



Still designed by Waldemar Caraballo



Waldemar Caraballo

# Casa W Distillery Brings “Illegal” Rum to Wyomissing

BY AMY MILLER

Before opening his distillery with his wife Madeline, Waldemar worked behind his father’s bar for twelve years, listening carefully to what drinks people liked. Many patrons spoke fondly of the illegal rum they enjoyed back in Puerto Rico, which was both stronger and better tasting than commercial rum and enjoyed during many local celebrations. Waldemar began researching rum’s 300-year history on the island, its cultural impact, and how it was made. He then went to work figuring out how to replicate its production in a legal way here in Berks County. Using his chemistry knowledge and previous experience making wine and sangria, he

“Pitorro is a rum, but not every rum can be a pitorro,” explains Waldemar Caraballo, owner of Casa W Distillery, which brings “moonshine or illegal style” Puerto Rican rum to Wyomissing and beyond. Pitorro, or “illegal style rum,” was so named because it was made in secret among the mangroves of Puerto Rico to hide from the authorities who regulated the commercial rum trade. Although Casa W Distillery uses traditional recipes and ingredients, you can rest assured that all the drinks they offer are absolutely legal. Their bottled rum’s authentic flavor has earned them fans up and down the East Coast and even from Puerto Rico itself.

created a unique fermentation and distillation process.

As Waldemar tells it, “The result is 80% art, 20% chemistry.” He uses only natural ingredients, with no artificial syrups or chemicals. And he always adds a little something that was grown on Puerto Rico to acknowledge the rum’s heritage. That might be cane juice or a little bit of passionfruit or tamarind. Casa W Distillery currently offers three flavors of rum, with three more available soon. Many of these are flavored with 100% fruit, such as pineapple, passionfruit, or coconut.

While many think the W in Casa W Distillery stands for Waldemar, it is actually in honor of his daughter Walymar. Casa means home in Spanish, a call back to before the distillery opened when people used to come to Waldemar’s home to enjoy the rum he’d made in his basement. The distillery is also built to look like an old Puerto Rican home, to inspire feelings of tradition and nostalgia.

Although Casa W Distillery has mostly relied on word of mouth and social media to promote themselves, they’ve already found customers all across Pennsylvania and even as far as Ohio, Maryland, and Florida. People come seeking the traditional style rum they remember from their past and often get emotional when they try it. One man started crying like a baby. “I haven’t tasted rum like that in 40 years,” he explained. On

another occasion, a woman tearfully recounted how she had made the same passionfruit rum with her grandfather. Sometimes visitors from Puerto Rico stop by, skeptical that any rum made in Pennsylvania can possibly hold up to their favorites back home, but they leave as believers. One customer heard from a friend of a friend that he could get pitorro in Reading, drove all the way from Maryland, and purchased 14 bottles, promising to be back.

While Puerto Ricans often feel a special connection to pitorro, anyone can enjoy it, no matter their heritage. People love the balance of alcohol and flavor, which works especially well in mojitos, daiquiris, and many other cocktails.



To try “illegal” rum for yourself, Casa W Distillery offers free tastings on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from 4-9 p.m. in their tasting room at 1339 Penn Ave in Wyomissing. Custom and seasonal cocktails are also available for purchase. All cocktail syrups and ingredients are homemade, and nothing artificial is used. Bottles of rum are available for sale and make great Christmas and holiday gifts.

Looking forward, Waldemar hopes to gradually expand without sacrificing the quality of their process or ingredients. This includes releasing new varieties of rum, creating more seasonal cocktails, and eventually expanding distribution to restaurants and bars so more people can be exposed to pitorro. One day they may even need more space to increase production. “We’d love to be big someday,” Waldemar says. “We’ve already gone from a basement to a small distillery. Little by little, we are growing. But we want to take steady steps instead of moving too fast, and we never stop learning and improving.”

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