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Kill Devil Drinking

As a fourteen-year resident of the Outer Banks, **Scott Smith** is the newcomer among the four owners of Outer Banks Distilling. The other co-owners are lifelong residents, not uncommon among business owners on the coastal island chain. For Smith, who relocated from Newport News, Virginia, after college, the local community is unmatched. “If you have a dream on the Outer Banks, people are going to support you and make it happen,” Smith says. The distillers infuse their flagship product, Kill Devil Rum, with raw ingredients (pecans, honey) that are indigenous to the region they call home.

INTERVIEW BY LIA GRABOWSKI
PHOTO BY BAXTER MILLER

How did four guys start making rum in the Outer Banks?

We all worked at Outer Banks Brewing Station in Kill Devil Hills, and got to be good friends. We wanted to go out on our own but didn't want to start a competing brewery. With such rich rum history in the area, we switched gears and went into distilling. We've been embraced by all the local restaurants and stores, and people have really given us the time to perfect our craft. We got incredibly lucky with the type of business like this, having that support from our community.

What is the story of rum in the Outer Banks?

Back in the colonial days, people were very spiritual and believed if you were sick, you had the devil inside you. They distilled sugarcane as a medicine known as “kill devil,” which became what we now call rum. The Outer Banks are known as the Graveyard of the Atlantic for all the shipwrecks, and when barrels of rum from a ship would wash ashore, locals would hide them in the sand dunes, leading to the name Kill Devil Hills. We wanted to bring back that history.

How do you incorporate that history into your distillery?

When you first walk into Outer Banks Distilling, you notice our ship's wheel, which came off the 1925 wreck of the Irma in Kill Devil Hills. Above our tasting bar is a mantle made from wood off the Corolla, a wrecked British warship. Aside from our flagship rums—silver, gold, and pecan honey—we release an installment of our shipwreck series every fall and spring. Those are experimental rum batches with different raw ingredients that are named for local shipwrecks. April's release was aged for a year and a half and includes Muscovado sugar from Barbados. We also do spiced rums; our most recent was aged in brandy barrels and infused with coffee, vanilla bean, cocoa nibs, and cinnamon.