

## Rooting Around for Flavor

BY AMY ZAVATTO

To honor their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary this past June, Bitter Truth, one of the companies that all but kicked off the artisanal bitters revolution in the modern cocktail community, launched Drops and Dashes, a limited-edition line of four new bespoke bottlings: Root, Wood, Blossom, and Nut; each carries an ABV of 42%. Their earthy aromatics and lush flavors are particularly pleasing for whisky mixing.

The inspiration for their back-to-basics approach was the Tree of Life, say founders and owners Stephan Berg and Alexander Hauck.

are, but more on full-fledged flavor without the bitterness at the forefront of your mouth," says Berg. "Instead, you get a slight bitterness in the back, but a lot of flavor in [the] foreground."

Root uses licorice, orris (the rootstock of an iris), and alpine gentian to add a textural and flavor richness to the bitterness; to bump up the aromatics and, as Berg says, "a fragile earthiness" overall. Wood uses different European oak extractions, as well as sandalwood and Brazilian wood, which soup-up the color and add a bit of tannic, linear dryness.

Blossom gives gentle aromas of jasmine, lavender, and orange blossom, which make a nice addition to light, simple cocktails like a Presbyterian, centered around the buoyant citrus and stone fruit qualities in certain Highland or Speyside whiskies. "The idea for this one was born in Taiwan," offers Berg. "A bartender showed me a perfume he had behind the bar. He said, 'Smell that, and now I'll make you a cocktail that tastes and smells exactly like it.' He did and



"The idea circulates around the different parts of a tree, which express different flavors and offer different experiences when applied to a drink," says Berg, a former bartender who came up with the idea for Bitter Truth bitters out of sheer necessity: he simply couldn't get the ingredients he wanted in his home country of Germany. "Usually bitters ingredients are taken from different plants and come together that way, but for this we thought, why not make a liquid just out of extract from just wood? Or from just roots? It gives each of them a very different flavor profile." It's that particular high note in each that seems to lend well to complementing specific regional and stylistic whisky characteristics.

Berg's focused, nuanced recipes—now totaling eleven different bottlings in regular production—have become ever-present on bars nationwide, but the tweak that makes the Tree of Life concept cleave so nicely to barrel-and-barley-centric spirits is the way they hit your palate. "For these, we're not focused on bitterness as most traditional bitters

I was blown away. It was brilliant."

Finally, for the luscious Nut bitters, Berg and Hauck use mainly young black walnuts, as well as hazelnuts and cashews. "The Nut really adds a richness and warmth to younger-style American whiskeys."

The limited-edition line, totaling about 30,000 bottles, comes in vintage-style glass vessels. Not only do they cozy-up nicely to the flavors of whiskies, they also look lovely on your bar next to them.

And to the neat set who doesn't like to mix? Berg has a message: "People think, okay, if I have my \$50 bourbon, I'm going to drink it neat and not in a cocktail. I think that's nuts. If you have better ingredients, you have a better cocktail—it's simple. I had a well-made Old-Fashioned the other day with the Wood, and it was great!"

Visit [the-bitter-truth.com](http://the-bitter-truth.com) for a list of establishments that carry Drops and Dashes bitters. Each bottle has a suggested retail price of \$20 per 100 ml bottle.