



## Broke-Ass Stuart

Cheap food aficionado. [Read bio](#)

# Field trip to Old World Spirits

Wednesday, June 23, 2010

Yesterday was a field trip day for [Team Broke-Ass](#). [Andrew](#), [Alison](#) and I boarded a 6:27pm train and were whisked away to the far off land of Belmont, California. I'm told it's on the Peninsula...or somewhere like that. A few weeks prior I'd received an email from Joseph Karakas, sales manager for [Old World Spirits](#). He'd invited me to come down for a tasting, and since imbibing by myself makes me feel like (even more of) a drunk, I brought as many of the team as I could muster.



Housed in an unassuming business park and surrounded by [Devils Canyon Brewery](#), a funeral home, and some other businesses I can't remember, Old World Spirits is not at all what I expected a distillery to look like. Then again I'd never really put much thought into it before.

I guess I thought it would look a lot like the big meth lab in *Breaking Bad*. It didn't. In fact it was a far more modest operation than I could've imagined. The distillery simply consists of a small two room warehouse space filled with a few big wine barrels, a tasting table, and a giant copper still that looks like some kind of steampunk Willy Wonka time machine (pictured). When I looked inside I half expected an Oompa Loompa wearing goggles and an aviator hat to peak his head out and ask me which century I wanted to go to. And when I say, "half expected" I mean "crossed my fingers and really really hoped for." While there were no magical, orange, time traveling little people (*sigh*), we were of course visited by the green fairy ... absinthe.

Master distiller Davorin Kuchan is a third-generation spirit maker from Croatia. His background includes studying distillation at Michigan State, creating spirits for the now defunct Sarticious Gin, and designing the afore mentioned still. Six months ago he and Joseph Karakas opened Old World Spirits and since then they've garnered a cult following for their handcrafted, small batch liquors. And holy f\*ck are they good.

Once we arrived and finished our introductions, Davorin lined up nearly ten different kinds of liquor and gave us tastes while explaining the history and distilling process of each one. We tried things like an [Indian Blood Peach Brandy](#), a [Black Walnut Liqueur](#) (both under the Kuchan brand) and a rare white absinthe called [La Sorcière Bleue Absinth Superieure](#)\* that becomes a bluish pearlescent color when water is added. By far their most popular liquor though is [Blade Gin](#), a kick ass and award winning drink that's easily the best gin I've ever tasted. Because 12% of it is double distilled brandy, it mutes the heavy handed juniper taste that turns some people off from gin. No tonic, lime, or chaser is needed. You can drink this bad boy straight from the bottle without grimacing, especially if you're on a late Caltrain headed back to the city (trust me on this one). It's this tastiness and craftsmanship that's made Blade, the Kuchan brandies, and the absinthes popular with so many of San Francisco's most respected drink maestros. [Nopa](#), [Alembic](#), [Rickhouse](#) and [Absinthe](#) are all showcasing some of OWS's creations on their drink menus and specialty retailers like [Cask](#) and [The Jug Shop](#) (my favorite name ever) are now stocking them.

So right now you're probably like, "Wait up dude, aren't you that motherf\*cker always talking about cheap stuff? Didn't I see you last Monday drinking [\\$1 PBR at the Homestead](#)? Why are you telling me about anything with the word 'handcrafted' in it?" Because pal, the fine folks at OWS are looking out for you too.

On the last Friday of each month they do "Friday Flights" where for \$10 you get to taste a flight of their excellent spirits. You don't even need reservations, just show up from 5:30-9 and get your taste on. If I have to explain to you what a great deal this is, I just don't think we can be friends anymore. Plus, Devil's Canyon Brewery next door does a similar thing at the same time. It basically becomes the most high grade block party you've ever been to.

As for us, we passed our bottle of Blade Gin back and forth on our ride back up to the city and made it back just in time to score some free food at the [Tamale Lady's birthday party](#). If that's not the perfect end to a broke-ass field trip, then I don't know what is.

\*Please note: I'm linking to K & L because they are one of OWS main retailers and OWS doesn't have individual pages for each liquor.