



# IT'S GOTTA BE THE WATER

The most important ingredient in any distilled spirit is water. One Colorado maker takes that very seriously.

BY FRANCINE MAROUKIAN

**When it comes to** craft spirits, the word *local* has different meanings. It can indicate proximity—how close the distillery is to where you live. It can mean indigenous, like rye in Pennsylvania or rum in Boston. Local sometimes references sourcing practices—distillers source ingredients from area farmers, sometimes even collaborating to create heirloom grains for the mash that becomes a spirit's base.

And then there is the top rung of the local ladder: the water.

“There’s no overvaluing the part water plays in distilling,” says Jeff Lindauer, who runs Spring44, a distillery in Loveland, Colorado. “An 80-proof bottle is 40 percent alcohol and 60 percent water. So even after all the ingredient sourcing and careful craftsmanship, it’s *water* that deeply affects the final spirit—particularly clear spirits like vodka and gin that don’t spend time developing character in barrels.”

Distillers typically draw from municipal water, which undergoes purification—reverse osmosis and deionization, or chemical alteration to balance flavor. But that can alter the water, getting in the way of other ingredients.

That’s why for his spirits—including Honey Vodka, imbued with the mild nuttiness of local honey, and Fortify, a ruby-colored aperitif with a hint of spice—Lindauer uses water from a protected source on a 10,000-foot mountain in Buckhorn Canyon. Called Spring44, it’s an artesian spring, meaning water encased in layers of rock bubbles to the surface because of natural pressure, purified

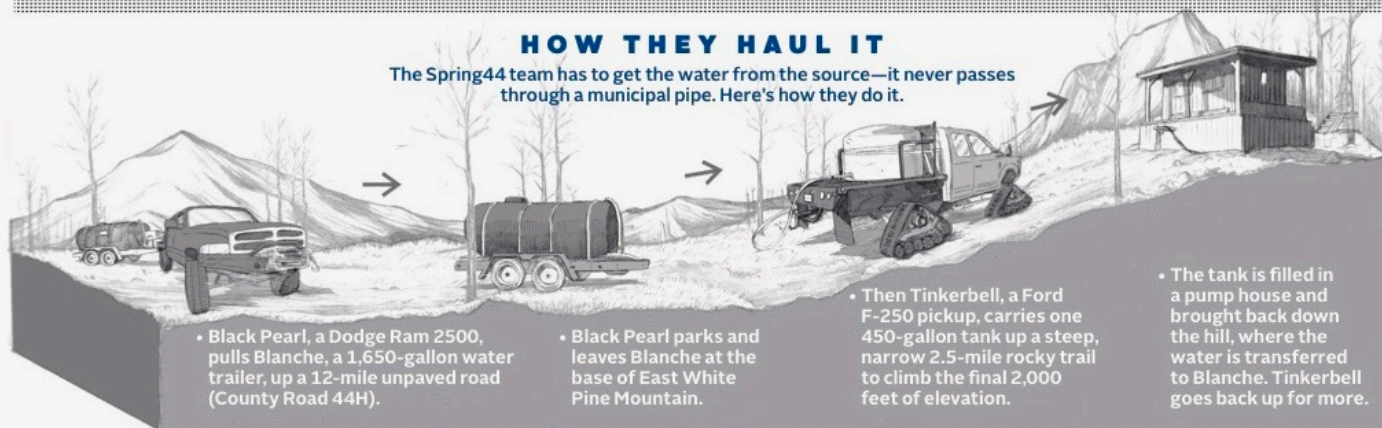
by passing through pores in the rocks. After Lindauer’s father bought the 40,000-acre property in 1969, he had the foresight to acquire the rights to the spring too. Spring44’s water is virginal, meaning its first and only use is to be blended with spirits. “There was never a plan to become distillers,” says Lindauer. “The water made that decision.”



Spring44’s Alex Makowski at the spot where the water bubbles from the ground. Next stop: the distillery.

## HOW THEY HAUL IT

The Spring44 team has to get the water from the source—it never passes through a municipal pipe. Here’s how they do it.



• Black Pearl, a Dodge Ram 2500, pulls Blanche, a 1,650-gallon water trailer, up a 12-mile unpaved road (County Road 44H).

• Black Pearl parks and leaves Blanche at the base of East White Pine Mountain.

• Then Tinkerbell, a Ford F-250 pickup, carries one 450-gallon tank up a steep, narrow 2.5-mile rocky trail to climb the final 2,000 feet of elevation.

• The tank is filled in a pump house and brought back down the hill, where the water is transferred to Blanche. Tinkerbell goes back up for more.

In winter and spring Tinkerbell’s wheels are replaced by Mattracks, rubber tracks that provide traction like a tank.