## \* FACT FILE

OUR SPIRITS MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY SUPPLIES LESS THAN 40 PER CENT OF DOMESTIC DEMAND, WITH /PORTED. ST OF OUR SPIRITS

IZE OF MARKET IN AUSTRALI enue from spirits is currently ued at \$568.4m (IBISWorld).

ıgs, Lion, Coca-Cola Amati

axes are a problem, as are rising erns about RTD consumption the have led many to voluntarily lice the alcohol content of

ctail drinks and value-added led spirits in the next five years, retrofitted banana shed is far slew of national and he returned to his small

SPIRITS TO GROW BY

big things. Emily McAuliffe reports. distillery have proven a small operation can achieve The owners of North Queensland's first boutique

winning distillation business paved the way for an award-A MAKESHIFT distillery on a Mark and Claire Watkins. for husband and wife team farm in Far North Queensland

more than a backyard hobby.

native botanicals.

"For example, instead of

London dry recipe, but years, is based on a 300-year-old internationally for the last five spirit Botanic Australis, for flavour twists. His gin-style spirits including gin, whiskey,

instance, awarded

rum and vodka, with unique

substitutes traditional

ngredients for Australian

35-year-old Mark Watkins, head house when I was about 16," says the Atherton Tableland. distiller at Mt. Uncle Distillery on "I started distilling in my cubby

down the back of the farm." know and the cubby was right "I didn't want Mum and Dad to

the foundations for a successful career as a distiller. high-school student was setting the farm's channel, the then cooling hoses running through With a sophisticated set-up of

hangover before a rugby game.

syrup from the local mill,

product that can't be emulated resulting in a light and clean gold rum out of sugar cane multi-award-winning Tridium makes his international Atherton Tableland, Watkins

using a molasses base.

For his 'Anjea' vodka,

name, and their rum is the international awards to their and cellar door. Thirteen years to establish Mt. Uncle Distillery tropical Far North Queensland hometown of Walkamin in science studies at university proving a small set-up in a produced rum in the country – highest-awarded Australianon, he and wife Claire have a which includes an onsite café production weren't for him, so climates required for wine Watkins decided the cooler After dabbling in wine

**CURRENTLY OPERATING** 

BUSINESSES

smoothing agent.

sugar or citric acid as a common practice of using volcanic rock, and avoids the

clean," he says. "If you spilt it on

"[Our product] is totally

marshmallow-flavoured liqueur, two 'menace' roosters living on developed as a result of a bad Mt. Uncle's signature Black Cock - which, contrary to their farm. Then there's SexyCat, single-malt whiskey named after what you might think, is a include TBBC –short for The Big instance, his product lines to create a distinctive brand. For earth character to the business also brings his wit and down-toprocess and technique, Watkins While meticulous about

> or collected locally. says. Most of these instead of lemon peel we use use cinnamon myrtle, and cinnamon or cassia bark, we

ingredients are grown onsite lemon-scented gum," Watkins

plenitude of sugar cane on the

Then, maximising the

AUSTRALIAN SPIRITS MANUFACTURING THERE ARE

> honey mash filtered through Competition, Watkins uses a awarded silver at the 2015

International Wine and Spirit

ise of premiumisation is expected

boost demand for pre-mixed

what we do now, drank it, and marshmallow," recalls Watkins. went on to win man of the "I mixed a concoction similar to dog and something sweet like "I felt like a bit of hair of the

popular products and won several awards in 2015. match. So I kept making it." It's now one of their most still imported from Germany. so utilises a 1500-litre Holstein stills produce the best products Watkins firmly believes copper PERFECTING THE PROCESS nothing – it wouldn't be sticky." glass it would evaporate to "There's not many of these

stills around," he says, "but I





in the world." inside some of the best consider the technology

opinion on experience. harsh taste. And he bases this avoiding development of a stainless steel and glass, thus copper reduces sulphides in vapour more effectively than According to Watkins, "The first still I built when

near as good." and the quality of the spirit we opened was all stainless that came out was nowhere

The ageing process is

use of good casks. equally important, with the

> all our colour from rum to bring the put caramel in their

head and French oak body. "French oak brings out

notes and a nice dry finish,"

vanillans and some sugars for "American oak brings in colour up, but we get

barrels with an American oak

your cinnamon and spicy clove

has a long finish." sweetness, so the whiskey also

temperature, about 76.5 degrees

"A lot of people will

uses reconditioned ex-red wine

the barrels," he says. For his single malts, Watkins

Watkins has a few home TROPICAL DELIGHTS

but here it boils at a lower go from a liquid to vapour stage, Celsius sea level, the product will metres above sea level. such distinguished products, advantages he believes help create principle that at 78 degrees Tableland, which sits around 700 including the altitude of Atherton "Distillation works on the

Australian native botanicals. a four-year barrel ageing process; Mt Uncle's rum is the Botanic Australis Gin uses produced rum in the country; highest-awarded Australian-Rum's colour is obtained from LEFT TO RIGHT: Iridium Gold

better quality and more put in, the finer the flavours, so because we're at altitude," he says. we can get away with making a "Technically the less heat you

loss to the angel share. cooler nights means greater Tableland's hot days and On the flip side, the "We lose around five to eight

amazing result after five years." saying that, we get faster ageing cent loss," Watkins says. "In per cent, per year, per cask, so our products have an whereas somewhere cooler would have say one to two per







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