He's always looking for a challenge, something different, a new variety he can grow, a variety he can grow in a different way."

"What's interesting with cider is people can relate to it," says Sea Cider co-founder Kristen Jordan. "It's not a hoity-toity, high-end beverage. It's local and it's part of North American history. We're making something [the early cider makers] would be proud of." ●



## WHY MATTHEW DILLON IS "ENCHANTED" BY CIDER

For those who have had the pleasure of dining at one of Chef Matthew Dillon's two locavore-oriented Seattle restaurants—Sitka & Spruce or The Corson Building—it should come as no surprise that Matt is a big fan of Pacific Northwest ciders.

"It's not like we put a ton of thought into it," he says. "We use Northwest ingredients, and apples are plentiful here."

While Matt uses cider for some of the usual suspects, like marinades, sausages and pork, he especially likes to use cider with fish and mushrooms from the Northwest. He's cooked mussels and clams with cider in the wood-burning stove at the Corson Building, and he especially loves how cider pairs with the spot prawns from the San Juans he prepares, like the spot prawn dish he did last fall with porcini and apples.

Every October, the Corson Building hosts a cider pressing to benefit Teen Feed, featuring food, music and, of course, cider.

|| For more information, visit [thecorsonbuilding.com](http://thecorsonbuilding.com)

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## THE CIDER LINEUP



### SEA CIDER FARM & CIDERHOUSE

Two events in co-founder Kristen Jordan's adolescence provided inspiration for her life to come:

- 1) She inherited an apple orchard on Shuswap Lake in the north Okanagan from her father after he passed away;
- 2) She went to school in Wales, where she received her first education in traditional ciders. Twenty years later she left her corporate job to start Sea Cider with her husband. Located on a gorgeous hillside overlooking the Strait of Georgia, Sea Cider offers eight very differently styled ciders made from a variety of cider apples.

2487 Mt. St. Michael Road, Saanichton, BC V8M 1T7 || [seacider.ca](http://seacider.ca)



### BUSHWHACKER CIDER

Opened in Fall 2010 as an "urban cidery" in Portland's groovy Inner Southeast neighborhood, Bushwacker Cider's tasting room features a hundred different bottles of ciders and seven on tap. "We carry everything we can possibly get our hands on," says co-founder Jeff Smith. Tastings are every Thursday—mostly free.

1212-D SE Powell, Portland, OR 97202 || [bushwackercider.com](http://bushwackercider.com)

### FINNRIVER FARM & CIDER

Operating as an organic family farm, Finnriver turned to making ciders a few years ago to add to the farm's diverse offerings. Besides the sparkling ciders, Finnriver handcrafts a sparkling applied cider blended with blueberry juice and other intriguing fruit-based spirits.

62 Barn Swallow Road, Chimacum, WA 98325 || [finnriver.com](http://finnriver.com)



### TIETON CIDER WORKS

As a third-generation apple farmer, Craig Campbell's DNA has always carried the spirit of experimentation. Twenty years ago, he started growing some of the first organic apples in Washington State. Ten years ago, he started growing some of the first "niche" apples in the state, like Ambrosia, Honey Crisp and Pinova. Three years ago, Craig went looking for a new "tree challenge," as his wife and Cider Works partner Sharon puts it, and took advantage of having their orchard located at 2,000-foot elevation to grow the organic, cool weather-loving cider apples. Their spirit of experimentation carries over to how they approach cider making, starting with traditional European techniques and cider apples, then adding their own little twist for a collection of ciders that pairs very well with different dishes.



Tastings by appointment || [tietonciderworks.com](http://tietonciderworks.com)

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