

Grow, Make, Eat, and Imbibe

Alumni promote the local origins of edible goods • by Nell Porter Brown



Andrew L. Cabot

“Long, slow, and cool”

Andrew L. Cabot, Ed.M. '09
Ipswich, Massachusetts
Privateer Rum

WAY BEFORE teenagers mixed it with Coke, rum was the drink of choice in Colonial America. Families drank it and George Washington served the libation at his 1789 inauguration. By that date, millions of gallons of molasses from the Caribbean were being shipped to New England's harbors, mainly to be converted into alcohol at more than 100 major distilleries. Rum was also a daily ration, imbibed as grog, for

the British Navy, and played a more ignoble role as a form of currency in the slave trade.

Despite this long history, “rum is rarely considered a top-shelf spirit,” says Andrew Cabot, whose new company plans to change that. Privateer's two rums, silver (from sugar cane) and amber (from molasses), are made in a 6,600-square-foot distillery that looks like an airplane hangar on a rural dead-end road north of Boston. “We have the perfect maritime climate here that allows for a long, slow, and cool fermentation,” Cabot explains. “That climate, and subsequently the natural breathing cycle, is consistent with the making of a fine whiskey or Scotch.” Unlike many commercial rum producers,

his firm uses no additives—such as flavorings, coloring, sweeteners, or glycerol (which eases alcohol's firewater quotient)—and lets time take a toll.

The silver rum rests for four to six weeks in vats. The amber rum spends 18 months in 53-gallon oak barrels, from which periodic samples are taken in the first step of a painstakingly precise blending process (which the industry calls “batching”) and then is rebarreled, to let emerging flavors meet and marry. Batches are numbered and catalogued using tasting notes that are available on Privateer's website (<http://privateerrum.com>).

“We are about purity and transparency,” says the energetic Cabot.

With a background in marketing and managing computer software (most recently as president and CEO of Content Objects Inc. in Cambridge), he runs Privateer like a laboratory or classroom: “If your aspiration is to get better every day, then there is no area in which you won't experiment.” The results have been lauded, most notably in four-star ratings last March from the distilled-spirit expert F. Paul Pacult, founder of the *The Spirit Journal*. Privateer also develops its own followers. “I love the ones who call and ask me, ‘When are you going to use part of barrel #54 again?’” says Cabot, referring to “a batch

with great flavor, and mouth and nose feel. Nice sherry tones. Brulée. Coffee. And just a pinch of brine.”

Along with his head distiller Maggie Campbell, a rare woman in the spirit industry, Cabot—who is working part-time on a master’s degree in gastronomy from Boston University—smells, swirls, and tastes every concoction. In the middle of the distillery is a horseshoe-shaped bar stocked with glassware—Campbell’s test tubes and beakers—along with dozens of bottles of cognacs, brandies, liqueurs, and rums from all over the world. Many were bought in the Caribbean, where Cabot spent two weeks visiting distilleries while building a vision for Privateer. “I realized the best rums were more often sitting in peoples’ desk drawers there,” he adds, “and not on pallets going to the U.S.”

In Ipswich, rum’s raw ingredients are delivered and blended in vats with water and a proprietary mix of yeasts; the fermentation lasts longer than industry standards to build a rich base flavor and body. The resulting liquid, about 6 percent of which is alcohol, is fed into the brass and copper still that resembles a giant saxophone merged with the Yellow Submarine at the Willy Wonka factory. Liquid can be seen sloshing about through glass portals, moving back and forth, from high to low, like a Slinky, and being propelled through tubes that separate the more desirable alcohol, “the sweeter stuff,” Cabot says, from the more volatile “stuff that smells like fingernail-polish remover.”

Cabot’s career has embraced many tangents; he has often taken breaks to work in completely different jobs and “come back at things with a fresh lens.” Because he is dyslexic, he has always had to focus hard to learn anything, loves to learn new things, and brings an intensity to any activity, he says. In 2001, he took a year off from the tech world to teach second grade at a Boston charter school, which later led him to explore the “challenges of mission-delivery in loosely coupled systems and organizations,” at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He has always been a hands-on member of the boards of non-profits with an educational mission, such as Raising a Reader.

Meanwhile, in doing some genealogical



Francie Randolph

research (his father is John G.L. Cabot ’56, M.B.A. ’60), he found out that his sixth great-uncle, also named Andrew, was a merchant and rum-maker in Beverly, Massachusetts, who became a privateer during the American Revolution. Although his ancestor sold his distillery around the time that privateering became more profitable, Cabot was inspired by this family story. He began reading histories of and industry reports on the rum industry, and saw a business opportunity to create a refined rum. “I also loved the chance to intertwine the person and the product in the way craftsmanship demands of you,” he says. “In tech, you are always behind the curtain.”

As it happens, Privateer Rum is among a handful of New England rum distilleries established during the past six years. Just as in the Colonial era, each outfit has its distinct approach and expression. Some products are spicy and carry an earthy-raw undercurrent and a sharper swallow. Others can be almost fruity, with a hint of tropical mellow banana. Privateer’s rums tend to be complex—with flavors that morph in the mouth—and extremely smooth. “Rum’s so heterogeneous that it’s hard to even consider it as a single class of spirit,” Cabot concludes. In the end, “We want a bartender to taste our rum neat

and draw from this inspiration to create great cocktails, or use as a main ingredient—the same way a chef goes to the produce market and picks out an especially fine specimen of kohlrabi and decides to make a salad that night. We don’t want to be just an alcohol-delivery vehicle.”

“I’d rather be free”

Francie Randolph ’87, Ed.M. ’96

Truro, Massachusetts

Sustainable CAPE—Center for Agricultural Preservation & Education

FOR YEARS, Francie Randolph lived in a Cambridge apartment, and tended a houseplant. Now ensconced on Cape Cod with her husband and two children, she cares for a 200-year-old farmhouse on three acres of land that are also home to apple and pear trees, two sheep, a beehive, and a dozen Buff Orpington chickens. The chickens roam the property, pecking at and fertilizing the ground, despite occasional run-ins with local hawks. “My theory has always been that I’d rather be free and die young,” says Randolph, “than safely penned up for a long life.”

This philosophy enables Randolph to cross-develop her various identities: visual artist, farmer, educator—and co-creator,

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with two farmers, of the annual Truro Agricultural Fair. First held in 2009, the fair celebrates the community's farming and fishing roots and has already become an end-of-summer destination for many: more than 5,000 people attended last August. Randolph recalls broaching the idea for the fair one night at a cocktail party in town. "Everyone just lit up," she says. "Before I knew it I was before the selectmen and the project was generally green-lighted all the way through. Then hundreds of people came forward to help."

The day features only produce and other foods that are made, grown, or culled in Barnstable County: farmers and fishermen at booths also educate people on sustainable practices, from keeping bees and hens and preserving fruit to conserving water, composting, and coastal growing techniques. "You come and have fun," Randolph says, "but you leave with specific information about how to make changes in your own home to sustain your

local food system and environment."

Randolph is also an artist. She designed the Harvard course-catalog covers from 1993 until 2009 (when they were put online), and a limited edition of hand-bound books of J.K. Rowling's 2008 Commencement speech on the importance of imagination and failure (see "Inner Vision," July-August, 2010, page 24). She and her husband, Thomas A.D. Watson, a painter, both have studios on their property.

There she designed and continues to hone the fair's aesthetic, from an elegant poster and logo using a patinated chicken weather vane to clever twists on traditional fair events. The Barnyard Beauty Competition, for example, seeks the fairest fowl: people vote for the most beautiful chickens, ducks, and geese by shelling fava beans, and the "bean counters" record the tallies. There are also contests for pie-eating, longest cucumber, five identical green beans (picked from one crop), heaviest tomatoes, tallest sunflower, best-look-

ing dozen (eggs), and "strangest varietal." (Last year's winner was a "portulent purple potato.") The "Zucchini 500" features the ubiquitous summer vegetable turned into small cars (fair-goers come with their own or can design, decorate, and produce them on site) that race on two 28-foot-long tracks constructed by Randolph's friend August "Gus" Schumacher '61. This fair supporter and summer Cape Cod resident is a longtime food activist who won the James Beard Foundation's Leadership Award earlier this year and served as agricultural undersecretary in the Clinton administration. (To get a feel for the event and fair, visit www.sustainablecape.org/press/videos-podcasts.)

As the fair's popularity grew, so did Randolph's vision. The event now falls under the nonprofit umbrella organization Sustainable CAPE, which she founded and leads. The group focuses on teaching children that "food is directly linked to your body, your community, your world,"



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she says. “They are concentric circles.” It runs the Truro Educational Farmers’ Market and helped get local food served for a series of lunches at the Truro school, where it also plans to fund a “farmer-in-the-school” position, and grows gardens with students. Its “farm to school” program twakes students “out in the world so they can see where food comes from and how it is produced,” Randolph reports. That includes trips to oyster restoration grounds and cranberry bogs, and to forage in the wild, and time spent on fishing and lobster boats. In cooking classes at the school, she had a student who had never cracked an egg, and others who didn’t know that French fries were made from potatoes. “And this is on the Cape where we are surrounded by fields and land,” she adds. “We’re talking about food that composes our cellular structures, and people are just not connecting the dots that personal health comes from healthy food and a healthy environment.”

She wants to keep developing the Sustainable CAPE projects and replicate them elsewhere. “As an artist,” she says, “I am trying to get people to see things differently. Instead of a painting on the wall, the work is about showing people our fundamental connection to the agricultural world—and to each other.”

“You get a potato, you cut it, you cook it”

Anthony Ackil ’99

Boston

b.good

BURGER KING may boast a monarch, and McDonald’s has Ronald. But b.good has Uncle Faris. “We grew up eating in my uncle’s kitchen and he would talk to us, tell us stories, and make real food,” says Anthony Ackil, who founded and runs the b.good fast-food restaurants with his childhood friend Jon Olinto. “He’d always end

our visits saying, ‘Be good,’ so we named the place for him.”

The story, with a photo of Faris looking especially avuncular, is up on the wall of every b.good, along with a rotating introduction to other mascots who embody b.good’s simple idea: “Make fast food ‘real’ by having it made by people,” says Ackil, “not in factories.” The menu offers familiar fare: beef, chicken, turkey, or veggie burgers on a bun, salads, French fries, shakes, and smoothies. But all of it is nicely seasoned, freshly made, and comes from regional vendors: the beef from Pineland Farms Natural Meats, in New Gloucester, Maine; fries from spuds grown at Swaz Potato Farms in Hatfield, Massachusetts; and shakes with ice cream from the Cambridge-based Toscanini’s. Diners can order the burgers in five versions, or add and subtract ingredients. (On a recent Harvard Square visit, we found the El Guapo chicken sandwich, made with thick slabs of bacon, a jalapeño sauce, lettuce, tomato,



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**Jon Olinto and
Anthony Ackil**

B.GOOD

and onion, to be delicious.)

Ackil and Olinto, who grew up in southeastern Massachusetts, were always fast-food fans. But when ingesting it in their early twenties began to make them feel a little sick, they noted a potentially lucrative hole in the market. "If I have kids, I won't ever take them to a McDonald's because it's not real food, and I think a lot of people feel the same way," Ackil explains. "Real food is: you get a potato, you cut it, you cook it. I know exactly where our beef comes from, and it isn't from 3,000 different cows across the country."

Beef burgers, according to *Forbes*, are a \$40-billion industry dominated by McDonald's, Wendy's, and Burger King. B.goods are often located on the same street, block, or strip as these behemoths, and sometimes not far from relative newcomers Tasty Burger (which also touts all-natural beef burgers and hot dogs and locally made buns) and Five Guys (reportedly the fastest-growing fast-food chain in America). But Ackil says b.good "is not competing with these chains because we're unique in the market," and beef burgers represent only about 20 percent of its sales.

Ackil has a doggedness about him, a thick skin he attributes to playing football and wrestling while at Harvard, where he made a lot of friends and was a government concentrator. After graduation, he worked in strategic consulting, but found it unchallenging. "And I didn't like having

a boss," he adds, shrugging. "I just didn't understand the concept—somebody telling me what to do every day." One night, when he was at a bar with Olinto, the two fell into their usual discussion about someday running a food business, this time concluding, "Now is the time." "I was 28. We didn't have any debt. No kids. No wives. I was living with my parents," Ackil explains. "We had no responsibilities."

About 18 months later, in 2009, they quit their jobs and leapt into the entrepreneurial world of restaurant chains, opening the first b.good (www.bgood.com) on Dartmouth Street in Boston. Now there are 10 corporate "units," as Ackil calls them, three franchise locations, and another 35 in development. "We're not joking around here," he says. "We want to be thousands of units—a national chain." So far, every New England state except Vermont has a b.good, as do Philadelphia and Toronto. Quality control is one obvious focus, and challenge, in scaling up the brand.

Real food, he notes, does not always equal local food. The goal is to find local vendors and farms that can supply the nearest eateries and adjust the menu accordingly. But most important is that he and Olinto know the people and farmers who raise and grow the food that is served. "We're taking it slow and choosing our partners carefully. Ultimately, we want people who can hustle, who want to be their own bosses and make a lot of money, and," Ackil adds, "who believe in our ideals." ▽