

December 2015

# Salt

The Art & Soul of Wilmington



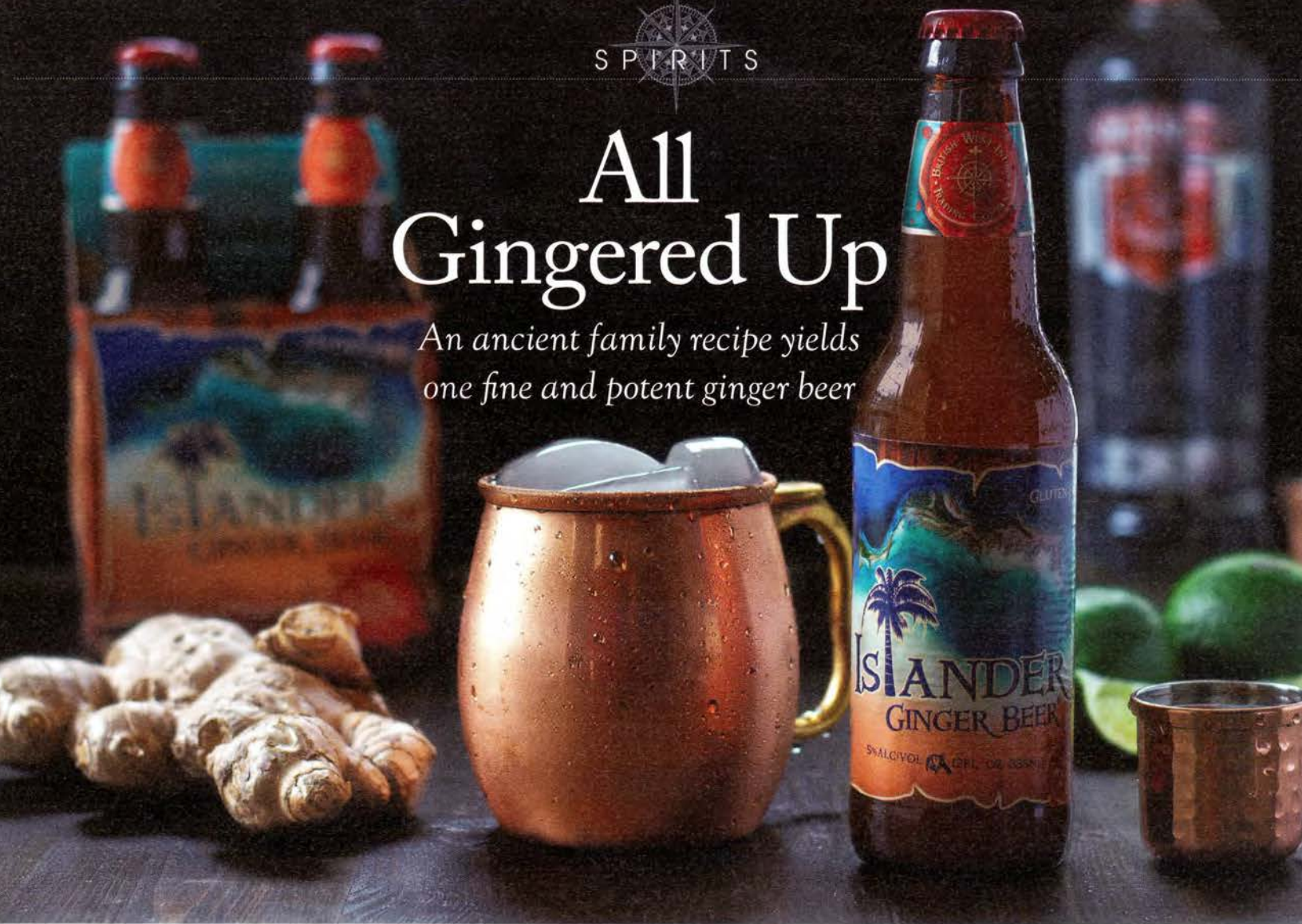
*The Gift of  
Sacred Light*

Inside Landfall  
Foundation  
A Tale of  
Two Historians  
The Christmas  
Bird Count



# All Gingered Up

*An ancient family recipe yields  
one fine and potent ginger beer*



BY JASON FRYE

**First things first:** Islander ain't the ginger beer you think you know.

The ginger beer you know — Gosling's, Reed's, maybe even Barritt's — is little more than glorified ginger ale, lacking in the powerful, fruity, spicy punch you find in more authentic brews. You have to reach for a Crabbie's to get a proper beer, but even then the flavor is off, not absent, but not fully present. In a day when the idea of authenticity rings through every ingredient, recipe and menu item, how is this the case, especially when we're talking about a drink that was born in the Colonial Caribbean and spread throughout the American colonies and Great Britain, becoming what Georgia Dunn calls the beer of our Founding Fathers?

Islander Ginger Beer is changing that.

Where Crabbie's has been around since 1801, Islander Ginger Beer's recipe predates that by centuries.

"If you look back fourteen generations, you'll find my ancestor, Thomas Harriott, at the start of it all," Dunn says. She should know. Her deep research into the family's history in the Salt Keys of the Turks and Caicos, Bermuda and England revealed much, including family recipes like the one that inspired Islander Ginger Beer.

"In my research, I found that the Harriotts were a family of entrepreneurs." A fact that's true today, as Dunn is the creator of Islander Ginger Beer and CEO of the brew's parent, the British West Indies Trading Company.

Her grandfather some generations removed, Thomas Harriott, was a

consort to Queen Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen; Sir Walter Raleigh; even Shakespeare. Harriott and a few other intrepid colonists, including his son born on the wrong side of the sheets, Thomas Harriott the Younger, moved to Bermuda to farm tobacco. As it turns out, tobacco didn't work so well, but the Harriott family owned something even more valuable: salt. In fact, they owned around 80 percent of the salt available in the Caribbean, a most lucrative commodity in a time when salt was the primary preservative.

"Thomas Harriott the Younger and several other Bermudians also worked to develop the structure for future colonies, going in to select sites and set up what infrastructure they could," Dunn says. "All this time — from the sixteenth century on — the Harriotts were brewing ginger beer."

The original brew wasn't like what most ginger beers are today. Those non-alcoholic ginger beers are soda with ginger flavoring, ginger ale on steroids; even Crabbie's deviates from the roots of the drink. See, Crabbie's is beer, plain old malt-based beer, but with ginger thrown in at the end.

Islander, well, Islander's different.

"It's a four-week process to brew [Islander]. I touch every spice, every piece of ginger, every ingredient that goes in because we're using a recipe that's old, that's tied to the roots of the beverage and the roots of this country. I want to make sure everything's fresh, flavorful and perfect for each batch," she says.

This fastidious control over the recipe, ingredients and brewing process is how Dunn ensured that Islander Ginger Beer is free from preservatives and is rich in flavors and colors delivered by fresh ingredients.

But why ginger beer? Her family's history as tied to the brew is one reason — after all, "Harriott [the Elder], a plant collector, introduced ginger



to the Caribbean from Asia via Spanish traders," she says — the other is the historical importance of the beverage.

As Dunn explains, ginger beer was the dominant drink of the Caribbean, Great Britain and her American colonies for 300 years. It started as a way to purify water, taking advantage of the fermentation process (and a very low alcohol content) and ginger's natural antiseptic qualities to make water potable, and became a daily drink. Every family across the Caribbean had a recipe, some familial variation on the theme, but ginger beer all the same. Soon, sailors were using ginger beer to water down rum that came off the still just a little too hot (read: strong) to be palatable. ("Ginger beer was popular with pirates," Dunn jokes. "They get a little snort of rum and the ginger helps settle the stomach, so it was perfect for life aboard a boat.") From there it spread and its popularity grew over the course of a couple of centuries. Until that popularity grew just a little too much and as governments are wont to do, the British saw fit to begin taxing all alcoholic beverages in the mid-1800s.

"[Taxation] caused brewers to change their recipes and methods and make ginger 'beer' without alcohol. They figured the taxes were high enough on the much stronger rum anyway, so pay the taxes once, add the ginger beer and make a drink they were all enjoying before the taxes, and not much has changed in the end."

Except that little change ended up being a big one, and with the recipes altered, ginger beer was forever changed; though we did gain a new drink, the Dark and Stormy, so all was not lost.

The story is the same in America. Dunn says that prior to the Revolution, our Founding Fathers did what other families did and brewed their own, and the drink remained popular in the nation's early years. "Up through the 1800s, there were 1,500 ginger beer breweries operating in the U.S.," she says. That lasted until 1876, when similar taxation caused a decline in the industry, then the early 20th century's Volstead Act and period of Prohibition killed it altogether.

Dunn says what she's trying to do is "put the beer back in this beverage" by returning to the family recipes for this centuries-old drink.

She's succeeding. Islander, clocking in at 5 percent alcohol by volume, is sold as a beer, not a soft drink, and sales are increasing almost exponentially. Wilmington served as Islander's U.S. test market and Dunn says the enthusiasm showed by distributor R.A. Jeffreys, chefs like Keith Rhodes, and bottle shops in the area has helped the ginger beer start off strong here in the States. Currently they're increasing production and looking at ways to widen distribution.

All this is just part of the story of Georgia Dunn and her family, a tale stretching back four-

teen generations; one she's recorded in a massive history and one she's happy to share with you over a ginger beer anytime you see her out and about.

## Bourbon Ginger Fizz

Recipe by culinary expert Heidi Billotto

For a duo of drinks:

2 highball glasses with ice

2 shots of your favorite bourbon

1/4 cup honey simple syrup (made with equal parts local honey and water, boiled down till honey is totally dissolved, then cooled)

3–4 drops orange bitters

2 ripe and juicy slices of orange

1 bottle Islander Ginger Beer

Combine bourbon, honey simple syrup and orange bitters and shake or blend well. Pour equal amounts into each glass of ice. Top each glass with half a bottle of Islander Ginger Beer. Garnish with orange and enjoy!

## Islander Ginger Beer Braised Pork Tenderloin with Figs

Recipe by culinary expert Heidi Billotto

3 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil

1 clove garlic, minced

2 Tbsp. minced fresh rosemary

2 Tbsp. minced fresh sage

2 pork tenderloins, cut into 1-inch-thick medallions

12–15 large dried figs

1 bottle Islander Ginger Beer

3 shallots, minced

1 1/2 cups beef stock, 1 1/2 cups chicken stock

Toss olive oil with minced garlic and minced herbs. Add pork and toss to coat. Allow to marinate for 30 minutes or so. Marinate the figs in a half bottle of Islander Ginger Beer.

Remove pork from the marinade and brown pieces side by side in a hot skillet about 4–6 minutes on each side. As you turn the tenderloins, add the shallots to the skillet. Add the figs and the Ginger Beer in which they have been soaking to the pan and cook until almost all of the liquid has evaporated. Add the stock and remaining Ginger Beer to the pan; bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low. Cook until the liquid has reduced by half and pork is tender. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve hot with pan juices over soft polenta, rice or mashed potatoes. 🍴

*Jason Frye is a regular contributor to Salt. Loves to eat and drink well. Just ask him.*