

WHISKY CLUBBING



Whisky Blasphemy co-founder Jun Nunez (second from right) enjoys a cigar and whisky with fellow club members.

Mixing It Up in Philly

Whisky Blasphemy embraces cocktails and eschews snobbery

You might not expect to find a trio of friends enjoying one another's company over cigars at a private cigar lounge to be discussing Jell-O shots—but for the Whisky Blasphemy club, those are the exact circumstances that brought the group to fruition.

"We're all members at Holt's cigar club in Philadelphia and there was an older gentleman there who was a big fan of Johnnie Walker Blue, and we all loved him but we used to tease him because he would never drink anything else no matter how much we tried to convince him," says Judd Weisgal, who co-founded Whisky Blasphemy with friends Matt Kinson and Jun Nunez. "Then one day we were at the club and Matt, who's a smart aleck of the highest order, said, 'We should make Johnnie Walker

Blue Jell-O shots just to mess with this guy!'"

The rest is history, as they say. While the trio never ended up making those gelatin delicacies, it did open up a conversation about mixing cocktails with high-end whiskies. "It

led us to walk into Jun's house and make an Old-Fashioned using vintage Macallan 25, good quality bitters, and homemade syrup, and we quickly realized that better ingredients make better cocktails," Weisgal recalls. "Matt suggested we start opening up our regular Thursday nights at Holt's to guests who want to get together and try these cocktails with

us." That was more than five years ago and the group continues to meet every Thursday at Holt's—even Weisgal, who recently moved to North Carolina, flies up often to attend. The

CLUB INSIDER

LOCATION Philadelphia

YEAR FOUNDED 2014

NUMBER OF MEMBERS

30 regular attendees; 4,846 online followers

WEBSITE

facebook.com/groups

MEMBERSHIP Join via

request to Facebook group

meetings usually bring in around 30 people, but the Whisky Blasphemy Facebook group has nearly 5,000 members from all around the globe, sharing photos and stories about what whiskies and cocktails they're drinking.

Among whisky purists, the very concept of mixing such whiskies in cocktails can seem sacrilegious—and that's exactly why Whisky Blasphemy was formed. "We had encountered a lot of snobbery in the whisky world, and we kind of wanted to thumb our noses at the people who look down at someone drinking whatever it is they enjoy, because our philosophy is whatever you enjoy in good company and good health is the best possible thing you could drink," Weisgal says.

Though Weisgal notes that he and the other Whisky Blasphemy members tend to drink their whisky neat about 95% of the time, they're definitely not afraid to push the boundaries with cocktails. "I think the most expensive drink we ever made was a Vieux



The founding members (left to right) Jun Nunez, Matt Kinson, and Judd Weisgal

Carré with George T. Stagg bourbon and Rémy Martin Louis XIII cognac, and one time I used half a bottle of Pappy 23 and mixed it with Macallan Amber liqueur to make vanilla-maple milkshakes for the group—it was delicious!" Weisgal says. With the other half of the bottle he made two pounds of chocolate-covered walnut whisky bacon, which he cut into bites for everyone to enjoy at Holt's. "We just have a lot of fun; we're always laughing. Sometimes we look around and just can't believe all the different people we've met and brought together. There's an ex-NFL star that comes regularly, plus politicians, cigar brand owners, cocktail experts—all types of people are members of our group. And it all started with Matt being a little bit of a smart aleck and the three of us wanting to take the snobbery out of whisky."

—Sally Kral