

LEXINGTON DISTILLING DISTRICT

The old James E. Pepper Distillery sat abandoned for years. It was Tony Higdon and Barry McNees who led the charge to start restoring the old Pepper Plant. But the site was so large, and the building so gigantic, that only a major producer could adequately fill it up. And, frankly, it would be cheaper to build a new plant for anyone of that size. So the developers chose a different tact.

They decided to split up the buildings, and begin a renewal. The final product is something like a mall of craft producers called The Lexington Distilling District. James E. Pepper in effect is the anchor business, and takes up the largest building. However, it's not the only craft beverage business located there. The old boiler house is now Goodfellas Pizza. The old administration building is now an ice cream shop. One of the other out buildings is a small microbrewery. The old warehouse is now home to a cidery, and two pubs. And another distillery and bar – Barrel House Distillery is in yet

another out building. The weekends are packed. All kinds of folks wander the grounds. Families. Groups of friends. Couples. The rehabilitation has been a success. And the town of Lexington has seen a historical piece of ground, that was a gruesome example of urban blight, suddenly blossom in the new craft beverage world.





PRESERVATIONIST DISTILLERY

Marci Palatella is the founder and owner of Preservation Distillery in Bardstown, Kentucky. Preservationist Distillery is located just off of the Bluegrass Parkway. It's a 40-acre farm, with 10 acres of cattle, and the rest planted to grains. This is a small shop. They mill their own grain for the estate whiskeys. They use only local grains. It's a small system for the estate whiskeys. The distiller runs two mash tuns, sixteen closed fermenters, and two copper hybrid pot stills. It's a thousand-gallon system for whiskey. Plus there's also two additional continuous column stills. All said, it's a 1 to 3 barrel system. Estate whiskeys have been laid down, but are still aging. In the meantime, Preservationist sell a series of blends.

Marci Palatella originally established this brand in 1986 for the Asian market when small batch bourbons were super hot. The original whiskeys were blended from sourced

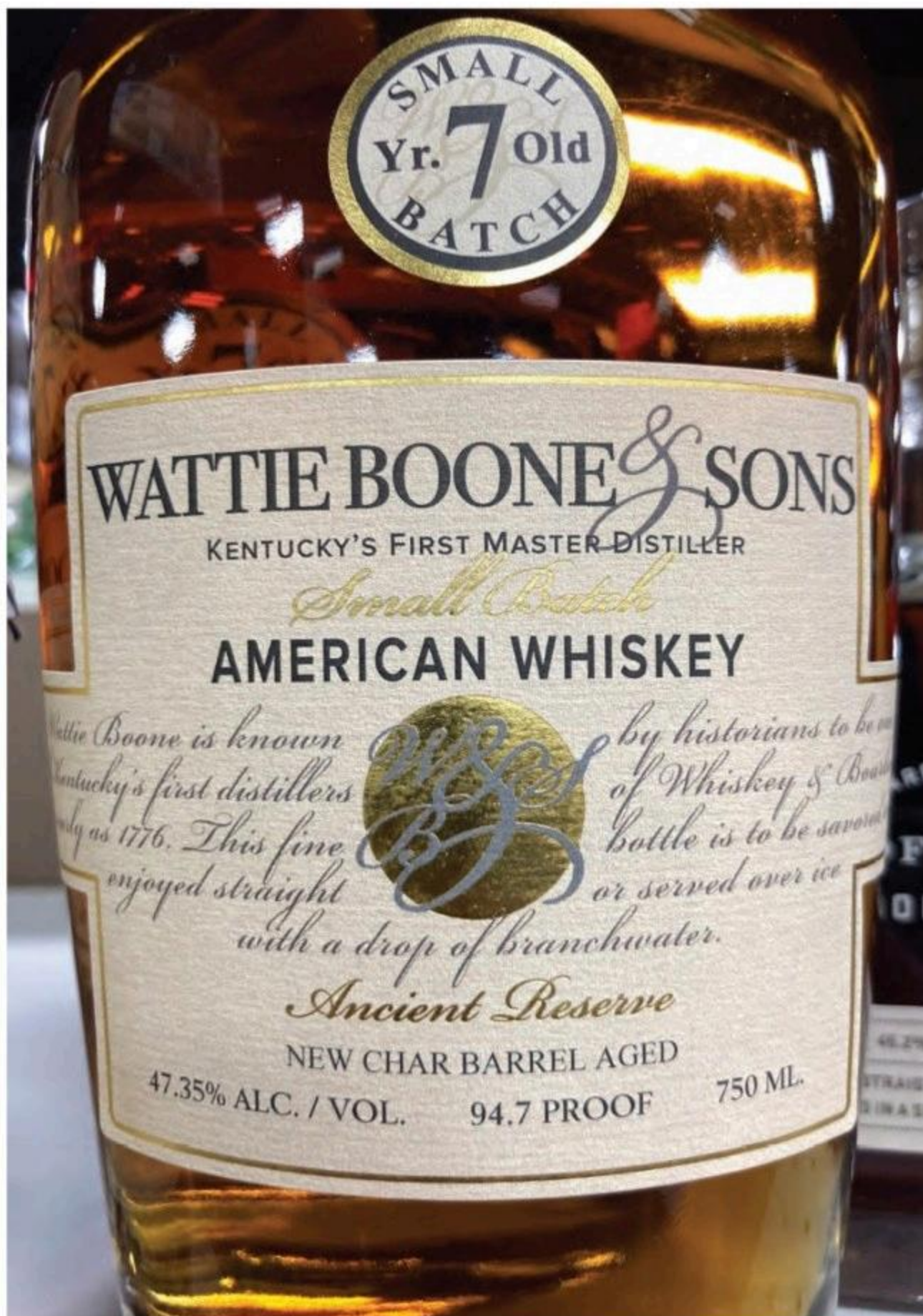
whiskeys from Old Commonwealth distillery and later Heaven Hill. The brand faded, and had not been available for years. Palatella revived the brand in 2018 when she founded Preservationist. Blended from sourced stocks, Very Olde St. Nick Ancient Cask 8-Year-Old Rye Whiskey (approx. 119 proof) is a barrel-strength rye, with a big nose, and nice notes of spice, caramel, black pepper, dried fruit, and honey.

Rare Perfection 14-Year-Old Canadian Whiskey (100 proof) is another of the brands developed by Palatella that she brought back with the founding of Preservationist. It's made from sourced whiskeys, and is a four-grain bourbon mash bill. A very lovely whiskey for those who like older bourbons.

Wattie Boone & Sons 7-Year-Old (94.7 proof) is another of Palatella's old brands that was reintroduced in 2018. It's named after Wattie Boone, who was the first person documented to have made bourbon in Kentucky, along the Beechfork just behind Preservation Distillery. This is a Tennessee whiskey aged for seven years in Kentucky. The

color of golden honey. Baking spices, oats, caramel, vanilla, and lingering brown sugar. Lovely, straightforward whiskey.





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RABBIT HOLE DISTILLING

This is all you really need to know. In the review of Rabbit Hole in *Modern Thirst*, co-founder Bill Straub wrote, “If you haven’t heard of Rabbit Hole Distilling, don’t worry. You will soon.” It really doesn’t get any better than that!

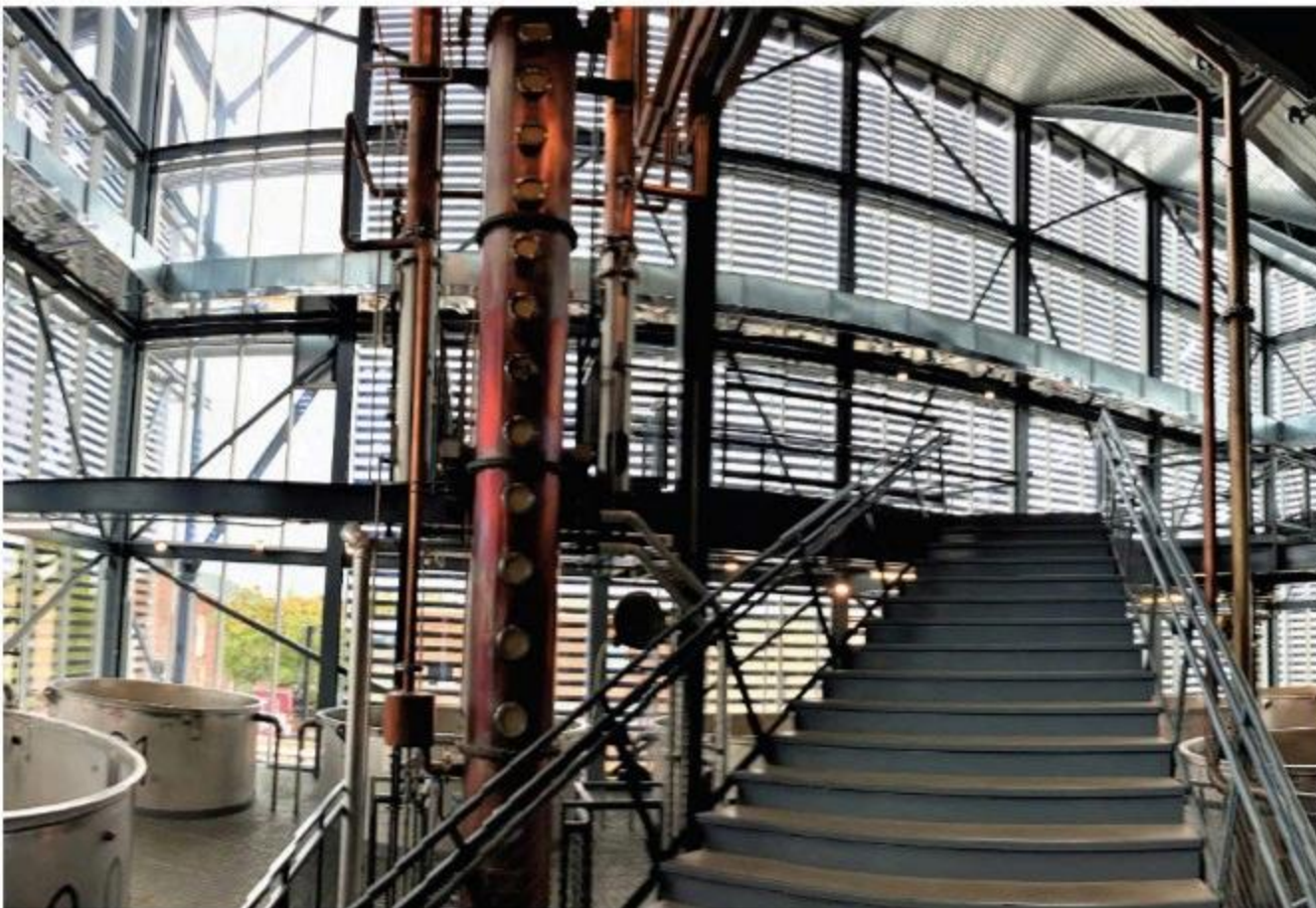
They began distilling in 2014, and began construction on their state-of-the-art Louisville distillery two years later. CEO and founder Kaveh Zamanian fell in love with a girl

named Heather, who lured him away from his beloved scotch, turned him on to bourbon, and lured him to Kentucky. Now that is a love story.

Zamanian was a psychologist who had attended Northwestern University; he had a clinical practice for nearly 20 years and taught at Loyola University. He decided he wanted to go into the distilling business. When he told his wife, she lamented it was a mid-life crisis, that he was losing his mind, claiming that he would “take the whole family down the rabbit hole.” That’s exactly what he did, and the company name bares the evidence.

The distillery is like nothing you have ever seen. It’s like something out of a James Bond film. According to Zamanian, he wanted the architecture to embody the Rabbit Hole philosophy of authenticity and transparency. The building does that. There are no walls in the distillation area, save the ones that guard against the outdoors (and those are glass). Pipes running under the floor are transparent, and the same is true of the floors. You can watch distillate and whiskey race back and forth between the distillation room

and the bottling and barreling rooms. Even the spirit safe, which looks like a jewel box, puddles the distillate on a 3' by 5' stainless steel case, enclosed in glass, so more of it can be seen by the naked eye. The operation is a glass and steel funhouse built to accentuate and illuminate the art and science of distilling. It took Zamanian and the architects one-and-a-half years to design it, and one-and-a-half years to build it. As Zamanian likes to say, "Chemistry happens when passion and purpose align." He also likes to say, "Bourbon is a verb."



Bourbon is a verb.

KAVEH ZAMANIAN
FOUNDER & WHISKEY MAKER

In truth, Zamanian thinks there's too much smoke and mirrors in the distilling business. He wanted his process to be honest and out in the open to the consumer. The only thing not available to the consumer are the rickhouses where they age the whiskey; those are in Henry County. Right now they make bourbon, rye, and they have a special single malt project in barrels, that won't be ready for some time. Rabbit Hole considers Kelvin Barrel to be a partner in the whiskey

making process, and works very closely with them. They are also aging spirits in French oak and Japanese Mizunara (oak).

Rabbit Hole Cavehill Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (95 proof) is a four-grain whiskey. It has a mash bill of 70% corn, 10% malted barley, 10% malted wheat, and 10% honey malted barley.

Rabbit Hole Heigold Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (95 proof) has a mash bill of 70% corn, 25% malted rye, and 5% malted barley. A high-rye bourbon. This whiskey is named for a German immigrant stonecutter Christian Heigold from the 1800s. It is made with German rye. Aged 3 years in new charred American oak.





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Rabbit Hole Boxergrail Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey (95 proof) has a mash bill of 95% rye and 5% malted barley. This is a rye-lover's rye. A big rye, with a huge floral nose and a gingersnap bite. However, its super smooth and sophisticated, more like a fine Highlands Scotch than a big,

biting rye. This is one of their big sellers, and a hit with the awards judges and whiskey writers. And deservedly so. Exceptional high rye.

Rabbit Hole Dareringer Straight Bourbon Whiskey Finished in PX Sherry Casks (93 proof) has a mash bill of 68% corn, 18% wheat, and 14% malted barley. The whiskey was aged in Pedro Ximenez Sherry Casks from Spain's renown Casknolia Cooperage. The casks hold the sherry for two years, and then are sent back to Kentucky. It's sweet up front with a kiss of spice. This is also a Scotch lover's whiskey. Super refined flavor profile. Outstanding.

Rabbit Hole Founder's Collection Boxergrail Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey (114.6 proof) is a limited edition, small-batch blend of Rabbit Hole ryes. Aged 6 years in the barrel at cask strength. Despite the high proof, there is little burn. Honey. Baked apple. The flavor is paramount. Taken neat the flavors are impactful, but never overpowering. This complex, well-balanced rye is graceful.

The plan is to produce two Founder's Collection releases a year – one in spring, around the Kentucky Derby, and one in fall. All will be small batch, limited editions.

These whiskeys are incredibly sophisticated. These are not big caramel bombs. They are not brawny or biting. These are incredibly complex spirits, much more akin to cognac, brandy, and Highlands Scotch. Stone fruits. Honey. A bite, but not stinging. Flavors of honey and orange zest linger. Rabbit Hole, in their packaging and flavor profile, are spirits made for a global market, part of the newer, more international style. And they are incredibly elegant. To steal an old line: I have seen the future of bourbon, and its name is Rabbit Hole.



SECOND SIGHT SPIRITS

Rick Couch, Carus Waggoner, and Dan Gibson founded Second Sights Spirits, a small, artisanal distillery in downtown Ludlow. They approach the business a bit differently than others, saying: “We believe everything we do should be good for the spirit. Our mantra not only guides us to use the best ingredients and techniques to create a

premium spirit but directs the company to excite, engage, and entertain our customers.” Couch and Waggoner both have backgrounds in mechanical engineering and industrial design, and created two of the largest shows in Las Vegas: Cirque Du Soleil’s LOVE and Viva Elvis.

“What brings us the most joy is when we have a new idea and working off of each other to make it come to life,” Waggoner said. “That’s where we really get our joy, just making and creating.”

The most unusual part of Second Sight Spirits is the still. It looks like a swami, and is similar to their eye-catching logo. The idea behind the still’s design is to drive home the double entendre of the term “spirits.” Except this one is mostly copper with highlights of stainless steel and glass.

Second Sight is interesting because for how little it is, the quality and inventiveness aren’t hindered at all. Second Sight sells Villa Hillbillies Moonshine in their tasting room. But their big claim to fame is rum. Currently they produce five rums. Really inventive, really good rums. And one bourbon. “Coming up with a brand new bourbon is a really hard sell

sometimes because there are so many great bourbon’s in the state,” said Waggoner.

For Second Sight Bourbon Barreled Rum (90 proof) they procure freshly emptied bourbon barrels from the finest bourbon makers in all of Kentucky to craft this unique aged rum. Exquisite white rum is transmogrified by placing it into bourbon-saturated barrels and aging it.

Second Sight Dark Rum (90 proof) is crafted using molasses from Louisiana and distilled and aged in Kentucky. An amazing dark rum.

Second Sights Oak Eye Kentucky Bourbon Whiskey (92 proof) is handcrafted in ultra-small batches from a mash bill of corn, rye, wheat, and malted barley.



SILENT BRIGADE DISTILLERY

Keith Bundy, a welder, and John Brown, an engineer, opened Silent Brigade Distillery in Paducah, Kentucky, in 2016. According to Bundy, “Silent Brigade Distillery was born from our passion to create the smoothest traditionally crafted bourbon . . . We started building copper stills and selling them. While we were in the process, we got a lot of questions, especially from the distillers, wanting to know what our stills are capable of. And so we were experimenting with them and found out we’re actually pretty good at making whiskey as well.”

The name “Silent Brigade” refers to a violent band of raiders that rose up out of the Tobacco Wars in Kentucky from 1900 to 1908.

Bundy told the press that their true goal was to make some of the top-quality bourbons in the region.

It started off with Silent Brigade Kentucky Moonshine (100 proof), a classic corn sugar wash with a mash bill of



50% corn and 50% cane sugar. This 'shine is straightforward and smooth. It also offers it in flavors such as apple pie, peach and apple, piña colada, blackberry, and chocolate coconut.



SILVER TRAIL DISTILLERY

EXPLOSION AND FIRE

On April 24, 2015, 26-year-old Kyle Rogers and 40-year-old Jay Rogers were hard at work at Silver Trail Distillery. Suddenly a violent explosion ripped through the small craft distillery, which is famous in western Kentucky for its moonshine. A raging fire then ensued. Both men suffered major burns and were in critical condition at Vanderbilt Medical Center.

Eric Gregory from the Kentucky Distillers Association (KDA) said distillers across the area were ready to offer any help necessary. "It's an industry of over 200 years, that's really been built on camaraderie and friendship. It's times of crisis in the industry where everyone pulls together and helps each other out," Gregory said. The KDA started the Lifting Spirits fund, while Copper & Kings, Glenns Creek, and MB Roland all held fundraising events. Local CFSB bank locations were accepting donations for medical expenses,

and Taco John's in Murray donated a portion of all their sales to help defer the costly medical expenses.

Silver Trail owner and master distiller Spencer Balentine was not injured but was severely shaken by the injuries the two had suffered.

On May 12, 2015, Rogers lost his battle with the terrible injuries he sustained. His family issued the following statement through the KDA: "We are deeply saddened to report that our son, Kyle, passed away last evening. And yet, we take solace in the fact that he is in God's comforting hands and is being greeted by cherished loved ones. We know Kyle is at peace and free of the pain from the last two weeks. We cannot begin to express our thanks for the wonderful and caring medical team at Vanderbilt Hospital and the tremendous outpouring of support from friends and loved ones, especially the family of Jay Rogers, who have stood by our side and shared in our prayers. We also would like to thank Spencer Balentine and all of Kyle's colleagues at Silver Trail Distillery. Kyle took so much pride in being a moonshiner, and we are grateful that he was able to work

in a profession that he loved so much. It is now our turn to pray for all those who knew and loved Kyle, and to show our thanks through God that we were blessed to call him son, brother, and friend for 27 years. He will be with us always."





In a warm tribute, whiskey expert Fred Minnick wrote: “I am just picturing the time I met Kyle, his warm smile, a Kentucky swagger and a firm hand shaking my right hand and putting his moonshine in the left. We lost a good one, an up-and-comer with unlimited potential.”

Balentine honored Kyle with a specially printed back label that was put on all bottles of the famous moonshine. The label honored the life of Kyle Rogers and included one of the last tweets he sent out, which read: “I didn’t choose the moonshine life. The moonshine life chose me.”



STITZEL-WELLER

Stitzel-Weller is as historic a name in distilling as there is in America. The original Stitzel-Weller Distillery was founded in 1935, after the merger of W. L. Weller & Sons (a successful distributor) and the A. Ph. Stitzel Distillery. The two companies had cooperated with each other for years, not the least of which was surviving Prohibition through the sale of medicinal spirits. After Prohibition ended, Julian Van Winkle Sr. founded the company in 1933 with partners Alex T. Farnsley and Arthur Phillip Stitzel. The actual distillery began operations on Derby Day in 1935. For many years it was known as the Old Fitzgerald Distillery, named for the king of American whiskey sales during the '40s and '50s.

The Stitzel-Weller Distillery produced such legendary labels as W. L. Weller, Old Fitzgerald, Pappy Van Winkle, Old Weller, and Rebel Yell, among others.

The company was able to store more than 25,000 barrels in its two warehouses when it opened in 1935. The company even invented the modern rickhouse we know today. In

its heyday, Stitzel-Weller employed more than 220 workers, held 300,000 barrels in its 18 warehouses, and produced 800,000 cases of spirits a year. Will McGill was the famed first master distiller of Stitzel-Weller. A veteran of the industry who had spent time at Early Times and Tom Moore, he was the oldest distiller in the industry when he died in 1952 at the age of 87.

Due in large part to W. L. Weller, Stitzel-Weller was incredibly influential in championing the making of bourbon that uses wheat instead of rye, providing a slightly round, softer finish. However, due to the decline of whiskey and other brown spirits, and with no diversity in their portfolio, Stitzel-Weller was sold off in 1972, with its various brands and stocks bought up by the likes of Buffalo Trace, Heaven Hill, and what is now Luxco.

Diageo used its deep pockets to reopen the distillery campus in 2014. Larry Schwartz, Diageo's CEO, said in his grand reopening remarks: "We are the heirs of Pappy Van Winkle and certainly the great brands that were distilled here through the years."





The distilling operations were moved to Shelbyville, where a new, state-of-the-art distillery is busy making whiskey. In a nod to the past, the Old Fitzgerald doubler from the original system was exhumed and installed at Shelbyville.

The newest incarnation of Stitzel-Weller includes the vaunted Bulleit brand. It also has such brands as I. W. Harper and Blade and Bow.

One visits the old Stitzel-Weller site as part of the Bulleit Frontier Bourbon Whiskey Experience. Your tour includes the Blade and Bow Room, Tom Bulleit's office, the old distillery museum, the small still area, one of the remaining Stitzel-Weller warehouses, and the tasting room and shop.

BULLEIT

Bulleit Bourbon is a high-rye bourbon that has soared in popularity over the last decade. The reincarnation of the Bulleit brand began in 1987. Tom Bulleit was a Kentucky lawyer whose great-great-grandfather Augustus Bulleit had developed a recipe back around 1830 and produced it

for about 30 years. Augustus's original recipe called for approximately two-thirds rye and one-third corn. That would not qualify as a bourbon today. So Tom created a sourced whiskey that was high in rye and had a lengthy aging process. Today's mash bill contains 68% corn, 28% rye, and 4% malted barley. It is bottled at 45% ABV and remains popular among mixologists and consumers.

Seagram bought the small but solid brand in 1997. What followed was one of the greatest rebrandings since Marlboro cigarettes. The funky type, more New York than Kentucky, and the square bottle were discarded. Stealing a page right out of the Philip Morris playbook, the whiskey was placed in an antique brown bottle, and given a fresh makeover, calling it the Frontier Whiskey.

But more importantly, the whiskey was solid. Seagram moved production of the whiskey to Lawrenceburg, Kentucky, and by 1999 had national distribution. When Diageo bought Seagram, the brand continued to explode. On March 14, 2017, Diageo opened a brand-new Bulleit Distillery in Shelby, Kentucky. Diageo invested \$115 million

to erect the new production facility on a 300-acre lot. The new distillery has the capacity to produce 1.8 million proof gallons per year.

I.W. HARPER

The I. W. Harper brand of bourbon was started by Isaac Wolfe Bernheim. A successful businessman, his distillery and distribution business helped solidify downtown Louisville, making it a hub of the distilling industry. The Bernheim Distillery, which is owned by Heaven Hill, was built in 1992 and named in his honor.





Bernheim used his first two initials, I.W., but chose a more American-sounding surname for his bourbon, thinking it was more marketable. And thus, I.W. Harper was born. This was an incredibly successful brand, one of the most storied in the industry until Prohibition. With waning interest in whiskeys in the 1970s and '80s, the whiskey was only available overseas—where it was very popular. Diageo, now the owner, repackaged and reintroduced the brand in 2015.

I.W. Harper Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (82 proof) has a mash bill of 73% corn, 18% rye, and 9% malted barley. It features lots of caramel, wood, and spice, and is a lovely, smooth dram. The I. W. Harper 15-Year-Old Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (86 proof) has a mash bill of 86% corn, 6% rye, and 8% malted barley, and was aged in oak for 15 years. This bourbon provides lots of sweetness upfront, and features big notes of caramel, raisin, baked apple, and vanilla. This wonderful whiskey was a limited edition. So if you see it, snatch it up!

BLADE AND BOW

Diageo began working on Blade and Bow in 2012 with an idea for a whiskey that paid homage to the old Stitzel-Weller Distillery site. The name refers to the parts of a key (the blade being the shaft or shank of the key, and the bow being the handle). Stitzel-Weller has long used the “Five Keys” symbol to stand for the five key steps in making bourbon: grains, yeast, fermentation, distillation, and aging. The package is elegant, and a brass-colored key is attached to each bottle.





The intention of this bourbon was to utilize the last remaining original barrels of the old Stitzel-Weller bourbon stocks. Diageo has neither denied nor confirmed whether this is a four-grain whiskey (corn, rye, wheat, and malted barley), but it feels like one. In a five-tier solera, the oldest barrels are at the bottom. Only a small portion of liquid

(maybe half or less) is drawn from the bottom barrels. The barrels are then refilled with slightly younger stocks from the barrel just above, and so on, and so on. This way the old Stitzel-Weller product stays in the whiskey for many years.

Blade and Bow Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (96 proof) is an easy-drinking bourbon. It's a lighter styled bourbon with notes of honey, caramel, stone fruits, and caramel, with hints of cream custard.

The 22-Year-Old Kentucky Straight Bourbon (92 proof) is a limited bottling that features whiskeys distilled in Louisville and Frankfort. This is an incredibly smooth whiskey. The nose evokes just-baked cornbread or vanilla cake, with hints of honey, caramel, pecan, and spice. All in all, it's one of the prettiest bourbons you will find.

ORPHAN BARREL WHISKEY DISTILLING PROJECT

According to the distiller, "The Orphan Barrel Whiskey Co. was started to share barrels of delicious and rare whiskey, hidden away and nearly forgotten in the back of rickhouses

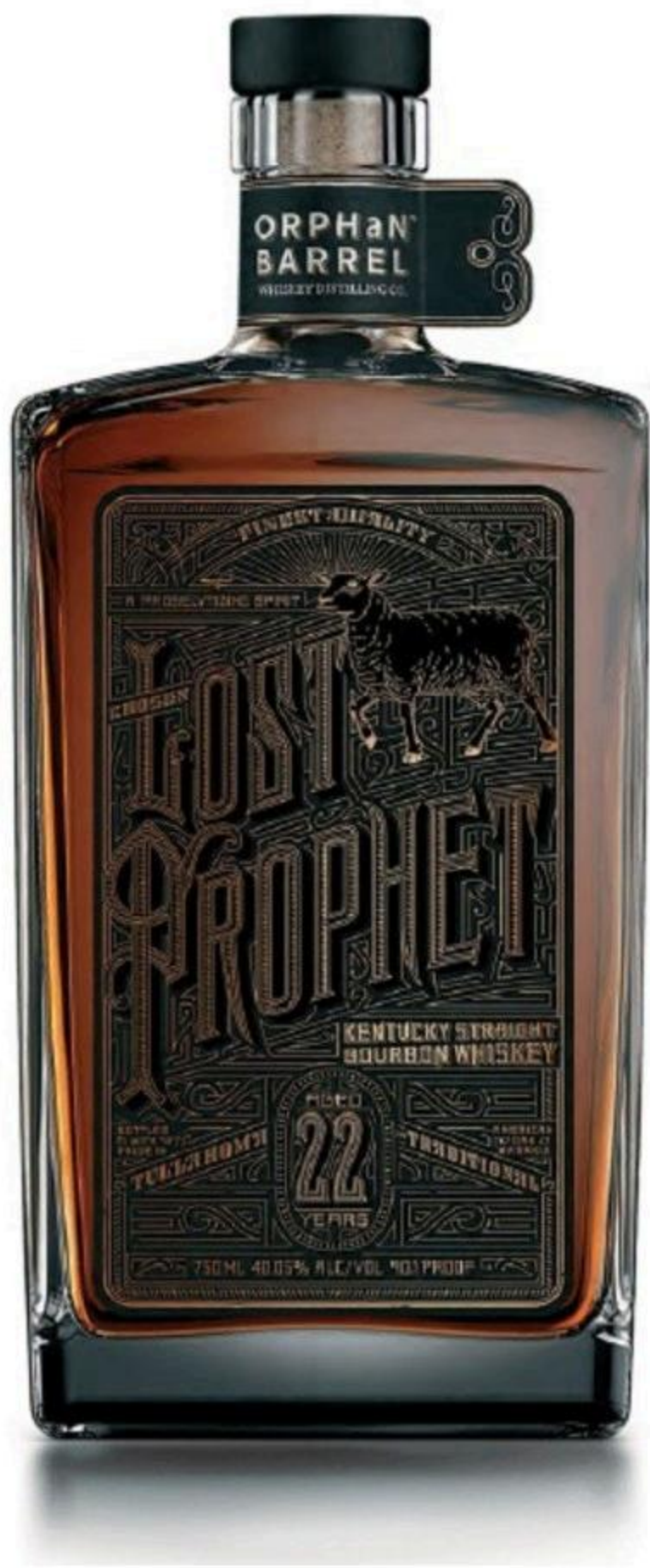


and distilleries. Stories of these lost whiskeys have become the stuff of legend. Our goal is to bottle these rare, small offerings for the world to try and for you to add to your whiskey collection. Every Orphan Barrel whiskey is hand-bottled in Tullahoma, Tennessee.”

That was the idea in theory, but the line soon became so popular that the parent company started doing large production runs to satisfy the growing demand. Provenance was another issue early on, as some whiskeys from this brand are older and rarer than others. Regardless of their rarity, a majority of them are tasty. Here’s three you should look for:

Lost Prophet Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (91 proof) sat in charred American white oak barrels that were nestled in a corner of the historic Stitzel- Weller rickhouses in Shively for 22 years. Honey, apricot, spice, and vanilla dominate this lovely whiskey.





Forged Oak Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (90.5 proof) spent 15 years in charred American white oak barrels in a Stitzel-Weller warehouse. Maple, vanilla, caramel, and cocoa melt into corn, butter, black pepper, and more caramel in this one. Truly lovely.

Barterhouse Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (90.2 proof) was a small-batch run of 20-year-old, barrel-aged bourbon. The whiskey was made at New Bernheim with a mash bill of 75% corn, 13% rye, and 12% malted barley. The result features oak, caramel, dark fruits, rich figs, and allspice, with hints of piecrust and more caramel and vanilla at the end.

THREE BOYS FARM DISTILLERY



Three Boys Farm Distillery is family-owned and operated by Ross and Heather Caldwell and their three sons. It is a small craft distillery located on a lush 122-acre farm in Graefenburg. The family moved to Kentucky in 2010, and opened their distillery that same year. The whiskeys went into production in 2013. And let me tell you, they nailed it!



Ross is a dedicated distiller with a real passion. And this is truly craft distilling. Three Boys does everything by hand, from germinating and milling their own grain to distillation, barreling, and bottling. It's all made right in the barn, making Three Boys a truly artisanal product.

Like many other distilleries, they sold unaged white whiskey and moonshine to pay the bills early on. Three Boys Farm's entry into the moonshine category is Foggy Dog Moonshine. They offer their traditional, unaged moonshine, as well as flavors such as sweet tea, apple pie, cherry pie, peach pie, and blackberry cream.

The Three Boy Kentucky Straight Bourbon is the estate-made bourbon. A big caramel bomb with cherries, butterscotch, pecans, but with sufficient snap. It is sold uncut and unfiltered. They even suggest you tip the bottle upside down to get whatever particulates are in the bottle moving around before you drink it. Hard core. But you gotta like it.

The Three Boys Kentucky Straight Rye (with a mash bill that that has risen to 90% rye from 66% previously) is an

estate high-rye rye, and as impressive a rye whiskey as there is. It's a big gingersnap of a whiskey, with lots of spice and color but a surprisingly smooth finish. A must try, if you can find it!

Whiskey Thief Bourbon Whiskey comes in two strengths: 98.6 proof and 123 proof. The 123-proof edition is a bigger, dark caramel whiskey with lots of flavor. This is a very good bourbon that makes a bold, simple statement.

Here's another simple statement: Three Boys Farm Distillery should be on your list of go-to Kentucky distilleries!





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TOWN BRANCH DISTILLERY

By Richard Thomas

Town Branch began when Alltech, the international animal feed giant started by Irish biochemist Dr. Pearse Lyons, bought the Lexington Brewing Company. Being attached to a corporate giant like Alltech helped the brewery weather the general failure of Craft Beer 1.0 in the Commonwealth, and they then became a trailblazer in bourbon barrel-aged beer with the introduction of their popular Kentucky Bourbon Barrel Ale in 2006.

As much as he liked his beer, what Dr. Lyons was really interested in was whiskey. Town Branch Distillery opened its doors and launched a line of sourced whiskey and liqueurs

in 2012, and by doing it once again became a trailblazer, because they created one of the early “brewstilleries” in America.

Initially the two operations of making beer and whiskey remained separate, cross-pollinating only in the sourced barrels of Town Branch Bourbon going over to age Kentucky Bourbon Barrel Ale. As both operations have grown, they have become more and more intertwined, sharing equipment as well as casks. The brewstillery also cross-pollinates with its parent company, Alltech, in the department of the yeasts used in fermentation, yeast being a key and often distinctive ingredient that is usually overlooked by enthusiasts. A rye whiskey was added to the line in 2014, and nowadays everything that goes into bottles of Town Branch Bourbon, Rye, and Pearse Lyons Malt is made in-house.

Another feature setting Town Branch apart from other Kentucky distilleries is their stills. They are one of two distilleries in the state using pot stills, along with Woodford Reserve. But whereas Woodford Reserve uses an Irish-style,

triple set of pot stills made (in the very Kentucky tradition) by Vendome, Town Branch follows the Scottish pattern: not only do they have two pot stills, but those stills were made in Scotland by Forsyths. It's especially ironic given that Dr. Lyons also owns an Irish distillery, and in a case of reverse expectations, that distillery uses equipment made by Vendome.

TOWN BRANCH TASTING NOTES

Town Branch Bourbon (90 proof) has a mash bill of 72% corn, 15% malted barley, and 13% rye. Hints of caramel, brown sugar, cherry, and vanilla. Very smooth.

Double Oaked Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (94 proof) is a small-batch edition of Town Branch Bourbon (same mash bill) re-casked into a second round of new charred white oak barrels. Deep brown sugar and cherry. Lovely.

Town Branch Bourbon: Sherry Cask Finished (100 proof) has a mash bill of 72% corn, 15% malted barley, and 13% rye; this is a 9-year-old Kentucky straight bourbon whiskey from the early days of Town Branch Distillery. The bourbon is finished in Spanish Oloroso sherry casks for this limited-edition release. Notes of caramel, roasted pecans with dried plums and raisins. "Finishing this in the sherry casks for nine months imparted a dry finish that complements the natural caramel and vanilla notes in the whiskey, as well as a rich burgundy color," said Mark Coffman, master distiller at Alltech Lexington Brewing & Distilling Co. "We selected nine barrels of the best bourbon in our warehouse for this expression."

Town Branch Rye (100 proof) has a mash bill of 55% rye, 30% corn, and 15% malted barley. Big, floral nose, with hints of vanilla and oak. Lovely honey and pepper finish. Very smooth.

Town Branch Malt Whiskey (87 proof) is a non-chill filtered Kentucky single-malt whiskey. A sweet cereal nose, hints of

molasses, vanilla, brown sugar, and spice. Lovely dried fruit and stone fruit at the end. Kentucky Cask Strength Single Malt Whiskey (110 proof) with a mash bill of 100% malt. This is limited-edition bottling aged in freshly decanted Oloroso Sherry Casks for 11 years. Lovely deep color, with baked apple and pears, and dark fruits and cocoa coming across the palate. Lovely finish. Very pretty. Town Branch Sundown (40 proof) is the distillery's entry in the ever-growing Kentucky Bourbon liqueur category. It is a blend of Kentucky bourbon, dark-roasted coffee, and sugar. Notes of mocha, chocolate, bourbon, and toffee. A lovely dessert liqueur.





VILLA HILLBILLIES MOONSHINE

“It’s a good-time drink for people who don’t take themselves too seriously,” said Dan Gibson, creator of Villa Hillbillies Moonshine. Gibson was getting frustrated at his job. And, apparently, he was getting on his wife’s nerves. She told him he needed a hobby. Next thing he knew, he was watching the Discovery Channel’s Moonshiners and Gibson thought he’d

give it a try. “It’s not too often your wife has a suggestion along those lines so I decided to hop to it.”

As the old saw goes, his friends tried it. And their friends tried it. And so on and so on. Until he couldn’t keep up with demand. He needed help and a bigger shop. “When I couldn’t keep up any longer, I got the gumption to take it to the masses.” In October 2015, Gibson agreed to a partnership with Second Sight Spirits in Ludlow, Kentucky. Second Sight Spirits, founded by Rick Couch and Carus Waggoner, is an artisan distillery focused on bringing the art of handcrafted distilling back to Northern Kentucky. “We just kind of backed into it,” Gibson said. “They were nice enough to bring the brand to life.” Villa Hillbillies is distilled and sold at the site. “I didn’t think it would turn into this,” said Dina Gibson, Dan’s wife.

Villa Hillbillies Original (100 proof) is handmade in small batches. Clear. Super smooth.

Villa Hillbillies Apple Pie (40 proof) is handmade in small batches with eight different spices that are steeped in spirits. The flavored spirits are then mixed with apple juice. Smooth,

flavorful.

Villa Hillbillies Fire Jack (60 proof) is a spiced moonshine.

Villa Hillbillies Honey (20 proof) is their original ‘shine flavored with honey from a local farm, which gives this one its unique color and taste.





WILD TURKEY

Wild Turkey is one of the most iconic brands in the liquor industry. It has a legion of fans, from literary mavericks to movie titans and music stars. It was journalist Hunter S. Thompson who immortalized the famous bourbon in his 1972 book *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (the bourbon was also featured in the film adaptation) and the 1973 book *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*. Stephen King also mentioned it in his book *It*. David Foster Wallace made it the favorite bourbon of the family's patriarch in his novel *Infinite Jest*. The bourbon was also featured in such movies as *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *The Cassandra Crossing*, *Rush*, *Mystic River*, *In the Heat of the Night*, *Silver Bullet*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, *Bad Lieutenant*, *Barb Wire*, *The Eiger Sanction*, *Where the Buffalo Roam*, and *The Guardian*. There was even a 1982 top-10 country single by singer Lacy J. Dalton called "Wild Turkey." Few bourbons and whiskeys have that kind of iconic brand placement.

As storied as Wild Turkey is, and for as old as the bourbon industry is, Wild Turkey is a relatively new brand. The legend of Wild Turkey is a simple one. In 1940, an executive named Thomas McCarthy brought some bourbon with him on a wild turkey hunting trip. The hunters were so delighted with the brown liquid that they started asking for "that wild turkey bourbon." McCarthy knew that their requests had a good ring to it, and his company, Austin Nichols, bottled the first batch of Wild Turkey in 1942.

The name most synonymous with Wild Turkey is master distiller James C. "Jimmy" Russell, who's been making whiskey for 60 years. Russell is the longest-tenured, active master distiller in the global spirits industry, and is the creator of brands and expressions like Rare Breed, Kentucky Spirit, and Russell's Reserve. He is in multiple distilling Halls of Fame, a Kentucky Colonel, and was honored with a special day by the Kentucky State Assembly. So great is his reputation that friends and peers call him the "Buddha of Bourbon" and "The Master Distiller's Master Distiller."

When Campari Group purchased the brand and distillery in 2009, they made a \$100 million investment in the business and built a brand-new distillery on the space where the old bottling lines were, right next to the old distillery. The new distillery opened in 2011 and new bottling lines began to operate in 2013. A beautiful new \$4 million visitor's center was opened in 2014 to showcase the bourbons.

Jimmy's son, Edward "Eddie" Freeman Russell, was named master distiller in January 2015. He has been distilling for more than 30 years and was the creator of Wild Turkey Spiced, Wild Turkey Diamond Anniversary, and, of course, the co-creator of Russell's Reserve. Eddie is the third generation of Russells to work at the distillery. According to his father, "When Eddie began working at the distillery, I made him do every job there was, even cutting the grass, so the other employees wouldn't think I was showing him favoritism. I was probably a lot harder on him than I needed to be, but it was all to help him." He's not kidding, that tough love made Eddie a Hall of Famer in his own right.

Wild Turkey is one of the top-selling whiskeys in the

world, with annual sales nearing \$2 billion. And the public isn't the only place where the distillery carries a lot of clout—writers, critics, and mixologists all love the Russell's Reserve. They are the largest single-location distiller in the region, and have 700,000 barrels stored in 28 rickhouses. Large batch bottlings of their mainline products may be comprised of liquid from as many as 1,000 barrels. Small batch bottlings will number no more than 100 barrels.

Wild Turkey basically only uses two mash bills. The bourbons such as Wild Turkey, Russell's Reserve, Kentucky Spirit, and Rare Breed all use the same recipe of 75% corn, 13% rye, and 12% malted barley. Russell's Reserve Rye and Wild Turkey Rye also share the same recipe, consisting of 51% rye, 37% corn, and 12% malted barley. Essentially, it's the aging and finishing that produce the differences between the products.



EDDIE RUSSELL, MASTER DISTILLER

By Richard Thomas

Although Eddie Russell officially took over for his father, living legend Jimmy Russell, as master distiller of Wild Turkey in January 2015, he had been serving as Jimmy's principal deputy for some time, and his fingerprints are all over the distillery's releases from the past several years. These include the bourbon-rye hybrid Forgiven, Wild Turkey Spiced, the Diamond Anniversary Bourbon released to honor his father, and at least some of the Russell's Reserve whiskeys.

Eddie's story is typical of a scion of a Kentucky bourbon dynasty. He started young doing menial jobs at the distillery, learning about everything that went on in the business step-by-step as he made his way up. After a couple of decades in lower- and mid-level jobs, he started serving as Jimmy's deputy and developing products, like the aforementioned



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Forgiven and Wild Turkey 81 Bourbon. Accomplishments like this got him inducted into the Kentucky Bourbon Hall of Fame in 2010, five years before he had even assumed the master distiller mantle.

After 60 years in the business, Jimmy is widely seen as a traditionalist, and the way I've heard him describe his idea of the sweet spot for making bourbon reflects Wild Turkey 101 very well; compared to other flagship bourbons, Wild Turkey 101 is slightly older and substantially stronger.

Eddie had already shown a penchant for going outside that flavor profile as much as he builds on it. In particular, the Diamond Anniversary Bourbon, Russell's Reserve 1998, and the original Master's Keep release are all quite old bourbons by past Wild Turkey standards. You can tell just from his whiskey that Eddie is both his father's son and very much his own man.





WILD TURKEY

Wild Turkey bourbon comes in a number of expressions, the most famous of which is affectionately known as Wild Turkey 81 in-house. Nationally, it is known as the original Wild Turkey Bourbon Whiskey (81 proof). The Wild Turkey 101 is a bit stronger than the original, at 101 proof, and is one of the brand's stars. Wild Turkey Decades Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (104 proof) is a blend of rare barrels between 10 and 20 years old. Wild Turkey Master's

Keep (86.8 proof) is a blend of 17-year-old whiskeys that combine into something smooth and impressive. Wild Turkey Rare Breed Kentucky Straight Bourbon Barrel Proof is a barrel-strength, aged bourbon, and Wild Turkey Kentucky Spirit Single Barrel 101 proof (50.5% ABV) is a barrel strength, single barrel offering. Wild Turkey's standouts, aside from the 101, are Wild Turkey Rare Breed and Master's Keep. These are both well worth their price, and the Master's Keep is one to roll out around the holidays

Wild Turkey offers only one blended whiskey, the Wild Turkey Unforgiven (91 proof). This is made in small-batch, limited editions and is a blend of high-proof, six-year-old bourbons and ryes. This whiskey is something of a rollercoaster. It starts off with notes of caramel and baked apple, hits you with a wallop of spice, and yet is able to retain a smoothness throughout.

Wild Turkey offers two ryes: Wild Turkey Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey (81 proof), which is aged in #4 char, new American white oak barrels. They also offer a 101-proof

rye, which is the better of the two—not that you can go wrong with either.



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RARE BREED

Wild Turkey released two whiskeys and a repackaging of their Rare Breed label. Rare Breed are barrel proof whiskeys, bottled uncut and unfiltered. Wild Turkey Rare Breed Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (116.8 proof) has a mash bill of 75% corn, 13% rye, and 12% barley. There's no age statement on the whiskey, but it's known to be a blend of 6-12-year-old bourbon. It has notes of sweet tobacco and hints of orange and spice. Very smooth. Wild Turkey Rare Breed Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey (102.2 proof) is a small batch blend of 4-year-old rye, uncut, unfiltered, cask strength. The nose and palate have spice, biscuits, hazelnuts, cocoa, dried dark fruit, and citrus. Caramel and baking spice with a nice, long finish. Both these whiskeys were very well received.

MASTER'S KEEP

The Master's Keep label was first introduced in 2015. Wild Turkey "Master's Keep" Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey Aged 17 Years. Then two years later they released Wild

Turkey Master's Keep Decades (104 proof) a blend of 10-20-year-old bourbons. In 2018 they released Wild Turkey Master's Keep Revival (86 proof) a blending of 12-to-15 year old barrels finished in Olorosso barrels, reviving a style Jimmy Russell worked on almost a generation previously. In 2019, they released Master's Keep Cornerstone (109 proof) a 9-year-old rye whiskey. And in 2020 the distillery released Wild Turkey Master's Keep Bottled in Bond (100 proof) a 17-year-old bottle in bond bourbon, one of the oldest "bottled-in-bond" whiskeys released in recent years

RUSSELL'S RESERVE

Jimmy and Eddie Russell co-created this line of fine, high-end, small-batch offerings from their best barrels. If that's not enough to entice you, know that this whiskey has more than 90 years of experience behind it!

Russell's Reserve is an expression of the Russells' favorite bourbons and ryes, made using the traditional house mash bills. "Every expression of Russell's Reserve—both the bourbon and rye whiskey—is matured in only the deepest

#4 or "alligator" charred American white oak barrels," according to the Russells, which ensures richness of flavor and color.

Russell's Reserve was rolled out for the very first time in 2013. The idea was to produce a high-end, single barrel, non-chill filtration bourbon and rye to compete in the collectible, high-end spirits portion of the market. With that target in mind, it had to be of the highest quality. And it is.

Russell's Reserve Single Barrel Straight Kentucky Bourbon Whiskey (110 proof) is loaded with flavor. It's a big, rich whiskey with a smooth start and a lip-smacking ending. As great as this one is, it was outdone by its older brother, the Russell's Reserve Single Barrel 10 Years Old Straight Kentucky Bourbon Whiskey (90 proof).

"This is bourbon at its best," says Jimmy Russell. "What is incredibly special about the Russell's Reserve Single Barrel is that each barrel has its own personality, but still captures the rich, creamy toffee vanilla style of Russell's Reserve. This bottling celebrates what we love about Russell's Reserve, but takes it to another level."

Russell's Reserve Single Barrel Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey and the Russell's Reserve 6 Year Old Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey are both excellent and fulfill the goal of being seriously collectible. Some people prefer the single barrel, and some prefer the six-year-old. Regardless of one's taste, they are both big, rich, smooth, creamy, spicy, incredibly complex, and imminently drinkable. Do not hesitate to purchase if given the opportunity.

WHISKEY BARON COLLECTION

The Whiskey Barons Collection was debuted by Campari America as a "Nod to the Bourbon Barons of Yore." The idea was to breathe new life into labels long forgotten, mostly those that had disappeared with Prohibition, but that had been popular in the 1800s. So far three have been released. All of the bourbons were made using Wild Turkey's bourbon mash bill (75% corn, 13% rye, 12% malted barley) in Lawrenceburg. However, it was noted, that neither Jimmy nor Eddy Russell was involved in the creation of Old Ripy or Bond & Lillard. Neither carries the Wild Turkey moniker.

Bond & Lillard Kentucky Straight bourbon Whiskey (100 proof) is a blend with an age of 7-year-old bourbon. The Bond family had been distilling in Kentucky for much of the 1800s, but the Bond & Lillard brand was born in 1869 between William E Bond and Christopher C Lillard. The original bourbon was quite successful and won the Grand Prize at the 1904 World's Fair. Caramel, coconut, vanilla, and pecans dominate. Very pretty whiskey.

Old Ripy Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (104 proof) is a blend of 8-year-old and 12-year-old Kentucky straight bourbon, non-chill filtered. The whiskey was sourced from Wild Turkey. The original brand was established in 1868. Old Ripy was created by Irish immigrant James Ripy. It was made in Lawrenceburg, Kentucky, on the current site where Wild Turkey Distillery stands today. The label was discontinued in 1950. Back then, the Ripy family was ubiquitous in Anderson County's bustling distilling community. Vanilla, toffee, and oatmeal with spice and brown sugar.

W. B. Saffell Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (107 proof) is a blend of 6-, 8-, 10-, and 12-year-old bourbons. The whiskeys were aged in #4 char barrels and is non-chill filtered. The whiskey is named for William Butler Saffell, a well-known distiller in Lawrenceburg in the mid-to-late 1800s. Saffell had been a successful executive in the whiskey business, and founded his own distillery in 1889. His whiskey was an instant success. But Prohibition silenced the brand. Vanilla, caramel, spice, dried fruit, ginger, and pepper. Lovely whiskey.



CHILL FILTRATION

According to Campari and Russell's Reserve, "Chill-filtration is a common process whereby the whiskey is chilled at temperatures below freezing and is passed through an absorption filter thus removing fatty acids and other flavor contributors such as esters and proteins. By avoiding the chill-filtration process, the whiskey is bottled with more flavor compounds and a deeper color, which is denoted by an impressive haze when ice or chilled water is added."



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WILDERNESS TRAIL DISTILLERY

By Richard Thomas

A familiar story in the micro-distilling scene is how the founders got out of the white-collar rat race to make spirits.

They often know about marketing, finance, and how to run a business, but much of the time, if they know anything about making booze, it's experience in brewing, not distilling. Folks with practical whiskey-making experience starting a craft distillery are not unknown, but certainly not the norm.

That was not the case for Wilderness Trail founders Shane Baker and Pat Heist. Baker is an engineer and Heist a micro-biologist, and together they founded a fermentation and distillation support company in 2006, Ferm Solutions. By the time they went on to start their own nano-distillery in 2013, they already had several years of fixing a wide range of other people's distilling problems under their belt.

They moved from their small rented space in Danville, a picturesque and out-of-the-way college town south of Lexington, to an outlying farm in 2014. Wilderness Trail had just installed a new still in 2016, but by 2017 they were already talking about expanding again. Content to wait for a properly matured product, they are focused on letting their sweet mash bourbon age until they are ready to make their initial release, described as a 4-year-old, single barrel,

cask strength, which they released in 2019. With business booming at Ferm Solutions, Baker and Heist can afford to wait, another point that separates them from the pack.



Wilderness Trail Distilling makes Blue Heron Vodka and Wilderness Trail Harvest Rum Handmade with Kentucky Sorghum Molasses, as well as four whiskeys.

Wilderness Trail Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey Single Barrel Bottled In Bond (100 proof) has a mash bill of mash bill is 64% corn, 24% wheat, and 12% malted barley using their own custom yeast strains. That is among the high-wheat content bourbons in Kentucky. Sporting a yellow label, this is a single barrel product and bottled in bond.

Wilderness Trail Small Batch Kentucky Straight Bourbon (100 proof) is bottled in small batches of 12 barrels each. Mash bill is the same as the single barrel. Aged in #4 char barrels, this is the workhorse of the distillery's line.

Wilderness Trail Single Barrel Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey (100-105 proof) has a mash bill of 56% rye, 33% corn, and 11% malted barley. Aged in #4 char, 53-gallon barrels, aged on the upper floors of their rickhouses for a minimum of 4 years (regular expressions are expected to be between 6 and 8 years of age in future).

Silver Label Signals Wilderness Trail 6-Year Bourbon (100

proof) is a wheated bourbon with a mash bill of 64% corn, 24% wheat, and 12% barley. This 6-year-old bourbon is only available at the visitor center.

WILLETT DISTILLERY



Willett Distillery can be found just outside Bardstown, Kentucky. The site where the distillery was founded had been the family farm before that. There are two distinct

businesses at this location. There's Willett Distilling and there is Kentucky Bourbon Distillers (KBD). The entire company is still privately held and run by the Willett family. They are makers and bottlers of bourbon and rye under their flagship name Willett as well as a slew of other labels. The whiskeys range from 2 to 27 years in age.

As you could probably guess, Willett is all about family. According to the distillery, John David Willett was born on December 26, 1841, in Nelson County. He was one-third owner and master distiller at Moore, Willett & Frenke Distillery. During his lifetime, John David was also the master distiller at four other distilleries in Kentucky. Aloysius Lambert Willett, who went by Lambert, was born September 23, 1883, in Bardstown. Lambert was in the Kentucky bourbon business from the age of 15, and served several distilleries across the commonwealth in various capacities. Aloysius Lambert Thompson Willett, who went by Thompson, was born on January 27, 1909. He was the founder of the Willett Distillery in Bardstown.

Willett Distilling used grandfather John's bourbon recipes

as a blueprint to create the whiskey that they would make into Old Bardstown. They made 30 barrels on March 17, 1937. The Willetts put their first barrel into storage in Warehouse A. By 1960, they had filled their 100,000th barrel.

Over the first 20 years or so, the distillery introduced several new labels, including Old Bardstown and Johnny Drum. However, the distillery fell on hard times, like much of the industry, and was shuttered by 1980.

In 1984, Even Kulsveen married Thompson's daughter Martha, and the couple took over the distillery's day-to-day operations. On July 1, 1984, Kulsveen bought the distillery and the property, and rebranded the business as KBD. KBD bottled and sold bourbon from the aging whiskey stocks in the Willett warehouses. Eventually, Willett began to run out of whiskey, started buying bourbon from other houses and acted more like an independent bottling company. The distillery insisted it was all from Kentucky, but did not confirm the source. It has been suggested that Heaven Hill may have been the main supplier.



In the 1990s, Kulsveen introduced a portfolio called The Small Batch Bourbon Collection, featuring such labels as Rowan's Creek, Noah's Mill, Kentucky Vintage, and Pure Kentucky. By 2005 the Kulsveen children, son Drew and daughter Britt, had joined the business. Over the intervening years their spouses would also join the family business. The first Willett estate bourbons were released in 2008, as was the estate-bottled rye and the Willett pot still bourbon.

KBD remains a very large bottling company in Kentucky and has been nicknamed "the big daddy of bourbon and rye bottling." Among the brands they bottle are Old Pogue, Michter's, and Black Maple Hill.

With the explosion of interest in bourbon, KBD reintroduced the Willett name as a brand in 2012. Today Willett/KBD produces a dizzying array of small labels.

A very extensive rebuilding and expansion have transformed Willett immensely. In 2011 the visitor center and offices were remodeled and opened. The rest of the distillery also underwent incredible upgrades. These changes allowed Willett to run its first distilling tests in

decades in January 2012.

Today, master distiller Drew Kulsveen oversees an operation that has three stills, including a column still with a doubler and a beautiful pot still. There are eight smallish warehouses on the original distillery grounds, which hold approximately 40,000 to 48,000 barrels in total.

Anywhere Drew turns in the distillery, he'll see a member of his family. His wife Janelle Kulsveen oversees the tasting room and customer experience, his sister Britt Chavanne is operations manager, and her husband, Hunter Chavanne, works sales and marketing.

In the meantime, huge landscaping projects have beautified the distillery grounds, and the company plans to have a series of exclusive, opulent country houses for vacationers to rent, so they can experience the bucolic farm as well as the rich smells of the distilling world.





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OLD BARDSTOWN BOURBON

Old Bardstown is named for a thoroughbred racehorse from the 1950s. He was a well-regarded horse in his day, but what was so fascinating about this horse was that he suffered severe ankle and hip joint problems. He was made a gelding and did not race until the age of four. However, he overcame this late start and had a successful four-year career. This “old” horse was retired at the age of eight, with lifetime earnings of \$628,752. That’s more money than 9 out of 10 of the Kentucky Derby winners of the 1950s earned in their careers. Old Bardstown died in 1972, at the age of 20.

There are three versions of bourbon available under the imprint: Old Bardstown Bottled in Bond (100 proof), Old Bardstown (90 proof), and Old Bardstown Estate Bottled (101 proof). Previously, these were all sourced whiskey, and the 90 proof with a black label was very solid stuff.

The Old Bardstown 90 proof with a beige label is now made start to finish at Willett. The mash bill is 72% corn, 13% rye, and 15% malted barley. It carries no age statement. The Bottled in Bond shares the same mash bill,



and also features estate distillate aged on-premise. While all the whiskeys are good, the best of the Old Bardstown line remains the Estate Bottled.



JOHNNY DRUM

Johnny Drum was introduced in the 1960s as a line made exclusively for a wholesaler in California. Johnny Drum comes in two different expressions including Black 4-12-

year-old (86 proof) and Private Stock (101 proof). The Johnny Drum Private Stock is a standout, and many whiskey writers lament the disappearance of the 15-year-old version.

WILLETT ESTATE

Willett Family Estate Bottled Bourbon (proof and ABV vary, but generally in the 110 proof range) was a four-year-old bourbon first released on March 17, 2016, 79 years to the day (March 17, 1937) that Thompson Willett put his first barrels of Kentucky bourbon into Rickhouse A on the Willett property. The mash bill is 72% corn, 15% malted barley, and 13% rye. This bourbon was only offered at the Willett distillery gift shop. Blended from four barrels of the Private Barrel Selection program and bottled at cask strength, this whiskey was made start to finish at Willett.

Willett Family Estate Bottled Rye (109 proof) is a 2-year-old rye, and the first rye made and aged at the Willett Distillery in decades. This whiskey was a blend of Willett high rye (mash bill 74% rye, 11% corn, 15% malted barley) and Willett low rye (mash bill 51% rye, 34% corn, 15%

malted barley). The result is a youthful but exciting rye. Very impressive, and well worth a try!



WILLETT POT STILL

Willett Pot Still Reserve (94 proof) was introduced in 2008. The sumptuous decanter-styled bottle, which actually resembles their pot still, offered a sourced, small-batch bourbon. Smooth, sweet, rich, and featuring caramel, pecan, yellow cake, and corn notes with a nice spicy finish, this is always a very popular bottle during the holidays. And it's always one of the first bottles to be finished.



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SMALL BATCH BOURBON COLLECTION

Pure Kentucky XO Straight Bourbon (107 proof) is a small-

batch, no-age-statement high-proof bourbon with limited release. To balance the higher alcohol, Willett offers a more aggressive oak profile. It is a spicy bourbon with hints of sweetness, without being too sweet. It has a nice, lingering finish, and provides great bang for the buck.

Noah's Mill Bourbon (114.3 proof) is a lovely no-age-statement whiskey that is rumored to contain all four grains, blend wheated bourbons with high rye bourbons, and use as many as four different mash bills. All that mystery can't overshadow the fact that this is one high-octane, spicy dram.

Rowan's Creek Kentucky Bourbon (101 proof) is a no-age-statement blend with a great, long-lasting finish. It stacks up well against the competition for proof, price, and flavor. This is the absolute keeper of the Small Batch Bourbon Collection, and one of Willett's most popular offerings.

Corner Creek Reserve Bourbon Whiskey (88.6 proof) is a no-age-statement sourced, lighter bourbon that features apple and pear notes and has a slightly floral nose. This is also a good value.

“Yes, I’ve had all
my shots: bourbon,
whiskey, and rye.”

—Noah (the cat) of Willett Distillery



WOODFORD RESERVE



To understand what Woodford Reserve is really all about, one must go to Scotland. In 1993, The Balvenie, one of the distilleries in the William Grant & Sons portfolio, was established as a “boutique” scotch distillery, especially when it released David Stewart’s famed Doublewood, which changed the distilling industry forever. It was the first scotch whiskey to be finished in another wood—port wood to be specific. With this release, William Grant & Sons established a showplace distillery that would be the jewel in the company’s crown.

It was not a coincidence that Brown-Forman established Woodford Reserve not long after. Brown-Forman also owned the famed Jack Daniel’s. The executives at Brown-Forman strategically positioned Woodford as The Balvenie to Jack Daniel’s Glenfiddich.

Woodford is meant to be a sophisticated bourbon. Its flavor profile highlights brandy, cognac, and fruit. More so, master distiller Chris Morris is attempting to make a bourbon that is of a high-enough caliber to dominate internationally. If I were to liken Woodford Reserve to

a famous scotch, it would be Glenmorangie. It has the same cognac, brandy, honey, and spice notes as the famed Highlands single malt, but the Woodford also has a big dose of caramel upfront. Its quotient of rye keeps it from being cloyingly sweet, making for a dryer bourbon without sacrificing its Kentucky heritage.

The distillery where Woodford Reserve stands now actually began its operational life in 1780, as the Old Oscar Pepper Distillery (which later morphed into the Labrot & Graham Distillery). The seemingly ancient buildings that house Woodford Reserve today, located near the town of Versailles in north-central Kentucky, were built in 1838, making Woodford, technically, one of the nine oldest distilleries in operation in Kentucky today.

The original distillery was founded by Elijah Pepper. He passed the operation on to his sons, who changed the name to the Oscar Pepper Distillery. In the mid-1800s, the famed Dr. James Crow worked to establish new practices and procedures that improved the bourbon making process, especially in the areas of sour mash fermentation, pot still

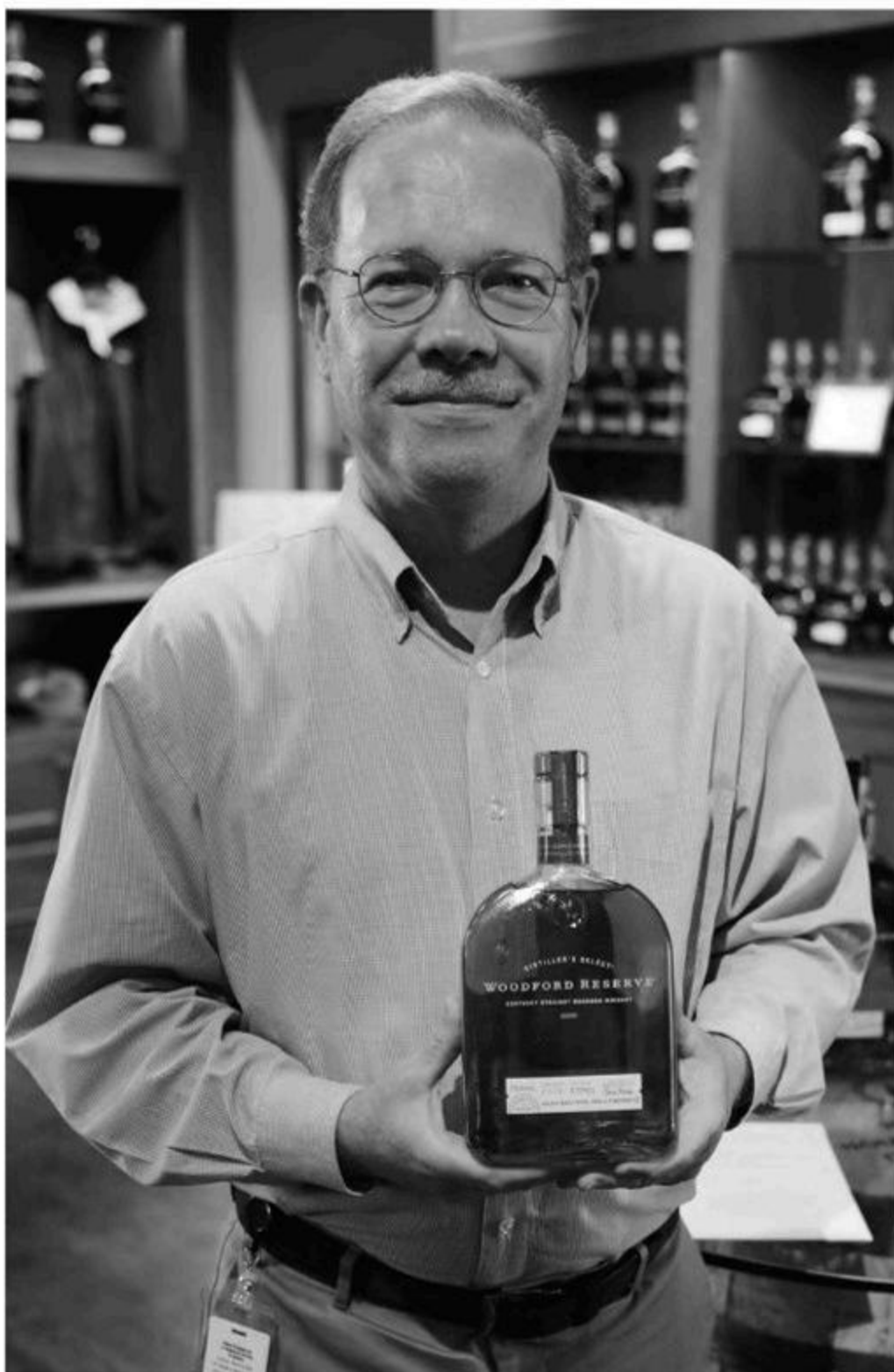
distillation, and barrel maturation. In 1878 Leopold Labrot and James Graham bought the distillery and operated it until it was purchased by Brown-Forman in 1941. Brown-Forman ceased operations in 1968 and then sold the mothballed distillery in 1971.

When Brown-Forman decided to establish Woodford Reserve as their “boutique” bourbon distillery, they repurchased this shell of an old distillery in 1993 and released its first whiskey in 1996.

According to master distiller Chris Morris, Woodford didn’t make a profit for 14 years. Luckily, money was no object, as the small distillery was transformed from a bunch of old, dilapidated buildings into one of the nation’s premiere bourbon distilleries. It was Brown-Forman’s long-range thinking that sought to establish Woodford as one of the premiere distilleries in the world, on par with the best of Scotland.

The storied Lincoln Henderson was Woodford’s first master distiller. Henderson guided the company’s first decade of production and releases before handing over the

reins over to Morris in 2003. Morris began working as a chemist for Brown-Forman in 1976, and had served as Henderson's protégé during the distillery's early years.



CHRIS MORRIS

THE GRAND MAN OF BOUTIQUE BOURBON

Chris Morris is not your normal master distiller. He has grown up in this business from the time he was in high school. It's a lifetime spent casting about bins of grain and barrels of aging Kentucky spirits.

Morris is a once-in-a-lifetime figure. He is to the Tennessee and Kentucky distilling world what David Stewart represents in Scotland. Despite his sterling reputation at home, Morris has his eyes set abroad, where he has spent considerable time. During these tours, he befriended men like Stewart and Dr. Bill Lumsden, and saw a number of things that formed his opinions, tastes, and ideas.

Morris is a fastidious man. He dresses clean and simple. He is a gracious, extremely well-mannered Southern gentleman. But do not be fooled by this calm. He is as

exacting as a scientist and demanding as a general. He walks slowly but with purpose. He always has a smile, but when his head jerks, his staff immediately starts buzzing around. There's no mistaking that Morris has high standards, and one gets the sense that behind the curtains there is hell to pay if something is out of place or not done with grace.

Morris has the staff do things the old-fashioned way. They still run the Scottish-made spirit safe by hand. And instead of using computers they keep large ledgers that look like something out of Harry Potter. This reverence for the past doesn't hold Morris in check, though—he was the first bourbon producer to finish his whiskey in chardonnay and cognac barrels.

He's been at the forefront of distilling in the United States for more than a decade. He was the first to offer bourbon pairing dinners in the region (an idea he picked up in Scotland). He started with bourbon and cheese pairings. Then dinners in 1991 and 1992. His own dinners hold such an esteemed place in his memory that Morris said, "I still have the menus."

According to Whisky magazine, "At Woodford Reserve, Chris developed the Master's Collection, Woodford Reserve Double Oaked, Rye and Distillery Series products, and in 2015 he was given the additional responsibility of Vice President of Whiskey Innovation for Brown-Forman. As a student of the industry, Chris authored the Society of Wine Educator's Certified Spirits Specialist program, introduced the use of taste notes for Bourbon in 1992 and developed the Bourbon Flavor Wheel in 2004."

And when the craft distilling wave began to rise it was Morris who hosted the fledgling industry at Woodford Reserve. He conveyed tons of information to these would-be distillers, and allowed for a trading of information amongst the participants.

Another feather in Morris's cap is serving as the mentor to Marianne Barnes, who was named the first female master distiller in Kentucky history, over at Castle & Key. For years she worked for Morris at Brown-Forman and Woodford Reserve, eventually rising to the position of master taster.



Of all the bourbon distillers in the region, Woodford was ahead of the curve when it came to bottling their own rye. Was Morris clairvoyant? Not really. They decided they would reach for 10% of the overall rye market at a time when the boom hadn't quite started yet. That goal was 9,000 cases. They are now doing 30,000 cases and still only hold 9-10% of the rye marketplace.

Morris insists that to achieve their unique flavor, all Woodford barrels are first toasted like wine barrels before they are charred, in order to find more of those stone fruit and cognac notes. He also intimates that the Master's Collection will continue to expand and roll out new ideas. The master still has a few tricks up his sleeve, and he smiles when asked about future expressions. He mentions chardonnay, pinot noir, four oak, and maple wood expressions that are in the works.

When asked what the toughest part of his job is, he answered quietly, but with a smile, "Patience." He hates waiting for new products to develop. And he is bullish on pot stills, insisting, like an old Scotsman, that they produce

richer, more flavorful whiskey. When asked what else, his nose wrinkles, and his brow furrows. He's delicate on this point, but it's a personal rankle. Morris insists that there needs to be an estate bottled equivalent in the bourbon industry.

Obviously, Morris is among the most accomplished of men making whiskey in the United States. And if you're wondering what this giant likes to drink, it's bourbon. In the winter he likes the bigger, older expressions, sometimes neat, sometimes with some ice. In the summer, he prefers mixed cocktails.

