

August 3, 2022



Cool Career

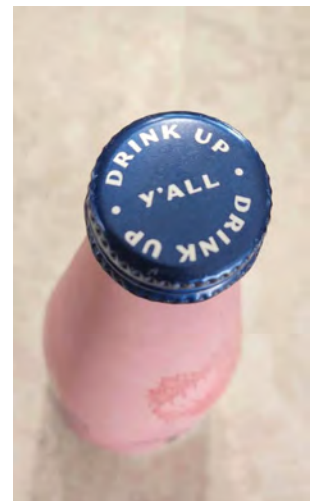
By Meda Kessler

Photos by Jeremy Enlow

Twin sisters Allison Love and Jennifer Ritz add vodka makers to their resumes. To that we say, ‘Cheers!’

When we first meet Allison Love, she’s wearing an Only Murders in the Building T- shirt, which makes us smile. It’s always a good start to an interview when you learn that your subject has good taste in Hulu programming.

Allison lives on 114 acres in Granbury with her husband, Doug, their children and multiple dogs. It’s a picturesque property, despite the fact that there has been no rain and everything is hard baked by the sun. Their custom home — filled with beautiful mesquite floors and tile from Mexico — is inviting, but we’re here to sip vodka and check out Long Creek Distillery, a new 65,000-square-foot facility located on the tree-filled property. Doug is in the early stages of making bourbon, but Allison and her identical twin sister, Jennifer Ritz, who lives in Lubbock, got things started by launching Toddi Vodka. The line of small-batch spirits is unabashedly aimed at women, from the distinctive flavors to the unique packaging. “But we know a lot of men who drink Toddi, too,” says Allison, with a laugh. “And we’re OK with that.”





We're not fond of overly sweet beverages, but the Toddi lemon-lime is a nice sipper on the rocks with a few wedges of citrus. Mint is equally bright, especially when served ice-cold. And we were pleasantly surprised by the vanilla cream flavor, which is an ideal after-dinner drink. Check out Toddi's website for cocktail recipes.

Their first sale was to Schrick's Liquors, which has stores in Weatherford and Hudson Oaks, and is owned by Dana Schrick. "We are our own sales staff, and Dana made us feel welcome," Allison says.

They also are introducing a new product this month.

"Our RTD [ready to drink] line of craft cocktails was supposed to launch before the vodka," says Allison, "but COVID changed our plans, because we had to wait for all this equipment. So, we put the vodka on the market first."

Expect some 10 flavors to come, including vodka soda with lime as well as more unusual combinations, in 8-ounce aluminum bottles with screw caps.

Their first commercial bottling of the vodka was Oct. 28, 2021, and they still bottle and package by hand. "It doesn't require a lot of people. We typically put family and friends to work to help," Allison says.

While they're invested in how the vodka is made — ingredients include non-GMO corn, pure sugar and top-quality flavorings — they're also proud of the fact that they've created a product that speaks to women. Everything from the flavors and the bottle shape to the colorful label with its modern take on Otomi design has been thought out carefully by the twins. "We like the fact that it looks good on a bar shelf in a restaurant or a bar cart at home," says Allison, who has some of the original bottles and labels on display in her home.



The twins wanted a distinctive look, including lots of color, for the Toddi packaging. The ready-to-drink aluminum bottles also come in vibrant wraps.



Plans are in motion to produce and age bourbon at Long Creek Distillery.

Toddi is definitely a sister act, despite the fact that Jennifer lives in the Great Plains region of Texas. They admit they have the same tastes and that they are loud, and they are OK with that. They also can talk to anyone, which has come in handy now that they have a vodka line to sell. The twins are quite close and are very proud of their heritage.

"We're seventh-generation Texans," says Allison. "We grew up in New Braunfels, where we made our own fun as kids. It was a small town then, but we never got bored."

The girls also spent time on the family farm in Stonewall in the Hill Country and in Fort Davis in West Texas. Those connections remain. "We are horse people, too," says Jennifer, "and as kids, we spent all day out riding without a care in the world." Both sisters attended Texas Tech in Lubbock, but when they got married, they had to learn to live distanced from one another.





Special equipment required for the ready-to-drink line includes an apparatus that suctions the labels around the bottle

“Southwestern Bell got a lot of money from us when we burned up the phone lines talking,” says Jennifer.

Family get-togethers have remained a constant and were an inspiration for Toddi Vodka. “In our family, ‘toddi time’ happened around 5 p.m. when the adults would gather to drink cocktails and listen to music. If the weather was nice, we’d be outside. It remains a family saying today. With us, it’s also time to be present, to put down the phone and enjoy each other’s company.”

The Distillery: Where the Magic Happens

We tour the massive distillery before the temperature hits triple figures, as much of it is not climate controlled. The building is set back on the property, far enough from the house that we have to drive there. Allison says the idea for Long Creek Distillery, named for the sliver of water that snakes off from the Brazos River and feeds into Lake Granbury, came from her husband, a mechanical engineer in the oil industry who dabbled in homebrewing. “The original plan was to build a small distillery, but a consultant told us to build big, so we don’t outgrow our facility. So, here we are.” Vodka is a natural byproduct of making bourbon and, since it doesn’t require aging, gets to the market faster. They’re also experimenting with producing gin. In the distillery, folding card tables are filled with glass bottles bearing blue-tape labels describing different flavors. It all looks like an interesting science project.



The massive metal building blends in nicely with its surroundings thanks to the earthy sage-green color of the exterior. Attached is a small apartment the Loves used as temporary housing while their house was under construction; it now serves as a friends-and-family tasting room where guests can sample new flavors. The cavernous rooms of the distillery are starting to fill up with stainless steel tanks and gorgeous copper stills for the bourbon. There’s special machinery for Toddi’s new ready-to-drink line of prepackaged vodka-soda cocktails; specialized equipment bottles and then essentially shrink-wraps the colorful labels onto the 8-ounce aluminum screw-top containers.

The classic copper still is made in Louisville.