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**MADE BY HAND**

JENNIFER WOLFE

## ***MADE BY HAND***

Ehrlich's Web Series Captures American Craftsmanship



PHOTOS BY KEITH EHRLICH

Images from "The Distiller," the first installment in director Keith Ehrlich's *Made by Hand* web series.

**"T**he *Distiller* features Brad Estabrooke, founder of the Breuckelen Distilling Co. and the first gin distiller in New York City since Prohibition. Accompanied by beautifully shot footage of the distilling process, Estabrooke talks about starting a business from nothing and the imperfect process of perfecting a craft.

This six-minute documentary is the first in a series called *Made by Hand*, which celebrates the people who make things by hand—sustainably, locally and with a love for their craft. When director Keith Ehrlich—or keef, as he's known in the commercial industry—first conceived of the series, he wanted it shot on film so it would continue that handmade ethos, but he quickly found that going digital was the only way to make the project work. "This project came from the need to do something more personally expressive," Ehrlich explains. "I wanted to make films about people using analog technologies, and I wanted to do it in an analog way, but ultimately we decided to go the DSLR route.



"The Distiller" was the first time I had shot in DSLR format, and while it's obviously not the same as shooting with full professional gear, in many ways it's better."

Ehrlich made his first steps into digital filmmaking almost ten years ago with the Sony DCR-VX1000. "At the time, I thought it was revolutionary. Most people now think of it as a toy, but it's a tool, and in the right hands it can do amazing things," he says. "When we first started talking about what this series was going to look like, we asked, How do we make films that are cinematographic and speak to the language of storytelling? How can we make something that's

maybe a little different than what people expect documentaries to be? At the same time, when you're dealing with people who are knife makers or gin distillers, who aren't used to being on camera, it's important that you come in with a small crew and minimal gear, that you aren't crowding their space."

For the *Made by Hand* series, the name of the game is to be as noninvasive as possible. "That's kind of a trick when you want to get beautiful coverage and hold onto some of the values of traditional filmmaking," laughs Ehrlich. "As the series evolves, we're constantly reassessing what we can do, how much we can get away with."

For the one-day, 12-hour shoot for "The Distiller," the *Made by Hand* production crew used a single Canon EOS 7D with a combination of Nikon prime lenses and a Canon L zoom, along with a second system audio recorder. "We had the camera, a few lights and a tripod, and that's it," Ehrlich says.

Editing was performed in Apple Final



Cut Pro and color grading in Apple Color. "We're trying to make a lot of decisions during production so we don't have to mess with it in postproduction," Ehrlich comments. "The digital world gives you infinite tools and infinite possibilities, and I think a lot of filmmakers struggle with the amount of options. I like to be as old-fashioned as possible, and I'm a big fan of minimalism."

With several projects in various stages of production, the *Made by Hand* team plans to have five or six films completed by the end of the year, all of which will be released on the web. Ehrlich is excited about the possibilities for the series. "I want to keep making these films as much as time allows," he says, "with as much as my collaborators can give to them." **dv**



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