

Hands-on Approach

In Nashville, Robert Longhurst plays with spirits he helped develop

Not many bartenders have the opportunity to create cocktails with spirits that they themselves created, but that's exactly what Robert Longhurst gets to do on a regular basis. In 2016, when he was managing at a neighborhood bar in Nashville, Longhurst began experimenting with creating his own coffee-infused rye whiskey. As luck would have it, Bob Angus, CEO of the beverage company Four Blue Palms, was a frequent guest of this bar and took an interest in Longhurst's whiskey creation. The two hit it off and quickly jumped into business together. Longhurst joined the Four Blue Palms team as creative director, helping launch Standard Proof Whiskey Co. in 2017, with the coffee-infused Red Eye Rye as its first product.

Since then, Standard Proof Whiskey Co. has released eight additional expressions of rye, most of which are infused with natural ingredients, such as ginger root, mint, and pecan. As creative director, Longhurst works with the Standard Proof team on development of new products and brand direction, and he also created the concept, design, and beverage program for the company's first tasting room and bar, which opened in Downtown Nashville in 2020. "I wanted this to be a home for our brand—not in the way of a classic distillery, but a



At the Standard Proof Whiskey Co. tasting room in Nashville, Robert Longhurst develops cocktail recipes that include spirits he helped create.

facility that could be a playground for creative bartenders," Longhurst says. "We get to use great whiskey and different ingredients to create some very unique spirits and cocktails that other distilleries and bars can't."

In addition to sampling from the Standard Proof lineup, patrons of the tasting room can also enjoy a range of cocktails (\$10-\$15) developed by Longhurst. "Simple cocktails made very well have always been the most impressive to me, as it's all about the quality of ingredients and the method of preparation," he says. "A couple of my favorites that really showcase this approach are the Smoked Old Fashioned and Wildflower Lemonade." The former drink (\$12) is infused with cherry wood smoke and comprises Standard Proof straight rye whiskey, simple syrup, and Angostura bitters, while the latter (\$12) features Standard Proof wildflower rye whiskey—which is infused with honeysuckle—as well as lemon juice, simple syrup, and sparkling water. "I love developing these spirits and seeing all of the ways other bartenders use them," Longhurst adds. "There are some very talented bartenders all over the country and I'm very lucky to have enjoyed some great cocktails that use products I had a hand in creating."



Sally Kral

Robert Longhurst's Recipes



Smoked Old Fashioned

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 ounces Standard Proof straight rye whiskey;
- ¼ ounce simple syrup;
- 4-5 dashes Angostura bitters;
- 1 untreated plank of cherry wood;
- Orange peel.

RECIPE:

Start by scorching the cherry plank and then place a rocks glass upside down over the burned wood to allow the glass to fill with smoke. While the glass seasons, stir the rye, syrup, and bitters with ice in a mixing glass. Strain the chilled ingredients into the smoked glass and add one large ice cube. Garnish with an orange peel.



Wildflower Lemonade

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 ounces Standard Proof wildflower rye whiskey;
- 1 ounce lemon juice;
- 1 ounce simple syrup;
- 2 ounces sparkling water.

RECIPE:

In an ice-filled Collins glass combine rye, juice, and syrup. Top with sparkling water.