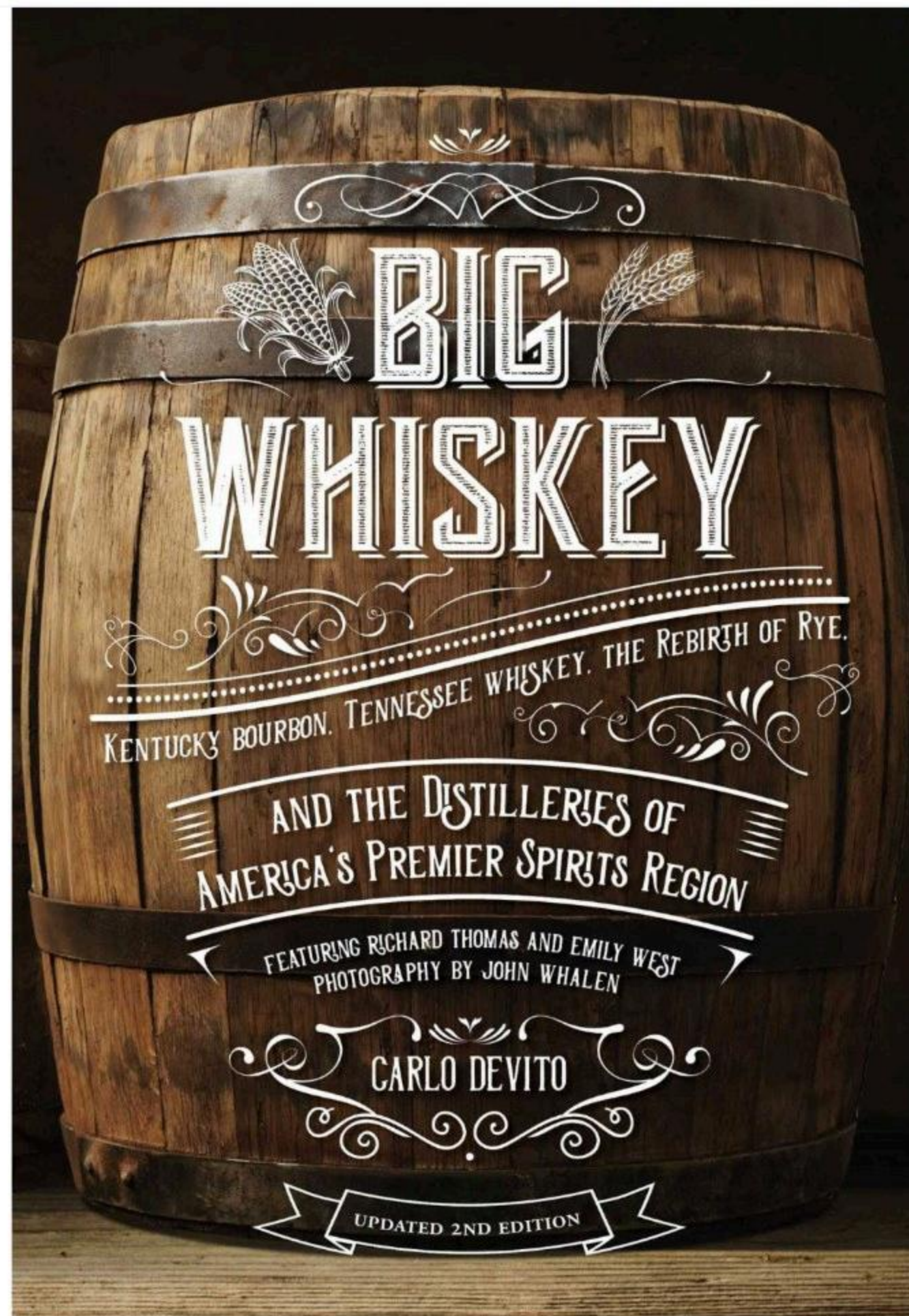






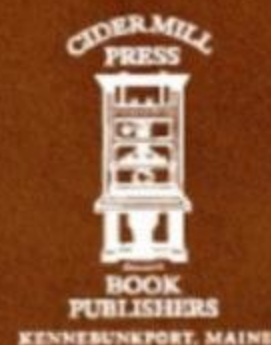
BIG WHISKEY

Kentucky Bourbon, Tennessee Whiskey,
the Rebirth of Rye, and the Distilleries
of America's Premier Spirits Region

BY
CARLO DEVITO

WITH
RICHARD THOMAS AND EMILY WEST

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
JOHN WHALEN



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Big Whiskey

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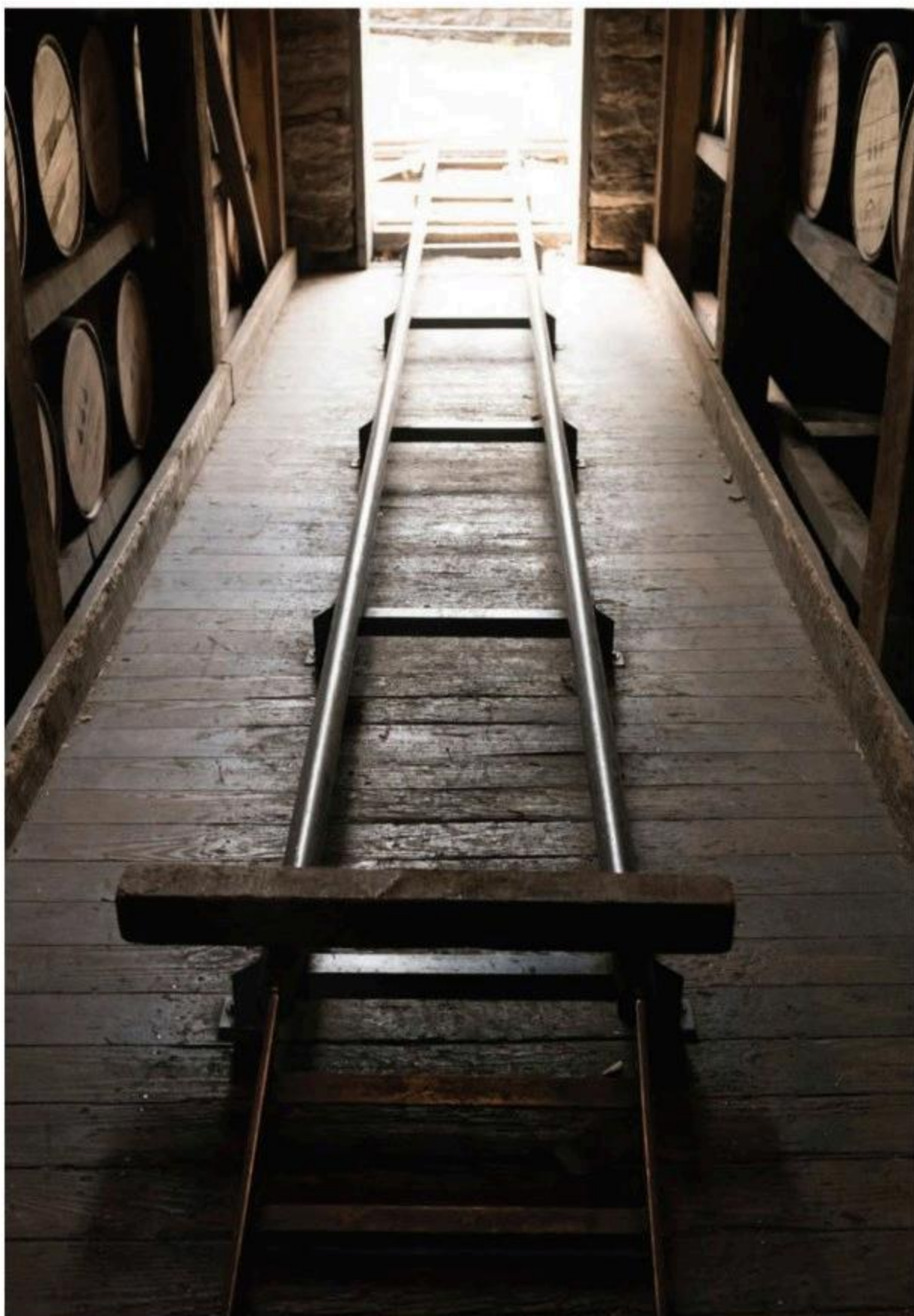
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BRINGING HOME KENTUCKY

AND TENNESSEE WHISKEY

If ever there was a time to quote legendary newspaper editor and publisher Horace Greeley, it is now: "Go West, young man!" But for our purposes here, we'll be more specific: "Go to Kentucky and Tennessee!" There has never been a richer time in either state's history. Construction in both states is at an all-time high. Business is booming! Kentucky and Tennessee are being handed out on a silver platter. And what's on the platter? A bottle of Kentucky bourbon and a bottle of Tennessee whiskey!

Investment in the region's distilleries is in the hundreds of millions of dollars. In both states, small towns that were moribund for years have suddenly sprung new life. Young people from all over the country are gathering there. And all the associated industries are going along for the ride.

There is no question that this is the whiskey capital of America. Kentucky and Tennessee form the heart of the largest distilling region in the United States. There are four main whiskeys that are strongly associated with this region: Kentucky bourbon, Tennessee whiskey, rye whiskey, and moonshine, or white whiskey.

Like a pair of siblings, wherein you can see one family's lineage in similarly shaped lips or cheeks, the two states are undeniably connected by similarity and rivalry. The mash bills for the Tennessee whiskeys and Kentucky bourbons are very similar in most cases. Ironically, the corn whiskey, or moonshine, also shares many similar recipes and grains. Kentuckians take immense pride in their bourbon, and Tennesseans are beginning to appreciate their state's own version of whiskey in a whole new way. And both sides make rye and moonshine.

The differences are just as startling. Kentucky seems to have fewer distilleries. But many of the distilleries they do have are much, much, much bigger than most distilleries in the United States. One distillery in Kentucky may have

anywhere from one to thirty brands that it represents and produces.

And, of course, in Kentucky, bourbon is king. And these days, that kingdom of bourbon continues to expand. Distillery improvements and new construction are up in crazy numbers. And everyone seems to have been, is now, or will be involved in this robust industry.

Kentucky is a company town when it comes to distilling and horse racing. Both industries share storied pasts. Both are steeped in history, and both industries are chockablock with families that have been in their respective businesses for two, three, or four generations.

Tennessee—a leader in distilling production before Prohibition—is in the middle of one of the biggest booms in the state's history. Millions and millions of dollars are being poured into new distilleries—both large and small. Craft spirit distilling, while small in overall size, is a much bigger trend in Tennessee.

In 2009, Tennessee had three distilleries, but today there are more than forty. The two biggest are the large and iconic

Jack Daniel's and George Dickel. But with the excitement that is brewing, Tennessee whiskey should be one of the hottest new categories in the next half-decade and beyond. In the meantime, a phalanx of new Tennessee moonshines, vodkas, and gins are being crafted across the state. The excitement in the industry is palpable. And the desire to compete with their now-bigger brother to the north has never been hotter.



For many years, Tennessee has been known as the center of country music. The state is awash with references to it. The other major export has been Tennessee whiskey. Now, more than ever before, whiskey is in the ascendancy. And soon, like its neighbors to the north, Tennessee will have a second industry that is as dominant as the one that put it on the map.

Maybe you can't move to Tennessee or Kentucky. The good news is you can always bring a little bit of Kentucky home, and celebrate with a mint julep and a souvenir from Keeneland or Churchill Downs, or raise a glass of Tennessee whiskey and toast Graceland or the Grand Ole Opry. The only movement required is a visit to your local purveyor of fine

liquors, where you can procure some of the best whiskeys in the world and add them to your home bar.

Share a little Southern hospitality and spend time with friends and family over a good glass of whiskey. That's why whiskey is really so popular—sharing it with loved ones, bringing back memories, and making new ones. Doesn't matter if you're a Louisville Cardinals fan, a Kentucky Wildcat fan, a Tennessee Volunteers fan, or a fan of a far-flung team, you can always sit down with a bottle, pour a couple of glasses (maybe over a small amount of ice), lean back, and laugh. That's really what great whiskey is all about!



INTRODUCTION

WHISKEY, BOURBON, RYE:

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Here's how it works: bourbon, rye, Tennessee whiskey, and some moonshine are whiskey. "Whiskey" is the term used to describe an aged spirit that is distilled from grain.



All bourbon, rye, and Tennessee whiskey come from grain—primarily corn, rye, malted barley, and wheat.

QUICK REFERENCE:

CORN WHISKEY (also known as moonshine or white whiskey) is the base spirit most Kentucky and Tennessee whiskeys are made from. It is the distillate with water added back (usually), which comes from grain and some variable amount of corn. Some are made from 100 percent corn. It is usually clear. Most are not aged, but a few are “rested” in oak for a short period so that they can be called whiskey. Some moonshine contains cane sugar as part of the mash bill.

BOURBON is a whiskey made from at least 51 percent (but no more than 80 percent) corn, with the rest made up of rye, wheat and/or malted barley. It must be made in the United States, and aged in new charred oak barrels. The final product must be at least 80 proof. Although there is no minimum aging requirement for bourbon, any bourbon

younger than four years must have an age statement on the label. Furthermore, the age statement of any bourbon must be according to the youngest whiskey in the bottle.

STRAIGHT BOURBON is American bourbon aged a minimum of two years, as mandated by law. This same requirement applies to any other whiskey labeled “straight.” Moreover, any “bottled in bond” bourbon must also be a straight bourbon, and aged for at least four years (not to mention that it must come from a single distilling season, and be distilled by one distiller at one distillery, then aged at a federally bonded warehouse). Blended bourbon must contain at least 51 percent straight bourbon, but may also include other spirits, flavoring, and color.

RYE WHISKEY, like bourbon, is an American invention and must also be aged in new charred oak and bottled at least 80 proof. Made from at least 51 percent rye grain, rye whiskey is spicier and drier than other varieties. Once common throughout the northeastern United States, rye whiskey almost died out after Prohibition, but is currently seeing a

resurgence. Canadian whisky is also often called rye whisky, but most contemporary Canadian whiskies don't contain a majority of rye in their mash bill, or any at all.



TENNESSEE WHISKEY is made using the same method and ingredients as most bourbons, but features an extra step, a charcoal “mellowing” known as the Lincoln County Process, where the distillate is passed through heavily charred American maple chips before it is put into new American oak barrels for aging. Although there are no legal guidelines as to how much charcoal the distillate must pass through to qualify as Tennessee whiskey, Jack Daniel's and George Dickel filter their whiskeys through massive 10- and 13-foot vats of charcoal, respectively.

Whiskey is also a generic term, meaning the mash bill does not fulfill any of the above requirements—i.e. a distillate resulting from a mash bill of 25 percent corn, 25 percent rye, 25 percent malted barley, and 25 percent wheat is considered a generic whiskey. It might be very tasty, but it does not fulfill the requirements for bourbon, rye, or Tennessee whiskey.

GRAIN

There are four main grains we are concerned with: corn, malted barley, rye, and wheat. These four grains, in some combination or another, make up the greater part of bourbon, rye, or Tennessee whiskey. They are the backbone of the industry.



CORN

Corn is the foundation of both Kentucky bourbon and Tennessee whiskey. White, sweet corn is the coin of the realm, and the cornfields of the South and Midwest feed

a steady stream of corn to distilleries throughout these two states. Why corn? Because it helps offer that hint of sweetness that makes bourbon so popular in the United States. Corn is where it all began!



MALTED BARLEY

Malted barley is almost always in the mix. Malted barley provides several different elements. It adds another texture or flavor profile to the whiskey. Because it is malted, which means it has been wetted and started to germinate, it provides enzymes that will help break down the grains, and help the yeast turn sugars and carbohydrates into alcohol.





RYE

The backbone of 90 percent of the bourbon and Tennessee whiskey market comes from rye. Rye offers the spicy notes that one associates with bourbon and whiskey. It lends a gingersnap-like quality, blending lots of spices with a peppery finish. The more rye in the mash bill, the drier and spicier the whiskey will be. Rye is one of the hardiest and easiest crops to farm, which is what made it the most popular grain grown for distillation before Prohibition.



WHEAT

Most distillers use a red winter wheat in their mash. Wheat often lends a softer touch to whiskey, giving a soft, even sweet flavor not unlike that which oatmeal lends to a beer. Any whiskey with 51 percent or more wheat in its mash

is a wheat whiskey, and bourbons that replace rye in the mash bill with wheat are “wheated” bourbons. Both lack the characteristic bite that comes from rye, and may have floral or grassy notes.

MASH AND WASH

The mash is the blend of grains used to make the base of whiskey. In bourbon, the mash bill, or recipe, must be predominantly corn. In Kentucky, the percentage of corn ranges from 70 percent to 90 percent of the final mash bill. Buffalo Trace has a mash bill with corn making up as much as 90 percent of the recipe, while Jack Daniel’s and George Dickel are both in the low 80s. After that, most of the industry is around the 70-something mark.

The mash bill in some instances is guarded like a state secret, while other distilleries are happy to share. Suffice to say, it is an immeasurably important part of the makeup of the final product.

Malted barley is the next constant, with that portion of recipes averaging anywhere from a low of 5 percent to a high of 15 percent.

The other portion is usually rye, but there are a few bourbons that substitute wheat for rye.

With the mash bill perfected, the next step is making mash, or distiller's beer. The grains are cooked. The corn is usually cooked first, and then the barley and other grains are added after the corn has come to a boil. The final product smells and tastes like Cream of Wheat, or to be more precise, cream of corn. It smells like breakfast. It has all the flavor and sweetness of a sweet corn porridge. After the full boil has been executed, and the grains are fully cooked, distillers have that liquid they refer to as mash.

The mash is then moved to a big open-topped tank called a fermenter. After it has had a chance to cool, yeast is added to this soupy mess.



Here is where recipes differ. Some mashes are fermented in three days. Others four or five. Some as long as seven days. How long the mash ferments directly relates to flavor.

The longer it takes the yeast to turn cream of corn into an alcoholic porridge can, and does, determine the flavor profile of the whiskey. Woodford Reserve has five-day fermentations, and master distiller Chris Morris absolutely believes that the stone fruit, apple, and pear notes in this whiskey are a direct result of the cooking time.

Yeast works in the fermentation tank a lot like it does in a beer tank. The hungry yeast races through the slurry of sugar and carbohydrates and voraciously feasts, turning the sugar and carbs into alcohol. The result of this hunger turns the mash into distiller's beer, or wash.

Some distillers are looking for high-alcohol beers, while others are looking for lower alcohol content. It all depends on what flavor a particular distiller is trying to produce.

WHAT KIND OF FERMENTER
DO YOU HAVE?

Most fermenters in the industry are stainless steel. However, some fermenters are made of wood, much in the way rooftop, wooden water tanks are made. They are open-topped, and usually made of the wood from cypress trees. Many distillers who use the wooden fermenters are very proud to show them off. They are very sexy indeed, and impart an old-timey note to the operation. But their draw goes beyond the surface—some distillers swear that the interaction of their mash bill with the wood helps the flavor profile of their spirits.

DISTILLING

Distilling is the process by which the distiller's beer or wash is turned into distillate. The mash, once it has been cooked, is ready to be turned into a distillate.

HEADS AND TAILS

Heads and tails are terms used to describe the front and back of the whiskey distilling process. The distiller will make cuts as the liquid passes through the still.

The distiller checks the volume of alcohol at the beginning of the run. The alcohol level is not sufficiently high enough, and the front of the run contains compounds and elements, such as methanol, that are not ingestible. Imbibing of the heads and/ or tails may result in severe sickness, partial blindness, or even death. As the process continues, the liquid begins to process more efficiently, producing a higher alcohol content. The impurities in the liquid decrease as the alcohol increases. Thus the first “cut” is made. Simply put, the distiller shifts the direction of the liquid. The heads are usually sent off to the “low wine” tank, where they will again be run through a still to be refined and rendered drinkable.

Once the liquid is at a high enough alcohol content, the main run begins. The liquid is sent to a spirits tank that will hold it until it is ready to make its way to barrels and become



bourbon, rye, Tennessee whiskey, whiskey, or remain a neutral grain spirit.

As the run starts to wind down, the alcohol level begins to drop, and the distiller makes another “cut.” This particular cut is called tails. Like heads, the dangerous compounds begin to reappear because the process is not running efficiently. The distiller sends the tails off to the “low wine” tank for reprocessing. This is the end of the first run for the whiskey.

The whiskey is usually redistilled. In the bigger distilleries, the column still feeds a “doubler,” or another still, where it will be run through for a second time. In most cases, distilleries feed their whiskey through a pot still or a combination pot/column still. In smaller places, it’s run through the same still once again. In order to make gin or vodka, it’s run through a taller column still, often called a stripping column, which will have anywhere from 15 to 20 distilling plates. These plates create a clear, odorless, tasteless spirit that provides the base for gins and vodkas.

Now the liquid is ready for barreling.

CLAPPING FOR CREDIT

Often, if you are lucky enough to see it, a distiller will pour distillate on his hands, rub them vigorously, and then smell them. Generally they will do this three times in a row. It’s what the old moonshiners used to do. But why?

The first time they rub their hands together and smell them, they are trying to gauge the amount of alcohol in the distillate. The second time they do it, they are looking to see if the corn (or the dominant grain) comes through on the nose. The final time is to check if they can detect the nose of their yeast. Science has since replaced this brand of from-the-hip testing, but many distillers still do it.



BARRELS

The barrel is an incredibly important part of the whiskey process, especially when making bourbon. It is the barrel that imparts color and additional flavor to the whiskey. How it's stored, where it's stored, and when it's moved or pulled all help determine the final flavor of the whiskey.

The most popularly used tree for barrels in the distilling world is American white oak. White oak, also known as *quercus alba*, produces one of the most highly regarded hardwoods in North America. The tree can be found as far north as Quebec, and as far south as northern Florida.

As far as the whiskey industry is concerned, the most valuable white oak comes from Arkansas. It produces fine-grained, pale sapwood that is strong, tough, heavy, and durable.

Barrels are made at cooperages by coopers who still execute their craft by hand. Due to the increased popularity

of whiskey around the world and the influx of craft distillers in the United States and internationally, the barrel industry has swelled to an all-time high. The most commonly used barrels in Kentucky and Tennessee come from Kelvin Cooperage, Speyside Cooperage, Independent Stave, and Canton.

The wood is harvested and rough cut into strips. The wood is then stacked in interlocking piles and left outside to age, generally, for about two or three years. It is then milled into the pieces that make up a barrel. Each piece of lengthwise wood is called a stave. There are 32 staves in a 53-gallon barrel. The ends are called heads, or barrelheads.

Most barrels used in the craft beverage industry are fired in one way, shape, or form. Coopers place half-finished barrels over an open flame in order to affect what flavors the barrels will impart. Wine barrels are toasted; whiskey barrels are charred.

“People have suggested that the inside of barrels was originally burnt to remove the leftover flavors of goods previously stored within, which sounds reasonable enough.

There's also some evidence that the practice goes back as far as the 15th century amongst French cognac distillers, but no one really knows how the practice began," say the folks at Angel's Envy Distillery. "Because we only use new barrels, and nobody really stores fish or hog parts in them these days, we don't have to worry about scorching previous flavors out of our casks. So why do barrel coopers still char the interior? Charring the wood actually primes the wood, which impacts the spirit's flavor in several important ways that have nothing to do with smokiness."





CHAR LEVELS

All whiskey barrels in Kentucky are charred. No. 3 Char is the most commonly used. The classic version is a No. 4 Char, also known as the Alligator Char or Alligator Skin, where the burnt wood bubbles and crackles and ends up looking like alligator skin.

No. 1 Char—15 seconds of direct flame

No. 2 Char—30 seconds of direct flame

No. 3 Char—35 seconds of direct flame

No. 4 Char—55 seconds of direct flame

BARREL CLOCKING

As each barrel is slotted to be rolled into its rack next to other barrels, it must be positioned properly so that when it arrives at its spot the bung is at 12 o'clock. The idea is that it reduces the chance of the whiskey leaking out near the bung entrance. This practice is called “clocking” or “barrel clocking.”





Why charred barrels today? Barrels contain sap. Sap that is boiled becomes caramelized. Basically, it's the same concept as boiling sap to make syrup. When the whiskey settles into the wood, the boiled sap, now a sweet, caramel-like solid, interacts with the aging whiskey, imparting lovely caramel and vanilla flavors. The oak, and the burnt oak, also help color

the whiskey, providing it its lovely, rich hue. That sounds like plenty of work, but that's not all: this wood helps take impurities out of the whiskey, as well.

SIZE MATTERS

These barrels come in a number of sizes: 5-, 10-, 15-, 25-, 30-, and 53-gallon barrels are among the most commonly used in the United States and around the world. In most cases, distillers large and small agree that the best, and most even, productivity comes from the 53-gallon barrels. They produce the flavor, color, and mixture of spices associated with classic, high-quality bourbon. Where a barrel is stored also has immense importance. Barrels are often stored in

classic, seven-story rickhouses, or warehouses. The hotter the temperature, the shorter amount of time that a barrel needs to stay in the rickhouse. The cooler it is, the longer a barrel needs to remain.



TRADITIONAL BARRELS VS. PALLETIZED BARRELS

Traditional barrels are well known. They have the classic

barrel shape, with the bulge in the middle and tapped at both ends, with a bung hole placed half way down one of the wider staves on the side of the barrel. These barrels are stored on their sides, bung hole up, and corked.

However, a new barrel is one the rise. The shape is pretty much the same, however, the bung hole is placed on one of the heads. The barrels are not placed in traditional rickhouses but in climate controlled warehouses, and are stored standing up.

Proponents of traditional barrels insist that time-honored methods are the best. But a new generation of distillers has seen the value proposition of the new barrels. They can be palletized, meaning it is safer and easier to move them with a forklift. Proponents of palletized barrels also argue that there is no discernible difference in how the final product tastes. The battle rages on.

THE ROLE OF THE RUBBER TIRE

When unloading a massive truckload of barrels at the distillery, the barrels are usually stacked three high in the back of large tractor trailer rigs. The barrels fit tightly, and so cannot be moved by fork lifts. The warehouse workers need to pull them down manually. But a barrel dropped from that height to a cement floor will surely crack. Enter the rubber tire. A large tire is placed at the bottom of the large wall of barrels and the top barrels are gently pulled out and bounced off the tire onto the factory floor. This happens until all the third-tier barrels are bounced off the truck.

WHISKEY RING

After the whiskey has been dumped, some barrels are disassembled, and the staves are sold in the distillery retail store. Viewing the stave from the side, one can see how far the whiskey penetrated into the wood. The idea is that whiskey literally expands into the wood when it is hot, and contracts when it is cold, taking some color and flavor with

it. The trace of this expansion and contraction is called the whiskey ring.

However, during a distillery tour, one will see many differently sized barrels. The small craft distillers, especially the newest ones, tend to use smaller barrels. First, they just don't produce enough to require larger ones. Second, they need the smaller barrels to age their whiskeys and get them to market faster. The idea is that smaller barrels offer more wood-to-liquid contact, resulting in faster maturing. Brown spirits are extremely popular and command more review attention, consumer desire, and higher prices. If you're a small craft distiller, small barrels are your friend.

Is there a taste difference? If the smaller barrels are handled properly, no. If not, there can be. The small-barreled whiskeys have a more aggressive oak profile. That doesn't make them bad. It just makes the notes of pepper, dark caramel, and spices more pronounced. Some of these whiskeys, like Hartfield & Co., Corsair, and Nelson's Green Brier all produce whiskeys with bigger wood noses, but also with bigger flavor, more chocolate brown malt, and bigger

spice notes. These are exciting, fun whiskeys.





fix leaking barrels. But how do they stop them from leaking? First, they use an awl, and hit the open spot with it and a hammer to make the pinholes larger. Then they hammer cone-shaped pieces of wood, somewhat like fat toothpicks, into the holes. Once the leak has been plugged, the cooper might chip off any wood still sticking out with a chisel. The barrel can then be confidently rolled into a rickhouse and stored.



FIXING FULL BARRELS

The big distilleries like Buffalo Trace, Woodford, Jim Beam, Wild Turkey, and Jack Daniel's all use the 53-gallon variety. These places employ coopers on-site to





whiskey.

HONEY BARRELS

Honey barrels (also called sugar barrels) are mythical, or unicorn, barrels smuggled away in rickhouses all through Kentucky. Honey barrels are those barrels that suddenly produce a barrel to be sold at “cask strength,” producing whiskey that has a magical taste.

Wild Turkey and Buffalo Trace not only believe in these barrels, they claim they have found them. *Whisky Advocate* contributor Chuck Cowdery has said, “I’ve been around Kentucky distilleries for forty years and have always heard the term. It simply refers to a particularly good barrel, and there is nothing mythological about that. It’s subjective, of course, and certainly prone to abuse if marketers start using it.” On the other hand, Eddie Russell—the master distiller at Wild Turkey—believes!

It is generally thought that these barrels are found in the middle two floors of a rickhouse. Many are destined to become single barrel, cask strength bottlings, or end up being reserved for exclusive customers who buy barrels of

FINISHING

So, while bourbon has to originally be stored in brand-new American white oak barrels in order to earn the title of bourbon, it can be finished in other kinds of oak. Angel’s Envy, for example, is finished in old, port barrels. Maker’s Mark 46 is finished with several types of toasted French oak, and Woodford Reserve has released several high-end expressions of bourbon aged in old, Chardonnay, sherry, and cognac barrels.

The idea behind this type of finishing is that these bourbons will mirror the high-end Scottish single malt whiskies, adding new notes and more complexities to the final product. These bourbons are in demand by collectors and the foreign markets of Europe and Asia, where it is a much more common practice.





SCOTLAND, HERE WE COME

All bourbon has to be stored in a new American white oak charred barrel. The barrels cannot be reused to age bourbon again. But most once-used bourbon barrels are sold at a premium on the secondary market. The number one consumer of used American white oak bourbon barrels is Scotland. The distillers who make Scotch whisky age all of their first-run, single malt Scotch in once-used bourbon barrels. In many cases, there are pre-arranged deals. For example, Glenmorangie gets most of its barrels from Jack Daniel's.

THE ANGEL'S SHARE

Every master distiller and distillery owner must suffer the

theft of his or her whiskey on a regular basis. As whiskey matures in the cask, a portion of the liquid evaporates. Over the centuries, this has come to be known as The Angel's Share. This is as true in Scotland and Ireland as it is in Kentucky or Tennessee.

According to the Scottish distillers at Bruichladdich, “as much as 5 percent of the volume of the new spirit we put into a cask will be quickly absorbed into the thirsty wood when it is initially filled—but it does not stop there. A smaller proportion, up to 2 percent, will go right through the grain each year and out into the atmosphere to be lost forever, unless you are an angel. It is therefore not uncommon for a cask that is 15 years old to be half-empty by the time it is bottled.” In Kentucky and Tennessee, they estimate that between 4 percent and 10 percent of their whiskey is lost to the angels.

There are numerous factors that play a part in evaporation, but temperature and moisture (or lack thereof) play the biggest roles. Counter to what might seem logical, smaller barrels lose more than larger ones, and the hotter

parts of the warehouse race through more whiskey than the cooler ones.





Seen from the outside, there is nothing particularly inspiring when you arrive at Kelvin Cooperage. The first thing you see is the massive loading dock, its doors might be open at any given time, with hard- working men covered in smoke and sweat rolling new and used 100-pound barrels into giant containers as if they're pillows. A little glassed off window shields the operations desks from the world outside. But then, there's what's behind the proverbial curtain.

Kelvin Cooperage has been family run since it was founded in 1963 by Ed McLaughlin on the banks of the River Kelvin in Glasgow, Scotland. Ed had just completed his four-year cooperage apprenticeship and decided to open up his own shop. In the beginning, Kelvin serviced only Scotch distilleries, finding, repairing, and shipping used barrels.

In 1991, Ed's son Kevin relocated to Louisville, Kentucky, in order to take advantage of Louisville's proximity to Bourbon Country. Kelvin is all about family. Kevin served his apprenticeship in Scotland, and has managed Kelvin's Louisville facility since it opened in 1991. Kevin is a graduate of Pepperdine University. Ed's other son Paul joined the

KELVIN COOPERAGE

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family business in June 2001, as general counsel. Prior to joining Kelvin, Paul was an attorney, having received his bachelor's degree from Harvard and his J.D. from Notre Dame. Since 2001, Kelvin is the industry's top purveyor of barrels to the craft market. Kelvin now supplies new and used barrels to leading craft distilleries throughout the world. Kevin, who was well-loved in the industry, passed away in 2019. Paul now owns and operates Kelvin Cooperage.

The move in 1991 served two purposes. Kelvin could source more barrels directly, and the inspection and repair took place on the US side of the Atlantic before shipping. Since then Kelvin Cooperage's used barrel operation has served the major distilleries in Scotland, Ireland, and beyond continuously since its formation.





But the new barrel business soon began to boom. And throughout Kentucky and Tennessee, there is an unmistakable and immediate consensus regarding Kelvin's absolute craft of barrel making. And when you get behind

those loading docks doors, you immediately understand why.

First, Kelvin takes raw, aged oak and saws, steams, pounds, hammers, and fires these barrels all by hand. Because Kelvin is all handmade, they offer key benefits to craft distilleries at any stage of development and production. They are a full-service barrel provider. They can offer traditional 53-gallon barrels, traditional wine barrels, customized whiskey barrels, and offer a wide range of used or refurbished barrels.

The staves are assembled in a group. A cooper (a carpenter who makes barrels) pulls from a wide swath of cut and trimmed timber, fitting the staves through a hoop to make sure they fit snugly. No two staves are alike. All are individual. Yet there are 32 staves in a barrel. The bands are placed around the wood and a metal cable tightens the ends and the barrel rings are set down, giving the barrel its shape. The barrels are fired before the heads are attached. Even the bung hole gets seared, and is sanded and given a final polish before it's ready to go out the door.



No words can explain the wonder of such a place. To say they have two giant industrial sheds is to reduce its absolute magic. To see the barrels fired. To see the barrels take shape. To see all the hand work that it takes to make a barrel is as exhausting as it is amazing. You begin to realize, whether it's at the station where they put on the hoops, or the station where the barrels are fired, or sanded, or even where they test the barrels before they go out, that these men are not just performing jobs – assembly line though it might appear to be – but that these workers are craftsmen. And when you see what comes in at the front, and what gets ready to be loaded out the back is nothing shy of artistry.



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“When I first joined here in 2001, there were only six or seven heritage bourbon brands here in Kentucky, so it didn’t make any sense for us to even think about that market,” said Paul. “All of their needs were being met by the big cooperage operations. It wasn’t until 2010 or 2011 that we even looked at it again. Our focus has definitely changed. When we were doing wine barrel production, it was mostly seasonal. Wine has stayed fairly steady, but whiskey has vastly overtaken it in volume.”

To watch in the giant firing area, as pole beams of blue light shine down from the shed ventilators through the darkness where the fire suddenly rages for 15 seconds; to watch the coopers select the wood; to see them make the barrel heads; to watch them plane the wood — all of it is awe inspiring.

Throughout our tour, Paul walks and chats, in his button-down shirt, and down vest, like some studied ringmaster, waving his arms with careful consideration, showing you one wonder after another, knowing how much you will be enthralled. He has perfected his turn as one of the whiskey

industry’s Willie Wonka’s, and rarely fails to please. His self-effacing good humor, and jovial personality make him the perfect foil for this incredible operation.



VENDOME COPPER & BRASS WORKS



Regardless of where you go in Kentucky and Tennessee, one of the most popular industry vendors is Vendome Copper & Brass Works of Louisville. It makes 90 percent of all the copper and brass works in the industry in this part of the world. Vendome can trace its lineage to a small company called Hoffman, Ahlers & Co., a Cincinnati manufacturer that dates back to the 1830s. Elmore Sherman, the eventual founder of Vendome, started as a bookkeeper in the St. Louis branch in 1901. By 1910, Sherman had risen to vice president, and when George Ahlers died Sherman took his customers to Louisville and founded Vendome. It was a major success up until the time of Prohibition.

The Temperance Movement crippled the company for a decade, as the distilling industry almost totally collapsed. However, after the repeal of Prohibition, Vendome saw more than 100 different distilleries place orders, and the company rebounded nicely, expanding its reach into other states and countries. By the 1970s, the company was doing a large majority of its business out of state.



Since the 1980s, the small-batch, craft boom has been a new area of growth for the company, although it still services large customers as well. With more than 250 new small-batch distilleries, Vendome's expertise and experience have become invaluable to the ever-expanding industry. But it continues to be highly prized by the Kentucky and Tennessee distillers as well, and has been called upon to make many new stills to cover the increased production.

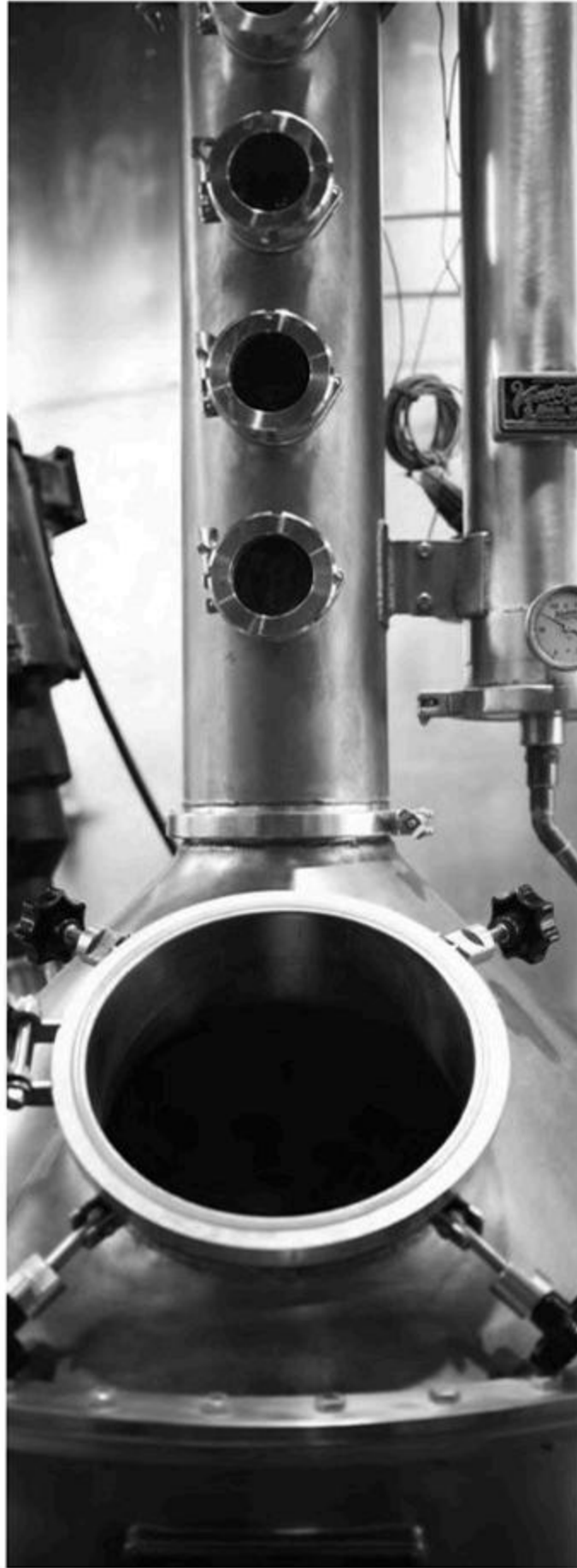
In 2005, the Elmore Sherman family was inducted into the Kentucky Bourbon Hall of Fame, the first non-distillers to be so honored.



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When you first approach the offices of Vendome, you are greeted by a charming, refurbished gray and white Victorian home, simple but elegant. The only thing to truly make it stand out, as one might expect, is a copper plaque with the simple inscription “Vendome Copper & Brass Works.” It belies what happens there. The little Victorian homestead is bounded on all sides by large industrial sheds and garages set off in a little neighborhood of its own.

Vendome occupies more than an entire block in Louisville’s Butchertown neighborhood and has over 75

employees. The company also makes stainless steel tanks and copper coils for huge companies like Anheuser-Busch and Archer Daniels Midland. In the years before the small distillery boom and the brown spirits boom, Vendome had to find new ways to keep the lights on as well as expand. They reached out to the chemical, food, and beverage industries.

Vendome vice president Michael Sherman is now a fourth-generation family member to run this business in its illustrious 110-year history. He is tall, with blue khakis and a runner's zip-up pullover. A smile and shock of salt-and-pepper hair, he is affable and friendly. Before we enter the works, he reminds us never to forget that we are in an industrial workplace. It is hard to forget.

Entering one of the big sheds, you are greeted by all kinds of metals. Some shiny, some dull, some scraped and scratched, some polished. There is scrap everywhere. But there are also men at work. They take huge sheets of metal that they bend, poke, weld, hammer, and polish until the raw materials resemble a work of art.

Vendome manufactures almost all of their own parts. As

Michael offered, even the threads on pipes were not good enough, so now they thread their own pipes. They have all manner of machines, some of which date back more than 100 years, back to a time when factories were filled with such things. They are not archaic to Michael and his gang. He and one of his longtime machinists, Tim, described how they bought the century-old behemoth, a 10-ton metal press, at auction for \$5,000. "It cost two or three times that just to ship it," he laughs and rolls his eyes. But it paid for itself in the first job they took on. Tim laughs and cracks wise. After we walk away, Michael says not to be fooled by Tim's demeanor. Tim keeps meticulous records in his own notebooks, going back more than two decades.





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The number and variety of apparatuses among the many floors is mind boggling. In one shop they are assembling a five-story tall continuous column, seemingly the size of a small submarine. Alongside it, there are two medium-sized, 500-gallon pot stills for some small craft distilleries. Another thirty-foot copper column has been disassembled, and is ready to ship. There is super-sized, custom industrial piping for a refinery that you could crawl inside of. And still in another shed is a bowl that will be part of a giant still for a chemical processing plant. The bowl is the size of a small cottage.

Chief among the skills for being employed at Vendome is welding. They have a standard test for tradesmen to show that they can do the four standard types – MIG, TIG, SMAW, and FCAW. Most important on the floor, however, is how they weld copper. Michael says they want good welders to whom they can teach their copper technique. Their welds have to hold, or people get hurt. And they have to look good. Vendome has its own in-house style, and all welders either get it, or they don't last.

Sparks fly everywhere. It's as if the Tin Man were being refurbished at Oz. From welding to grinding, the metal is worked. Scrap is everywhere. Copper shavings. Stainless steel shavings. Precision laser cut outs. You are struck not just by the fabrication, which is incredible, but the scraping and polishing that goes on. The metal does not shine when it comes in, but it glows and gleams when it's ready to go out. The men who make these high-pressured machines are not just metal workers. They are in fact artisans. And the art they produce is on display when it gets shipped to its new home.

Whether you're at Angel's Envy, Copper & Kings, Rabbit Hole, Kentucky Peerless, or a number of other distilleries around the US, large and small, chances are, the still is from Vendome. And it's not just working — it's showcased! Lit. Polished. A shiny object of affection. A feature on the distillery tour.

The stills are almost all custom. There's no catalog to order from. Distillers like to add their own touches. And Vendome is happy to oblige. A distiller comes to meet with Michael and his staff, and they design it together. As Michael



says, if there's a new distillery, we know about it a year or so before anyone else. Vendome has a year- and-a-half backlog in ordering.



BIG ASS FANS

If there is one thing that Vendome Stills and Kelvin Barrels share in common it's fans, big ones. Why? You're talking about an industry that shuts down two weeks in July or August because it is simply too hot to operate the systems. They usually close down and clean out their operations that time of year. Kentucky and Tennessee can get very hot. If you're working in a brewery or warehouse, as well as in a lot of bigger tasting rooms, chances are you will see a huge fan, or "big ass fan" if you will.

Big Ass Fans started in 1999, with the idea of creating safer, more productive work environments in industrial facilities. Carey Smith incorporated the Delta T. Corporation in Lexington, Kentucky. He had seen a "high-volume, low-speed" (HVLS) ceiling fan made by a company in California.

Smith signed an exclusive distribution agreement with the company, and changed the name of his company to HVLS Fan Company. He shifted his company's focus almost exclusively to the sales of this fan. The company's first line of products included several iterations of HVLS fans for industrial and agricultural use. These fans use airfoils instead of flat blades and feature onboard variable-frequency drives.

In 2000, the company then known as HVLS Fan Company initiated a marketing campaign with mailers depicting the rear of a donkey, a fan with a 20-foot (6.1 m) blade span, and the caption "Big Ass Fan." Postmasters in seven states refused to distribute the advert cards. The response was immediate, and customers wanted to know if they had any of those "big ass fans" for sale. Sales shot up and Smith changed the name of his company to Big Ass Fans. Smith even changed his job title to "Chief Big Ass."

The name remains controversial. The Big Ass Fans Facebook page includes a gallery of letters complaining about the company's name. However, sales continued to rise.

Smith sold his controlling interest in the company in 2017 to a private equity fund. Big Ass Fans continue to be seen in many of the distilleries operations, warehouses, and tasting rooms throughout Kentucky and Tennessee.





BUZICK

Where a barrel rests in its wooden cradle in a warehouse is called a rick. Whether you call it a rickhouse, a rackhouse, or a warehouse, the Kentucky and Tennessee hills are filled with these giant buildings. And they are fascinating places. Featuring wood interiors, and filled with thousands of 550-pound wooden barrels, they go on for what seems like forever.

When you start asking questions about these unique edifices, one name pops up again and again: Buzick Construction.

When I inquired about the price for a Buzick rickhouse, one distiller told me \$5.5 million. That seems like a lot, and yet many of the distilleries are ordering multiple buildings to handle demand. Even some of the newer distilleries need two or three. Is there a volume discount? Nope. You call, you order it, and they will come to build it. It has positioned itself as the only contractor anyone in Kentucky uses. So the price is the price whether you want one or five. Call up and take a

number.

Why are distilleries willing to pay such large amounts? Because these unique buildings require an experienced eye and hand. Most rickhouses are seven stories tall. Distillers don't want them much taller. The heat would be too intense, as well as the weight. Shifting of weight is also a problem. And then of course it's managing more floors than seven. Buzick tends to build them all alike, so that the warehouse men know what they are doing regardless of which building they're in.

Buzick Construction is a fourth-generation, family-owned company. It was founded in 1937 by Cliff Buzick (a former distillery equipment salesman) in Bardstown, Kentucky. Buzick saw that the region lacked qualified construction companies familiar with a distillery's unique needs. Thus Buzick was created to service that industry. And it was an immediate success. Years later, Donald Buzick, Cliff's son, expanded the company's mission to include other types of construction. And expansion has continued apace ever since.





Buzick has built for many of the big names in the bourbon business, including Barton Brands, Buffalo Trace, Four Roses, Heaven Hill, Jim Beam, Maker's Mark, and Wild Turkey. According to the company, "Today, due to the boom in the Bourbon Industry, the distillery trade accounts for more than half of our contracts . . . Because the company owns much of the construction equipment required and has many staff positions associated with subcontractors, such as steel pre-fabrication crews and plumbers, Buzick Construction can self-perform 70 percent of the work on any project."

The structure is built from the inside-out. The entire interior, all seven floors of ricks, is complete before the outside beams and the final walls are put up.





THE CLEAR STUFF:

WHITE WHISKEY, CORN WHISKEY, AND SUGAR WASH

The distilling boom in Tennessee also ushered in a new wave of white whiskeys that rivals those made in Kentucky.

WHITE WHISKEY, MOONSHINE, CORN WHISKEY, WHITE LIGHTNING, CORN LIQUOR: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

There are some major differences. Moonshine is the generic term that was largely ascribed to illegally made hooch, usually made by moonlight in the woods. Thus it was called moonshine.

Today, moonshine is a generic term, like beer, or whiskey, which describes a segment of the market. However, a little while back, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau



allowed commercially made, unaged whiskey to be called moonshine—and sales took off. Today, there are many kinds of “moonshine,” or unaged whiskeys, on the market, and many of them are misnamed.

Shine or sugar wash, was traditionally made in the 20th century with simple household sugar.

FOUR KINDS OF MOONSHINE

Even though it may say moonshine on the label, it may not be.

Shine or Sugar Wash – 100 percent refined sugar. Super simple and easy to drink. Little to no nose.

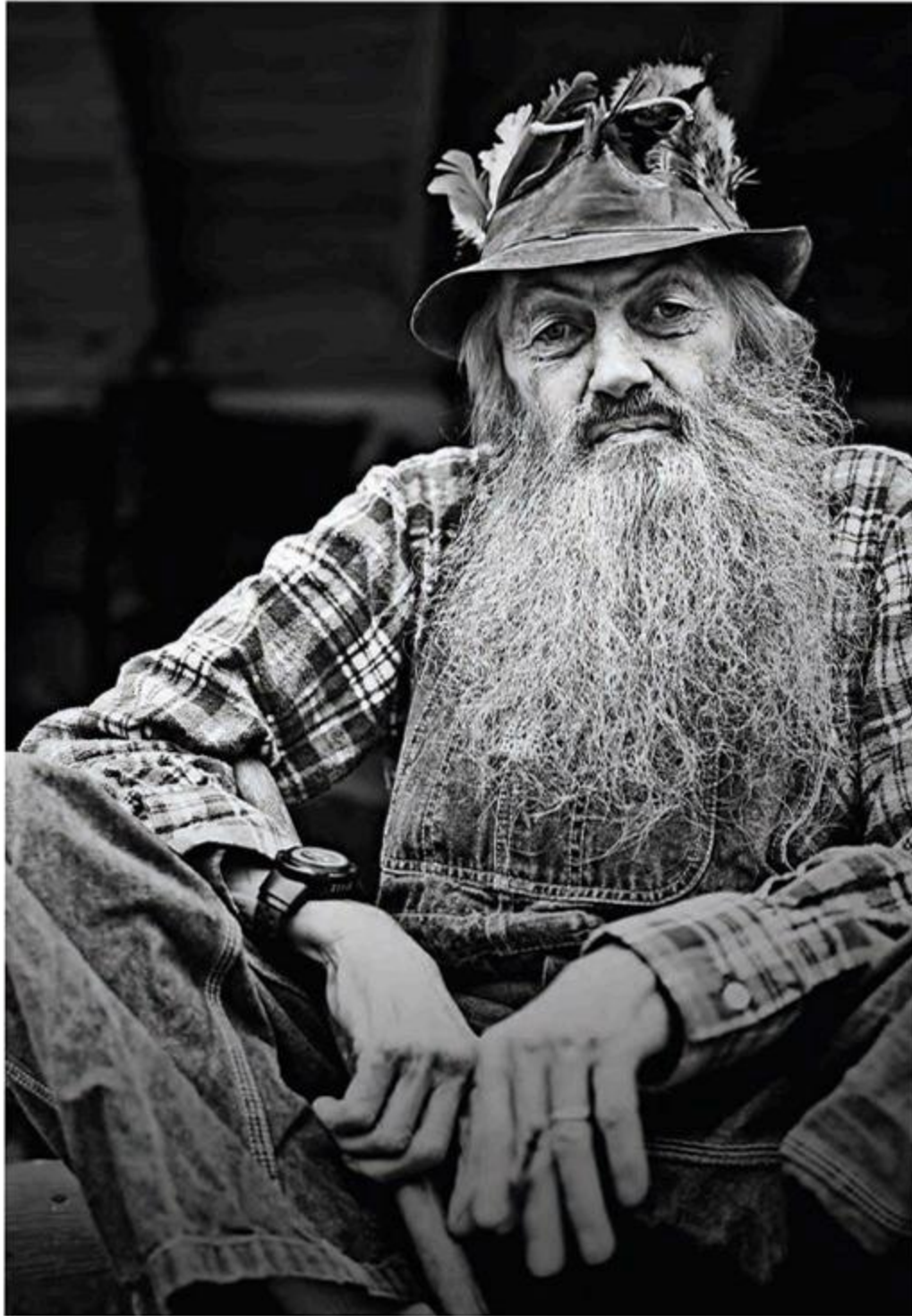
Corn & Cane – A mash of corn and some refined sugar. (Technically, if there is more sugar, it would be called Cane & Corn.) Hints of butter and cereal.

Corn Liquor or White Dog – This is a high corn mash bill. Technically it is unaged whiskey, even though it may be labeled moonshine. The good ones have a nose of buttered popcorn and Cream of Wheat or Corn Flakes.

Unaged Rye – Typically, rye is 51 percent or more of the mash bill. A nose full of gingerbread and spice.



POPCORN SUTTON A TENNESSEE MOONSHINE LEGEND



Popcorn Sutton captured the imagination of many. He was funny, irascible, and especially quotable, with little bon mots like, “Jesus turned water into wine, I turned it into likker.” With an outlook like that, it is no wonder that Sutton’s look—overalls, floppy straw hat, unkempt beard—became the image of the moonshiner in America. Few purveyors of wines, beers, or spirits were ever lionized to this degree. Popcorn was an authentic, loveable, hillbilly anti-hero. In short, a classic moonshiner. The last of a breed.

In 2009, Sky Sutton, Popcorn’s estranged daughter, wrote a book entitled *Daddy Moonshine: The Story of Marvin “Popcorn” Sutton*. He was so well-known that Hank Williams III wrote and recorded “Moonshiner’s Life” on his 2010 album *Rebel Within* and mentioned Popcorn. Sutton also appeared in the 2011–12 season of Discovery Channel’s *Moonshiners* television series. He also self-published an authentic guide to moonshining, which also served as an autobiography, entitled *Me & My Likker*. On top of all this, a coffee table book of photographs, *Popcorn Sutton The Making and Marketing of a Hillbilly Hero* was released in 2012.

Sutton was of Scottish-Irish descent, and came from a long line of moonshiners. He acquired the nickname “Popcorn” after he beat a popcorn machine in a local bar with a pool cue. He ran a junk shop in Maggie Valley in the 1990s while living with a woman named Ernestine Upchurch. Sutton spent most of his life in and out of trouble with local authorities. He was caught selling untaxed liquor in 1974, and in 1981, and again in 1985. He was also charged with possession of controlled substances and assault with a deadly weapon. Despite being convicted, he never served prison time, only probation. In 2007, firefighters arrived at Sutton’s Parrottsville property. While trying to extinguish the blaze, more than 650 gallons of untaxed hooch were discovered. Again Sutton was tried and convicted, but received only probation.

Slowly he began to become famous, with little star turns in films about Appalachian life by documentarian Neal Hutcheson. Two that were popular included the 2002 documentaries: *Mountain Talk* and the one that made Sutton famous, *This is the Last Dam Run of Likker I’ll Ever Make*.

He was again the subject of a feature documentary when he appeared in The History Channel’s *Hillbilly: The Real Story*. Later recast, edited, and renamed *The Last One*, it was broadcast on PBS and won a Southeast Emmy Award.

In March 2008, Sutton’s property was raided by Federal Marshalls and ATF officers. He had nearly 900 gallons of untaxed, illegal moonshine. In 2009, at the time of his trial and sentencing, Sutton discovered that he had cancer. He pled guilty and asked the court for mercy, hoping that his cancer would reduce his punishment to house arrest. But the judge, citing his probation, appearances on television where he instructed people how to make illegal moonshine, and photographs of him surrounded by a multitude of firearms, sentenced Sutton to 18 months. Depressed, ailing with cancer, and unwilling to go to federal prison, Sutton died from carbon monoxide poisoning in his garage. Popcorn’s widow, Pam Sutton, said, “He called it his three-jug car because he gave three jugs of liquor for it.”

Sutton's traditional gravestone reads: "Marvin Popcorn Sutton / Ex-Moonshiner / October 5, 1946 / March 16, 2009." But Popcorn had prepared to have the last word in death. At the foot of his grave is a marker he had commissioned decades earlier. It read simply: "Popcorn Said Fuck You."

This became more prevalent during the 1920s. The sugar accounted for a certain smoothness. Another variation was "cane and corn" where sugar was combined with some amount of corn.

Corn whiskey is usually made from a recipe that is predominantly corn, though it may contain some other grains. Corn whiskey is the cornerstone of the entire Kentucky and Tennessee distilling region. It is the bedrock of the industry. In short, corn is the standard of the realm, and corn whiskey is the fuel that makes the industry run.

But what is corn whiskey? Corn whiskey is the distillate that comes from the still. It is made from a mash bill that is at least 51 percent corn, and is probably blended with other grains, usually barley and rye. These three components

make up the mash bill of 85 to 90 percent of the bourbons and sour mashes made in the region.

Corn whiskey is uniquely American. Whiskeys sold as white whiskey are usually made of at least 80 percent corn. More often than not they are distilled at 160 proof (or 80 percent ABV).

Unaged rye was a new addition to this category, though these versions usually end up in the whiskey section – not the moonshine section. They are 51 percent rye, and are unaged versions of their brethren that are resting in oak. These whiskeys have gained favor, but were originally launched so the distiller could recoup some of their costs while resting aging stocks for release later. As rye is fairly more expensive than corn, and harder to come by, the retail costs of unaged rye usually reflect those in the bottle price.

But there are differences, subtle differences.

In the beginning moonshine was a quick way to make a buck to pay off your still and distillery. But these days, there are some very good moonshines being made. Indeed, for real aficionados of this spirit, eastern Kentucky and

eastern Tennessee have become the Napa and Sonoma of moonshine.

A DOZEN POPULAR MOONSHINES

Moonshine is a popular item in the United States today. Here are ten moonshines made in Kentucky and Tennessee. Ole Smoky and Lucky are among the most ubiquitous moonshine brands from the region. These are very easy drinking brands that can be used for anything from straight drinking to cocktails and punches..

Ole Smoky Tennessee Moonshine

Hook & Ladder Tennessee Moonshine

Short Mountain Shine Tennessee

Moonshine

Old Glory Moonshine

Doc Collier Moonshine

Tennessee Legend Moonshine

Jakes Creek Tennessee Moonshine

Boundary Oak Kentucky Moonshine

Lucky Kentucky Moonshine

Kentucky White Pepper Moonshine

LBL Moonshine

Donut Shine



SOME GREAT WHITE WHISKEYS TO TASTE

These are the best white whiskeys made with grain mash bills that you can drink straight. They all have the aroma, body, and taste to stand up to their barrel-aged brethren:

George Dickel & Co. White Corn Whiskey

Hartfield & Co. White Whiskey

Buffalo Trace White Dog Wheated Mash

Nelson's Green Brier Distillery Tennessee Handmade White Whiskey

Natchez Trace Tennessee White Whiskey

Fugitives Manifesto Tennessee Nascent Whiskey





Corn whiskey uses a traditional mash process and is usually sold unaged. If a distillery ages this whiskey, the distillate must be aged in uncharred barrels, at 125 proof (62.5 percent ABV). Most are stored in oak for six months or less. Straight corn whiskey is stored in used or uncharred new oak containers for two years or more. Straight corn whiskey that is aged for at least four years may be designated as “bottled in bond.”

But is corn whiskey the same as moonshine? Not necessarily. Historically, moonshine was a slang term used to describe illicitly distilled, high-proof spirits. It was called moonshine because the clandestine stills producing it usually operated out of sight and at night, in remote locations far from prying eyes. This practice began in the Scottish Highlands and was later practiced in the American South. In 2010, federal authorities defined moonshine as “clear, unaged whiskey” and it was being soon sold commercially. Moonshine was usually something between sugar wash and some variation of “corn and cane.”



In Tennessee, where moonshine and white whiskey are much more popular, there are even rye white whiskeys. Generally speaking, young craft distilleries make these kinds of spirits because they do not have enough aged whiskey to sell. And, of course, it is because white whiskey is more popular than ever. Thus a portion of their run is made for aging, and the other portion is bottled immediately.

But don't let this rush to market dissuade you—there are some very, very flavorful moonshines and white whiskeys out there. Moonshine and white whiskey are great for cocktails, and you can even make a white mint julep to celebrate the Kentucky Derby.

Another popular item is Tennessee moonshine cake! Who doesn't want a slice of that?

BARREL-AGED MOONSHINE

Most whiskey purists turn their nose up at the thought of such a suggestion. Moonshine aged in bourbon barrels, especially used bourbon barrels, is a monstrosity to them,

not worth reviewing. On the other hand, they have sold well in the tasting rooms of small craft distillers.

Most distilleries that make white dog or corn liquor, sell a portion of it unaged to pay their bills and keep the lights on until their bourbon matures. Real moonshiners (people who make sugar wash or corn-and-cane) are not in the same place. But several small distillers have been brave enough to age their moonshines in used bourbon barrels to affect a whiskey's flavor.

This idea of aging moonshine has for a very long time been part of the home vatting market. Many moonshine customers have bought these white whiskeys and aged them at home with barrel aging kits bought from home brewing stores, catalogs, and websites. It is a popular holiday gift. One can either buy charred oak chips or sticks to put in a bottle and watch their whiskey mellow, or buy a small oak barrel from 1 liter to 1.25 gallons. Of course, the idea goes back much farther than that. Many a great-great-grandfather who made hooch, barrel-aged some at one point or another. This is just another trick out of the old rucksack.



The bottles that have been super popular include Boundary Oak's Patton Armored Diesel and Casey Jones' Barrel Cut Moonshine. These resulting elixirs are super easy to drink. They are infinitely smooth, and usually lack a lot of the bite imparted by rye, for instance. They are like light whiskeys, though they can still pack a wallop where alcohol is concerned. But there is often not the burn, the Kentucky Hug, that one usually associates with bourbon or rye. These are easy drinking brown spirits that are gaining more and more favor with younger whiskey enthusiasts, and are popular with moonshiners who want entry into the brown whiskey category.

BOURBON

There is not a clear and simple history of bourbon. No single person invented it, not a single town or county. It is, in the best sense, an American mutt. What we know as bourbon was really a combination of trial and error.

There are many contradictory legends as to how bourbon came about. One is that Baptist minister Elijah Craig was the first to age whiskey in barrels. Jacob Spears was said to have been the first to name his whiskey bourbon (as he was located in Bourbon County). All quaint and fun stories to be told on distillery tours. Certainly, these men made bourbon. But are they its pioneers? Hmmmm.

Bourbon was more or less a product that evolved over time, as different makers throughout an agricultural region traded ideas and recipes over generations. In fact, Louisville historian Michael Veach speculated that the whiskey was an homage to New Orleans' famed Bourbon Street. It was there that this unique American spirit first gained popularity and competed with the more expensive brandies and cognacs. In those days, the barrels were stenciled with the words "Old Bourbon."

It has been speculated that Scottish (and other European) immigrants brought the secrets of distilling with them to the Kentucky hills. Bourbon County was originally organized

in 1785 (and was considered more Virginia than Kentucky back then) and became part of Kentucky in 1792.

Bourbon was the king of whiskeys, and all American distilling, from the late 1800s to the 1970s. But in the 1980s and 1990s, vodka, gin, and tequila took a sizable chunk out of bourbon's domestic domination. Many Kentucky distilleries either diverted their manufacturing to making other products, or were shuttered.

Initially, there was no codified law in the making of bourbon. Instead, it was a generic name for corn-based whiskeys. It wasn't until 1964 that the United States Congress passed a resolution recognizing bourbon as a "distinctive product of the United States." The law states that bourbon whiskey could only be made in the United States, and that "the appropriate agencies of the United States Government . . . take appropriate action to prohibit importation into the United States of whiskey designated as 'Bourbon Whiskey.'"

According to the law, bourbon must be made with a minimum of 51 percent corn; it must be aged in new charred

oak barrels; it must be stored at no higher than 125 proof; and it must be bottled at no less than 80 proof. Fulfilling these requirements allows it to be called bourbon, and being made in Kentucky from start to finish, and aged a minimum of two years in a barrel, gives the producer the right to use the phrase "Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey."

Bourbon has flavors consistent with caramel, burnt sugar, brown sugar, honey, and stone fruits, and can also feature smokiness, hints of spice and gingersnap, and an oatmeal-vanilla finish.





HOW OLD IS YOUR BOURBON?

Single malt scotch is known around the world for being able to age well, and bottles and barrels decades and decades old have been found and shared with glee. But should bourbon be old? There is some debate about that. Off the record, some distillers will say that they think bourbon peaks at around eight or nine years old. Some feel that the signature brown sugar/caramel notes and slight sweetness begin to fade after that.

Dusty Hunters (enthusiasts who scour flea markets, tag sales, estate sales, and dirty/dusty old liquor stores in search of an ancient bottle) have had some success locating individual bottles of old bourbon. As with all antique bottles of unopened whiskey, the provenance is generally suspect, and the care of the bottle may have compromised the contents.

But some have raved about older bourbon. And the bigger, more established distillers have been selectively bottling some of their oldest vintages. Pappy Van Winkle is famous for this. The flavors are still there. They certainly mellow and combine, and yes, some of the sweetness falls away. But older

bourbons offer their own advantages, and are highly sought after by whiskey writers, collectors, aficionados, and fans.

Here are a few excellent, older bourbons for those who prefer older spirits:

Wild Turkey Master's Keep 17 YO Bourbon

Elijah Craig 18 YO Single Barrel

Elijah Craig 23 YO Single Barrel

Knob Creek 2001 Limited Edition

Russell's Reserve 1998

I.W. Harper 15YO

Pappy Van Winkle Family Reserve 15YO

Pappy Van Winkle Family Reserve 20YO

Pappy Van Winkle Family Reserve 25YO

