

T H E W H I S K Y

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Life

JIM FURYK KEEP WALKING

WHISKY
THE BALVENIE JOURNEY

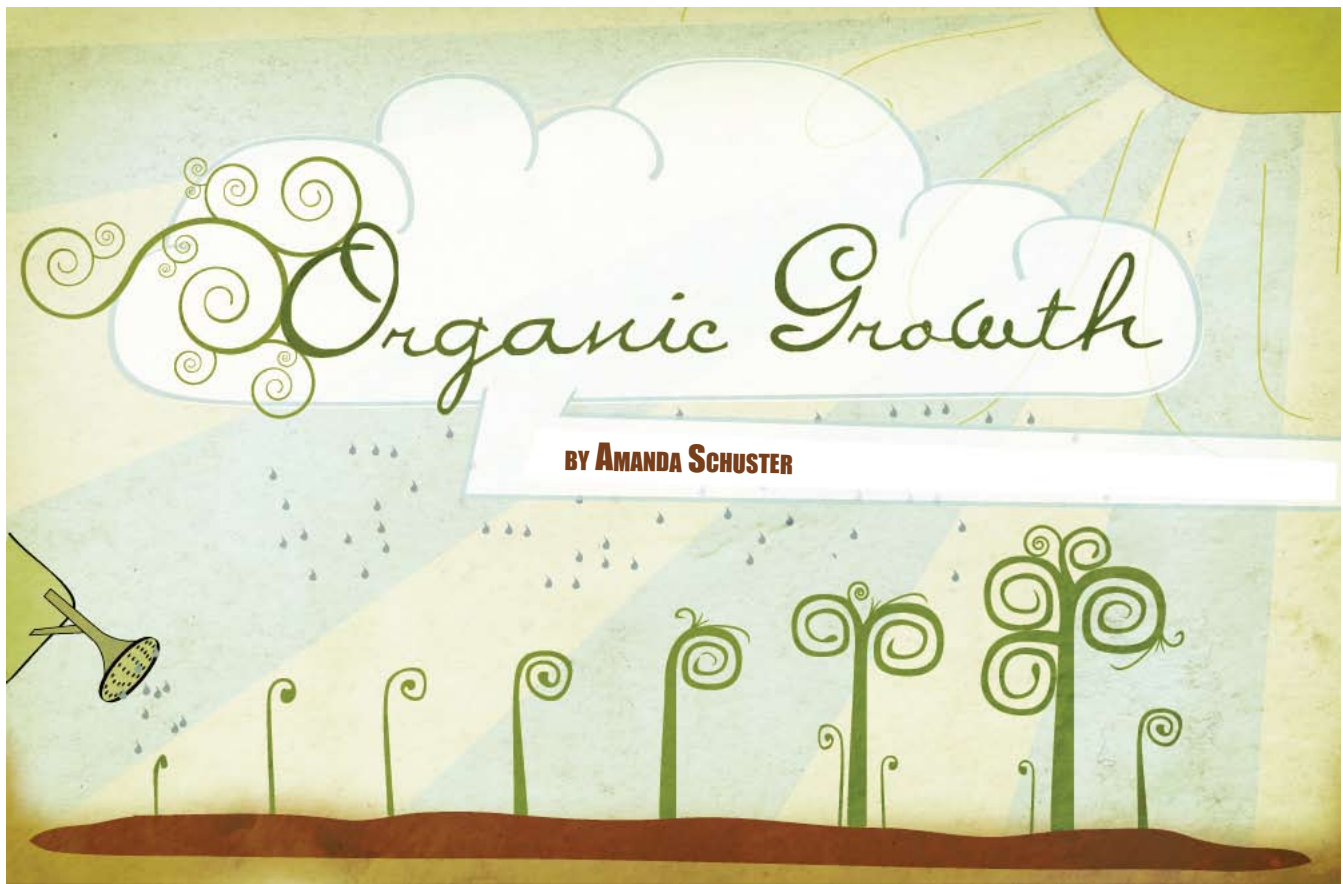
TRAVEL
THE GLENLIVET GATHERING

MUSIC
A GUITAR WITH A LITTLE SMOKE

CIGARS
I GIVE YOU THE GOOD LIFE



“the magazine for the new whisky connoisseur”



Organic everything is the new black, or should I say, green. I, for one, have definitely made that switch and buy organic foods, health products, and household cleansers whenever possible, trying to limit the amount of excess chemicals being absorbed into my body or our water systems and soils. I also have this not very logical hope that somehow eating organic will reverse all the damage I must have done to myself in the 1980's and 90's drinking NutraSweet soft drinks all day. I perceive that organic products are somehow "cleaner" than those that are not, and are therefore better for me. Not to mention that they also seem to taste better. So with all the organic liquors and wines out there, are these better for me too? And do they also taste better?

Be mindful of labels. A "natural" product can be anything at all, even if it contains chemical preservatives or other synthetic enhancers. What makes something certified "organic" is that this product must be first grown according to strict governmental guidelines using only organic materials, completely free of any man-made chemicals, pesticides, fertilizers, cleansers, or any other chemical additives. The place where these products are processed, the distillery for any organic liquor, for example, also has to be completely devoid of these agents, use only organic yeasts for fermentation, and all added ingredients and flavorings must also follow these guidelines. Organic orange vodka must be made with organically grown oranges. Organic gin must be infused with all organic botanicals, etc. All components with the exception of the packaging itself, must pass FDA approval to be labeled as organic.

There is some great stuff that has passed the organic Rubicon and been placed on our liquor store shelves. Most of it is vodka. What's interesting about this category is that the

flavors themselves are quite unique. There are two cucumber brands found only in the organic world: Square One, which is a 100% rye vodka, and Crop, which is made from a mixture of grains including wheat and corn. I find that the Square One tastes more like fresh cucumbers, while Crop, perhaps due to the sweeter choice of grains, is more candied, though both lend themselves to a huge variety of cocktails. Crop also has a tomato flavor, which oddly enough, makes a killer drink when mixed with a splash of cranberry juice and soda water. Both Crop and Square One also have smooth and quaffable unflavored versions. Another brand on the market is TRU, a 100% wheat vodka that goes the extra mile by using fully biodegradable and recyclable packaging, and boasts that a tree is planted for every bottle purchased. They have a straight version as well as a vanilla and lemon, both of which taste like what they're supposed to, deserving of their brand name since they completely lack that awful synthetic, slightly metallic aftertaste I find with other non-organic, flavored vodkas.



*A*nother fantastic line of organics are LOFT liqueurs, conceived by two former caterers, Sabrina Moreno-Dolan and Lisa Averbach, who wanted to create an alternative to the artificial appearance and flavors of most limoncellos. They found an organic neutral grain spirit, infused it with fresh fruits and botanicals, and used agave nectar as a sweetener, instead of high fructose corn syrup; and decided to market their success. The result is a delicious range of flavored-cellos: spicy ginger, lavender, lemongrass, and tangerine. The alcohol proof is kept low to keep them smooth, and they're fab in tons of cocktails such as spicy ginger in a dark-and-stormy, lemongrass in a bloody mary, tangerine in a margarita; and lavender is great poured over vanilla ice cream!



But organic liquor is not limited to grain spirit.

Enter Sombra Mezcal, conceived by skillful wine makers Richard Betts and Dennis Scholl. Their esthetic and attention to detail is what informed Sombra (“the Shadow”), which is made from organic blue agave grown and distilled in Oaxaca, Mexico. The agave is roasted over a mesquite flame, which adds smoky dimension to the flavor, and distilled to a proof that Betts says to him is like the equivalent of the right F-stop exposure for a photo. He wanted to find that place where the spirit is not too weak in flavor, nor too hot. I love the unique, sweet “barbecueyness” of this, though it tricks my sense memory when sipped neat, a bit like drinking a young Talisker, but completely clear! When added to margaritas or other cocktails (try it with some jalapeños in the mix, qué rico!), it creates a unique smoky base.

Organic liquors, like food and other products, will set you back more, mostly to cover the fees it takes to produce them according to the strict regulations. And keep in mind, these are all still made of alcohol, organic or not. People have asked me if these will give you a hangover. Yeah: if you drink ten Sombras you will get a hangover, just like drinking ten Patrons. Will you take off all your clothes and lecture your friends while completely buck-ass (not that I am speaking from personal experience or anything)? Who knows? But just think how you saved a patch of earth getting into that state. ●

