

Distillation

*Inspired by a day at Distillery Vallendar
in Kail, Germany*

We gather from across the regions and walks of life
to mash our experiences and questions
and ferment our hopes for the day
as the master guides us through the process
and the spaces, surfaces and textures of his distillery
that he maintains spotless, proud and in good taste.
Like an athletic coach, he trains us
to sniff out negligence and taste out excellence
to detect liability and extract quality
and to exercise on a narrow beam

That fine balance between trial, error, venture and world class.

Later, he challenges us—
Divided into groups, we gather at the stills
regulate the machinery,
operate the physics,
pursue gold as the ancient alchemists did,
heat and cool,
dip our noses and fingertips,
weigh the complexities,
argue when to make the cut,
do the final mix and math
under the watchful eyes of Lafite the dog
and the amused grin of the master's son
who at his young age already knows more than we ever will.

We settle for the 500 milliliters that we want to bring into the race
proving no competition of course to a former race car driver
and master distiller
but what counts is the lasting finish
of a day maturing into evening
of us sitting and talking and sipping on a fine selection
in the shared spirit.

Jennifer N. Smith