



Donovan Williams serves a lavender Tom Collins at the Delta Dirt Distillery bar.



Donna and Harvey Williams in front of their distillery in downtown Helena, AR.

## Sweet as Pie

EVER SINCE AMERICAN SWEET POTATOES REPLACED AFRICAN YAMS AS a dietary staple of enslaved Black folks in the South, they have been an essential part of the canon. For centuries, Black Americans have highlighted the beauty and versatility of this root vegetable: baked over coals, smoothed into casseroles, sliced and candied in buttery syrup, and whipped to fill pies. Today, in Helena, Arkansas, you can even drink them. Delta Dirt Distillery transforms sweet potatoes into its signature vodka. Harvey and Donna Williams own and operate the place with their sons Thomas and Donovan and use produce from Harvey Williams' ancestral farm just outside Helena. Visitors to their brick headquarters downtown on Cherry Street can watch the distilling process and sample Delta Dirt cocktails. Making alcohol from sweet potatoes is not new. Yet the idea that a Black family in the Delta might use this commodity crop and this process to bring vitality and entrepreneurship to a quiet, old Mississippi River port town is notable. So, too, says Harvey Williams, is their Rose on the Delta cocktail, made from the distillation of their farm's signature crop: "When people hear there's a sweet potato vodka, I think there's more intrigue there."

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