

# relax.

Turner Stillhouse's Justin Turner talks through the process of making quality whisky, as he embarks on a two-year minimum crafting process.

BY HARRY MURTOUGH

**I**T TOOK a crane to help assemble the rather large components that now make up Turner Stillhouse's newly built whisky distiller.

The stillhouse has spent 2019 entering Tasmania's gin scene with its Three Cuts Gin product line; the business now embarks on the long journey to craft its own unique whisky lines.

Turner Stillhouse founder and American-born Justin Turner said he was relieved to finally finish the hectic stages of assembling the still.

"Part of me, moving to Australia, I had to find the right mix of equipment both from a timing standpoint and a production standpoint," he said.

"It was a massive construction project in here for the last five months with a team doing the front of house side and a separate team doing the boiler installation and another team doing the plumbing installation.

"So it's been a very busy period for us while simultaneously pushing our Three Cuts Gin into the market."

Equipment for the distillery was sourced from across the world: the whisky still was sourced from Portland, Oregon while the fermenters were brought over from Germany.

"Our whisky still is from the United States - I think it could be one of the only whisky stills in Australia from the States," Mr Turner said.

The whisky making equipment takes up nearly the entire stillhouse building and dwarfs the two-metre tall gin still from the Netherlands.

Turner Stillhouse will manufacture their whisky onsite and from scratch, something other distilleries don't do.

"Some distilleries bring in their wash from a brewery that will make it for them and they'll re-distil it ... We actually will bring in the grains and mill the grains before mashing them before fermenting them before distilling them," Mr Turner said.

"At that point it goes in a barrel for a minimum of two years for it to be called whisky by law in Australia."

Mr Turner said while two years was a long time, it's a little better than the three-year wait distillers in the United Kingdom and Europe need to wait before the can release whisky.

"I think what the industry doesn't want is people pumping out spirit for the sake of it, they want to know care has been taken for it and ageing's been conducted with the spirit," he said.

"It interacts with the oak, depending on the size of the cask it can take as little as two years and up to five years or more.



**LIQUID GOLD:** Turner Stillhouse founder Justin Turner in front of the Whisky still. **Pictures: Paul Scambler.**

# MALTING MADNESS



The still was brought over to Tasmania from Portland, Oregon in the United States.

"There's a fine line between leaving it in the barrel for too short a time and over-oaking it to having just the right amount of maturation time in getting the right mix of age and oak."

In terms of the types of whisky the stillhouse will produce, Mr Turner said it will be a mix between that made using the time-hon-

oured Tasmanian distilling process along with more modern craft distilling techniques from places such as the United States.

"We're [Turner Stillhouse] a bit unique because we're going to a single malt, like a Scotch, which is what the majority of what Australian whiskeys are," Mr Turner said.

"This equipment is specially built so we can do American-style whiskeys - more or a rye or bourbon-esque or corn whisky as it's called here.

"We specifically got this still and masher to do what is called 'grain-on' distilling where we can bring the grains all the way through distillation for American-style whiskey.

"It's quite unique, there are one or two other distilleries that might have somewhat similar equipment but nothing quite like this."

The whisky-ageing process will adopt casks from adjacent wineries, including the neighbouring Tamar Ridge Cellar Door.

"Depending on the type of cask you have it will influence the whisky," Mr Turner said.

"You get more of a vanilla taste with ex-bourbon casks whereas if you're doing a fortified wine cask you get more of those influences from a French oak cask.

"As part of us being both on site with Tamar Ridge as well as being in the middle of the Tamar Valley wine route we definitely plan to do some of our finishes in pinot casks. I think it lends itself well to the wine country story as well as in the future visitors can have a glass of pinot next door and then come over and have a glass of whisky that has been aged in that same pinot cask."

As well as the casks, the barley, rye and corn are all being sourced from local producers with the latter two being the harder to procure in Tasmania.

"Tasmania is known for having beautiful barley ... corn or rye whisky is a bit more challenging," Mr Turner said.

"There used to be an abundance of corn and rye grown in the state years ago, however the areas have been replanted with more barley because it can be used for agricultural reasons as well now."

Mr Turner said the long wait for the whisky to be ready will make it's release all the more satisfying.

"Even with our barrel-aged gins which can go in the casks from two to eight months ... it's quite rewarding to see the final product come out of that and just have visitors enjoy that experience and taste," he said.