

MEN'S JOURNAL

FOOD & DRINK

A Second Act, With Spirit

Like 79

Tweet 5

g+1 0

Pin It

Submit



Greg Nichols, a former **U.S. Ski Team** member turned Nantucket home builder, never worked with spirits before founding **Lucky Dog Vodka** in 2011. "My experience with vodka was limited to drinking it," says the now-professional distiller, who took his rapidly expanding brand's name from New England surfers' slang term for the guy in the lineup closest to the break. The way he tells it, his naivete and active lifestyle were more critical to the success of his new venture than actual planning.

"I've personally found poverty to be a greater motivator than wealth, so all that it took to jump start my entry into the vodka business was a Great Recession," says Nichols. The collapse of the Nantucket housing market and his construction business presented Nichols with a choice: He could start something or go work for

someone else. Having vowed to remain self employed, he decided he'd start something. "I hoped that Fitzgerald's adage about there being no second acts in American lives wasn't meant to necessarily apply across the board," he says.

Nichols settled on creating a vodka brand largely because he was told how hard it would be. Having been informed by industry insiders that the vodka market was over-saturated and cash intensive, Nichols decided to take on the big dogs. "That sort of whetted the same appetite I'd known in my competitive days," he says. And Nichols is nothing if not competitive. Prior to his surfing days, the floppy-haired 53-year-old was on the first U.S. National Freestyle Skiing Team and highly ranked on the Saab Men's Mogul Tour, a precursor of the modern FIS.

In fact, Nichols likely wouldn't have succeeded at getting Lucky Dog off the ground if he wasn't so comfortable on a slope. He traveled the country looking for a distiller and found his future partner, **Distilled Resources Inc.**, in Sun Valley. "It's a part of the country that I really like, that I'm comfortable with," says Nichols. "When I first contacted these guys they had no interest in distilling for someone else, but ultimately I flew out there, we went mountain biking together, and shook hands on it." Now that Lucky Dog is in business (and expanding) the DRI guys, who make the stuff with local potatoes and water from the Snake River Aquifer, come and hang out on Nantucket.

As for Nichols, he enjoys a strong vodka martini. He's not toasting victory just yet, but it's been a good run. *[Look for bottles in high-end booze shops on the East Coast.]*

— **Christopher Osburn**