

Fruitland Augusta Peach Vodka A History Lesson

By Debi Lander

Augusta, Georgia is the revered home of the Augusta National Golf Club and the most prestigious golf championship in the United States: the Masters. Augusta was also the city that put Georgia on the map as the Peach State. Now there is a product that unites these two with a shocking surprise.

Augusta became the location of Fruitland Nurseries, one of the most successful nurseries in the 19th century. Belgian horticulturists, Prosper J. Berckmans planted millions of peach trees and his Fruitland Nurseries helped Georgia become famous for its sweet Georgia Peaches. But following his death the nurseries were sold. In 1931, they were transformed into one of the most famous golf courses in the world.

Back in 1853 farmer Dennis Redmond named the property "Fruitland". He grew peaches, apples, grapes, strawberries and other trees and shrubs. Redmond also began building a large house he called "Fruitland Manor" and it still remains. Surprise: The old manor house is actually the clubhouse at the Augusta National Golf Club.

In 1857 father and son Louis and Prosper Berckmans emigrated from Belgium to New Jersey and then chose Augusta as the perfect location to build their nursery. They liked the climate and soil,

and Augusta's location made it an ideal hub for transportation via water, road and rail. That year, they acquired 50 percent ownership of Redmond's farm, and a year later Prosper became the sole owner of Fruitland. He purchased additional acres of surrounding land to expand his business and completed Fruitland Manor to make it his home.

Prosper developed and improved many types of peaches, including the Chinese Cling, Belle, Elberta and Thurbur varieties. He became known as the "Father of the Peach Culture". Eventually all three of his sons were employed by the P.J. Berckmans Company. Prosper went on to become a talented landscape architect and designed numerous gardens in the South. He sons also went into landscape design and Louis created plans for numerous golf courses around the world.

On November 6, 1910, Prosper passed away at age 80. His three sons carried on the business, but his will left land to his second wife and that complicated matters. The business was shut down and in 1918; the trade name was sold to R.L. Wheeler who became foreman at the Nurseries.

As the early 20th century progressed, Augusta evolved as a small winter retreat for the wealthy. In 1925, Miami hotel mogul J. Perry Commodore Stoltz purchased the Fruitland property to build a winter

resort. However, he never completed the project and the property stood idle for the remainder of the 1920s.

In 1931, the property was sold to famous golfer Bobby Jones and his partners for a reported \$70,000. They planned to establish a golf course. Prosper's two sons, L.A. and Allie, returned and assisted in the landscape design of this famous course. The Berckmans' family home still remains and serves as the clubhouse, although there have been renovations.

Did you know that the Masters trophy, which stays at Augusta National, is a sterling silver replica of the original clubhouse mounted on a pedestal with winners' names? The champion receives a sterling silver replica at one quarter the size.

Enter Fruitland Augusta Vodka

Five years ago, Yuri Kato, beverage alcohol consultant, marketer and author of Japanese Cocktails, decided she wanted to create her own alcohol brand. The Atlanta resident happened to come across some research on Prosper Berckmans. She read the manuscripts in French describing Berckmans passion and his impact on the Georgia peach culture.

Herself inspired, Kato worked for four years to create a formula and then had it tested by chemists. "When we developed the flavor profile, I didn't want anything but peaches to come through," said Kato. Fruitland Augusta

Georgia Peach Vodka and Georgia Peach Sweet Tea debuted on the market in August 2014.

The peaches are sourced from a variety of farms around Georgia including Lane Southern Orchards, Carroll Farms, and Pearson Farms. While only pure Georgia peach juices are used, the vodkas are currently bottled in Kentucky due to laws prohibiting the manufacture of alcohol in Augusta. Work is now underway to repeal that law. Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting the dynamic Yuri Kato and tasting her products. I happen to love peaches, so I found the taste and smell of fresh peaches divine. Since my tasting happened during the winter, I tried a Fruitland Martini.

Fruitland Augusta Peach Vodka Martini

3 ounces of Fruitland Augusta Georgia Peach Vodka
¼ ounce orange liqueur

Simply shake with ice and strain into a martini glass. Garnish with a slice of fresh Georgia peach when available.

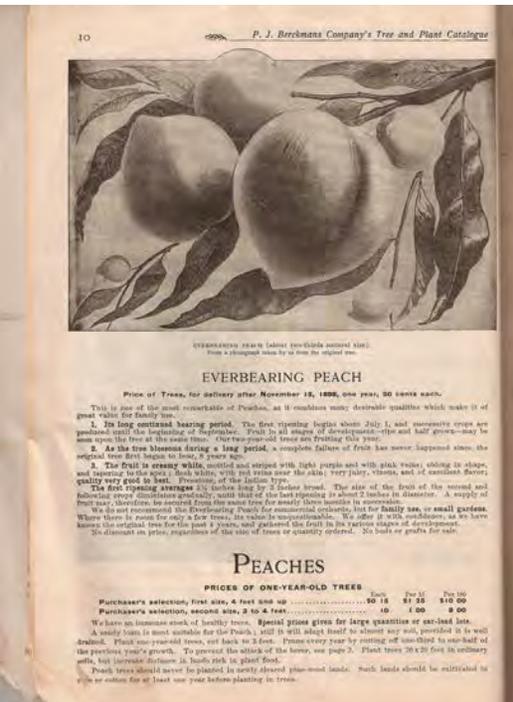
The Fruitland Augusta Georgia Peach Tea can be poured directly over ice or is popularly mixed half and half with lemonade.

Sadly, I do not live in Georgia, so I cannot buy the Fruitland products, but next time I visit the nearby state, I will pick up a stash!

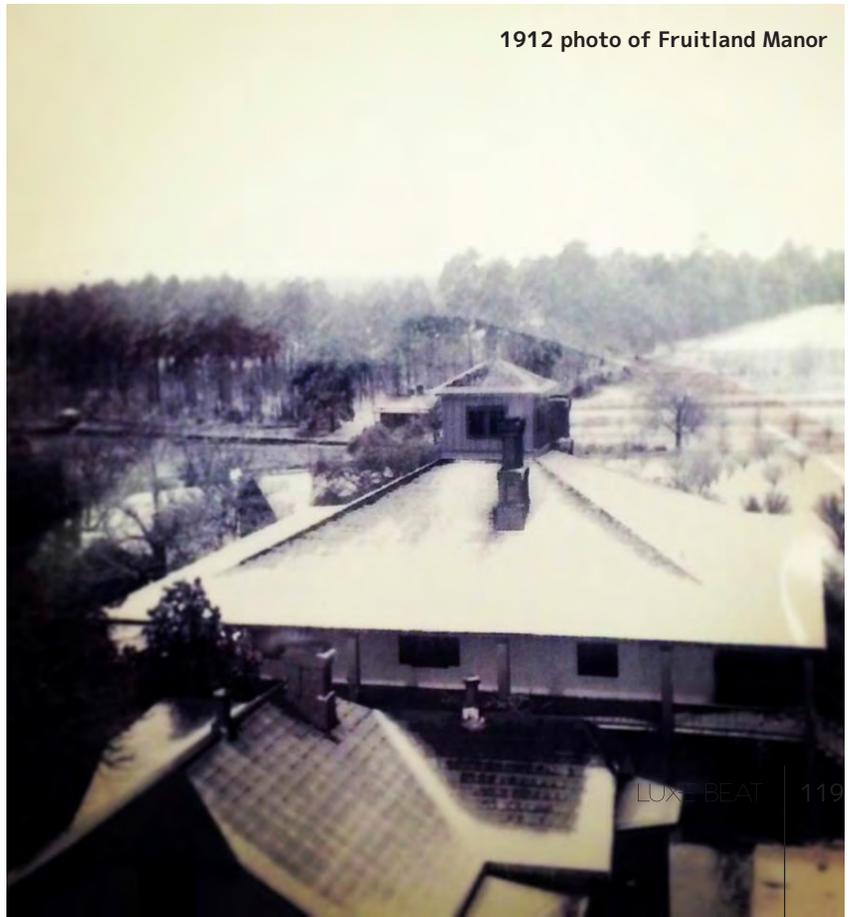


Fruitland products

BELOW
Berckmans catalog



Fruitland Augusta
Peach Vodka Martini



1912 photo of Fruitland Manor