



SHINE ON

IN SHINER, SPOETZL BREWERY BRANCHES OUT WITH A NEW DISTILLERY AND ON-SITE BARBECUE JOINT.

ACI MEDIA / ALEX CANTRILL-JONES



Jessica Michalec, Spoztl Brewery's Head of Distilling Operations

by AMANDA OGLE

IN BETWEEN San Antonio and Houston in South Texas, you'll find Shiner (population 2,069), a small town with a big appetite for beer — Shiner beer, that is, which is brewed at the Spoztl Brewery, the state's oldest independent brewery.

In 1909, the Shiner townspeople began using newly discovered artesian well water to brew beer, which replaced beer that was being shipped in by rail from Houston and San Antonio. The founders put the brewery up for lease in 1914, and German immigrant and brewmaster Kosmos Spoztl nabbed the opportunity. Born in Bavaria, Spoztl went to brewmaster's school and apprenticed in Germany before working at the Pyramid Brewery in Cairo, Egypt. Eventually, he moved to San Antonio in search of better weather for his health, carrying with him the recipe for a Bavarian beer made by his family. Within a year of leasing, Spoztl bought the brewery and implemented that old family recipe, producing kegs and bottles as Shiner's first official brewmaster.

Today, the Spoztl Brewery is still making every ounce of Shiner beer, which is available in all 50 states and Mexico. And now, they've whetted their whistle with a new line of

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spirits — vodka, moonshine and gin — from a new on-site distillery operation. It was a practical next step for expansion, as spirit production requires an already fermented beverage, such as beer, as a base. Whiskey, gin and vodka, for example, are all commonly produced by fermenting grains to make a grain-based alcohol.

“Beer is the base of all spirits, and a distillery expansion has always been a goal,” says Jessica Michalec, Spoetzl Brewery’s head of distilling operations. “We wanted to get back in touch with our original roots and use our existing beers as a base to craft smooth and unique spirits.”

Michalec began working part-time at Spoetzl Brewery’s hospitality and environmental health and safety departments while studying at Texas A&M. After graduating, she returned to the brewery full time as a project coordinator in the maintenance and engineering department.

As talks of the distillery became reality, Michalec started studying and earned her Foundations and General Certificate in Distilling through the Institute of Brewing and Distilling and took on the larger role of innovation manager and head of distilling operations, becoming Shiner’s first master distiller. Within this new role, she’s helped Shiner

develop Shiner Craft Gin, Shiner Craft Vodka and Shiner Shine, its 90-proof moonshine.

Staying true to its Texas roots, Shiner incorporates Texas ingredients into its new big-bodied spirits. The gin, which is 80 proof, uses Texas ashe juniper, Rio Grande Valley grapefruit peel and botanicals native to Shiner’s landscape for a grain-to-glass Texas gin. During the testing phase, Michalec even had a little gin barrel by her cubicle so she could try various grapefruit peels and juniper in the gin to find the perfect combination.

The vodka, also 80 proof, is distilled 20 times for a smooth delivery, and the moonshine is distilled in a copper still from a Scottish still maker, and sits inside one of the brewery’s oldest cellars that you can see from a large glass window in the new speakeasy.

Inside the on-site tasting room, which is next to the speakeasy and copper still, draft cocktails made from Shiner’s spirit line are poured for thirsty patrons. Currently, cocktails on tap include the spoetzloma — Shiner’s spin on a paloma made with Shiner Craft Vodka, lime juice, grapefruit soda and grapefruit juice; the half moon mule, which is a take on a Moscow mule; Bea’s 19th hole, a spiked



iced tea with Shiner Craft Vodka; and the kosmopolitan, a cosmo riff with a name inspired by brewery founder Kosmos Spoetzl.

“I like the Spoetzloma on a Saturday afternoon when it’s 100 degrees outside,” says Michalec. “One of my favorite cocktails though is our cherry lime shine, which is a combination of our moonshine, lemon-lime soda, grenadine and garnished with a cherry and lime. It doesn’t get much better than that.”

Visitors can check out the new distillery and speakeasy on a Spoetzl Distiller Tour (\$25 per person), which features a 45-minute tour that includes the history of spirits in Shiner, an up-close look at the new K. Spoetzl Distillery, and a walkthrough of how each spirit is made. You’ll also get a flight tasting of the three Shiner spirits (with a surprise fourth tasting at the end) with your tour guide. You can buy a bottle of your favorite spirit and enjoy it with your

very own K. Spoetzl Distillery shot glass that you receive at the end of the tour. Distillery tours run every hour, beginning at 10:30 and end at 5:30 (on Fridays and Saturdays). Brewery tours are also offered multiple times a day, Monday through Saturday.

All these new libations meant that Shiner wanted some grub available for visitors, and in Texas, barbecue is the obvious choice. That came in the form of the new on-site barbecue joint connected to the brewery, K. Spoetzl BBQ Co. It’s run by pitmaster Tommy Schuette, who formerly operated Shiner Barbeque Co. in town before closing the business to run Shiner’s barbecue outpost.

Schuette, who has over 20 years of barbecue experience, has lived in Shiner his entire life and comes from a long line of barbecue aficionados, having grown up around the craft. Everyone at Spoetzl Brewery were always big fans of his barbecue and wanted to keep it alive and well in Shiner, so he was hired on as pitmaster for the new K. Spoetzl BBQ Co., which opened in April 2023.

“To see the Spoetzl name and Shiner Barbeque together in the same sentence is one of the proudest moments of my life,” he says.

Cold beer plays well with hot and spicy barbecue, so Schuette likes to pair spicy barbecue with a hoppy beer and sweet barbecue with a malty beer. “The carbonation cuts through the fatty richness of the meat and cleanses the palate,” he says. “I even created a whole new brisket glaze that complements a frosty pint of Shiner Bock perfectly.”

K. Spoetzl BBQ Co. is open every day from 11 am to 4 pm, serving meats like brisket, pulled pork and sausage by the pound or on a sandwich, plus classic barbecue sides like potato salad, pinto beans and coleslaw. There’s even a “potato football” — a monster baked potato topped with brisket or pulled pork, cheese, butter, sour cream, and jalapeños if you wish. And it happens to be pitmaster Tommy’s favorite barbecue dish. [17](#)



Tom Fiorenzi, Director of Brewery & Distillery Operations