



**While American bourbon and whiskey drinkers raise their standards, bourbon producers raise the stakes with an upwardly mobile approach in all areas.**

In some circles, bourbon enjoys a great deal of prestige. Its role in American history has given rise to the American Whiskey Trail, with Kentucky and Tennessee distilleries designated as landmarks by the National Register of Historic Places. American bourbon barrels are used by distillers worldwide for the aging of other spirits. Closer to home, foodies and sports fans agree the All-American game time barbeque and sports bar fare would not be complete without a good bourbon-based marinade.

# BOURBON: BOTTLING THE SPIRIT OF AMERICA

WRITTEN BY: ELYSE GLICKMAN

Even with those distinctions, however, distillers are rethinking their image as the 21st century progresses. Though younger consumers a few years ago did not want to drink what their dads drank, the vintage cocktail movement, introduced by top mixologists nationwide, is shifting that paradigm. Also in a state of flux is the old perception of whiskey being a working man's spirit, especially as higher-end bourbons gain prominence.

Although most bourbon distilleries have always offered higher-end pours, and a glowing 1980 review of Maker's Mark in *The Wall Street Journal* suggested bourbon could share the same respect as Scotch and Irish whiskeys, connoisseurs still have plenty to learn about bourbon's evolution into the 21st century.

However, as spokespeople from Maker's Mark, Heaven Hill, and Jim Beam see it, riding this learning curve can be a lot of fun and potentially profitable, especially among bartenders and beverage buyers setting the trends.

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**(The evolution of bourbon) is a great story to tell and brings people in, especially because it is a story about hand-crafted products with interesting origins,” continues Kass. “Bartenders differentiate one whiskey from the next by explaining the way each master distiller approaches craftsmanship of an individual bourbon with his own techniques, recipes, history, yeast used, mash composition, mash builds, and the like.”**

## Points on the curve

This curve has wound its way around the country, resulting in bourbon emerging as one of America's best-selling spirits in major markets like New York City and Los Angeles. Propelling this trend is the advent of specialized bourbon bars in L.A., New York, San Francisco, and Atlanta that focus on artisanal cocktails and tasting flights in a luxurious setting.

Larry Kass, Heaven Hill Distillery's Director of Corporate Communications, points out the growth in bourbon's popularity has been organic and strong, anchored by discerning consumers who seek out products with artisanal pedigrees and meaningful connections to American history. “You've got a situation where bourbon is experiencing its own version of the artisanal Slow Food movement, coupled with a demand for quality-crafted cocktails,” he observes. Kass also tracks trends for the distillery, which puts out several boutique bourbons including Rittenhaus and Parker's Heritage Collection 27 Year-Old, the first American brown spirit to win gold at the San Francisco Spirits Competition. Kass believes that mixing bourbon's historic appeal with the craftsmanship involved in distilling, along with inventive new uses for the spirit, will win over a new generation of fans.



Kass further explains that because consumers are interested in both the process and the providence behind different bourbons, the idea of doing comparative tastings and flights is now extremely popular. To take full advantage of this new phenomenon, he says a bartender or host needs to devise ways to make bourbons and American whiskies understandable to both experienced and novice drinkers.

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**In general, bourbon and American whiskey can be a daunting subject for both trade and consumers because various regulations laid out by the government can be confusing, even for many people working in the spirits trade,” he says. “However, (flights) present an opportunity to demystify the category and put consumers on the discovery process for the segment. On the Whiskey Trail, for example, those moving from Heaven Hill to Jim Beam, Maker’s Mark, Woodford Reserve, Wild Turkey, and others will realize each distiller does things very differently, based on the way a given master distiller handles the yeast, the proprietary mash build-up formulas, and so forth.””**

Kass suggests setting up different flights for different audiences—one for the aficionados who know their bourbons, and another for those still learning. When doing a tasting for less-experienced drinkers, have them write down their impressions of flavor, color, and other sensory details. Chances are, consumers will keep going back and forth to different pours and their notes, which will help them compare and contrast when the bartender moves forward to the next pour.

# JUICY BASIL HAYDEN

## JUICY BASIL HAYDEN

BY STEVE COLE, BEAM GLOBAL

1 ¼ oz Basil Hayden’s® Bourbon

½ oz DeKuyper® Triple Sec

Splash of Orange Juice

Splash of Cranberry Juice

Splash of Simple Syrup

Combine all ingredients in a mixing tin with ice. Shake well. Strain into a rocks glass with ice.



Bernie Lubbers

## What's In A Name

While on-site, Jim Beam “Whiskey Professor” and brand ambassador Bernie Lubbers uses his prowess as a former stand-up comedian to tell the two-century old story of bourbon and the general distillation process to consumers visiting the Beam distillery. These skills, along with his own family’s background as veteran distillery professionals, also prove useful when enlightening bartenders and beverage buyers for hotels and restaurants about the intricacies of Beam’s prolific portfolio.

“I am surprised at the sheer number of professional bartenders who don’t know the differences between American whiskeys and bourbons,” states Lubbers. “Though there is a perception the American bourbon trail’s story has been told over and over again, I believe a refresher course (for professionals) can be a very good thing. Consider, for example, that different bourbons in our portfolio such as Booker’s, Knob Creek, and Baker’s play different roles in the overall story about how bourbon evolved from a humble grain spirit, to America’s spirit, to a full-blown category that goes all the way up to small batch and ultra premium products.”

**Rather than dwelling on how to distill bourbon with both professionals and consumers visiting the distillery, Lubbers tells the story through the subtleties appearing on the spirits’ labels and bottle shapes—a trick taught to him by a master distiller when he transitioned from the comedy club stage to the American Whiskey Trail.**

“Bottle shapes define the personality of the brand,” says Lubbers. “Prior to (the government’s) first consumer production legislation and the Bottling Act (1935), tavern owners got the whiskey in barrels and would dispense the spirit in whatever bottles were around. Today, many small batch brands are bottled in vessels reminiscent of the shapes of old apothecary and medicine bottles, to evoke bourbon’s history and character. Labels might be based on historic practices as well. For example, Knob Creek’s labeling is based on the fact that many farmers had labeling machines at home and would take a piece of newsprint and print on it with a piece of charcoal.”



# AMERICAN WHISKIES

# BOURBON

Lubbers adds that there are other important points of differentiation between American whiskies and bourbons. A good bartender needs to be aware, for example, that whiskey can be made from any grain from anywhere around the world, but bourbon can't just be produced from any old grain or mix of grains. Bourbon has to be a specific percentage of corn, distilled at a lower proof, stored in a new charred oak barrel, and so on.

"There are laws that make bourbon 'bourbon,' like DOC and DOCG for Italian wines, and only calling spirits made in Cognac, France 'Cognac,' and so on," continues Lubbers. "What I do, particularly for the trade, is break down different labels to their elements, and point out that elements mean specific things on their own and mean specific things when they are combined with other elements. In the term 'bourbon whiskey,' each word means something separately and something else when they are put together."

## The Boutique-ization of Bourbon

Lubbers credits the success of Beam Global's whiskey portfolio to the diversification with its boutique labels, each with its own historic cachet, charismatic distiller figure, and product personality. For example, in 1984 distiller Elmer Lee launched Blanton's, a single-barrel bourbon aged in one of the most optimum places in the rack house (where bourbons are stored for aging). In 1992, distiller Booker Noe made his artistic statement by taking several barrels, aging them in different prime spots in the rack house, and later blending them to create the small batch bourbon Booker's.

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**When new subcategories of bourbons surfaced, that's when we saw more consumer interest in bourbons," says Lubbers. "Each label has distinctive flavors and identities based on distilling styles, proofs, recipe, aging technique, and bottles. When you taste different**

**bourbons in the portfolio, you're not trying Jim Beam at different ages and proofs, you're trying totally different bourbons.”**

Fred Noe and Bernie Lubbers



Although Lubbers could go on for hours explaining how each bourbon and whiskey in the Beam family has contributed to the category's changing cachet, he (as well as reps from other distilleries) will credit Maker's Mark for revitalizing the category using the luxury angle, with such touches as the signature wax and its notoriety in *The Wall Street Journal* back in the early 1980s. Unlike other distilleries, Maker's Mark made its mark as a premiere boutique bourbon by focusing on one primary product. Company president Bill Samuels, Jr. and master distiller Kevin Smith steadfastly maintain that the distillery's primary goal is to retain focus on the craft that goes into creating Maker's Mark.

Bill Samuels, Jr. with  
Master Distiller Kevin  
Smith of Maker's Mark



**Maker's Mark has held onto that cachet for over three decades. A living testament to this sits like a trophy in Kevin Smith's office—a gold-dipped bottle that was part of a VIP tour of the distillery offered for \$7,500 in 2009 by Neiman Marcus' world famous Christmas catalogue. Smith points out with a mix of pride and surprise that seven couples splurged on this package, which included a thorough tour, the dipping, and accommodations at a boutique hotel. "People really value Maker's Mark as their whiskey," muses Smith as he inspects the bottle.**

"We take pride in the fact that we have shepherded the premium bourbon category into existence," affirms Samuels. "We also managed to midwife the bourbon trail back in the early '70s by becoming the first distillery to have a visitor program. Additionally, we went around to the other distilleries to figure out how we could work together and cooperate. However, when it comes to the visits, our guests come specifically to see how their bourbon is made."



# GOLD-DIPPED-BOTTLE

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Although Samuels prefers his bourbon in simple, classic recipes, he and Smith acknowledge that the advent of the mixology movement has helped expand Maker's Mark's growth and popularity in recent years. "Bars have moved to the front of the restaurant, emphasizing the show-time element of cocktail-making, which has had a wonderful impact on us." Samuels notes that 30% of Maker's Mark customers are now professional women in bigger cities. And although many consumers will stick with traditional cocktails such as the Old Fashioned and the Manhattan, Samuels believes mixologists are opening their customers' minds to new ways to appreciate bourbon.

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**While I don't see a huge change in what consumers are ordering at the present time, the fact is the Old Fashioned and the Manhattan are both great foundations for cocktails developed in this modern era of sophisticated cocktail-making," says Samuels. Smith adds, "I just got back from London, and instead of finding pubs that only served beer and poured straight shots, I found many of the bartenders over there were well-versed in all kinds of cocktail recipes, as well as the Maker's Mark name and product."**

# THE HORSE'S NECK

## THE HORSE'S NECK, OR THE WHISKEY PROFESSOR

BY "WHISKEY PROFESSOR"  
BERNIE LUBBERS, BEAM GLOBAL

1½ oz shot Jim Beam Black Label 86 Proof Bourbon  
High-end Ginger Ale  
2-3 Drops Aromatic Bitters  
Ice  
Lemon Spiral Garnish

Combine all ingredients in a mixing tin with ice. Shake well. Strain into a rocks glass with ice.



While Maker's Mark has prided itself on its distinction of being a focused, one-product company, it also understands there are merits to creating a new product extension that will shake things up at bars and retailers. Enter Maker's Mark 46, which made its debut this past July. The new extension began as a playful joke between Samuels and Smith, with Samuels musing his legacy would only extend to one bourbon. However, the result (sweet, toasty caramel and vanilla, with a lingering spicy finish but little heat on the back palate) ended up being a success, as it made a positive impact as an extension without compromising the original Maker's Mark.



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“This expression of Maker’s is slightly higher in proof and gentler on the palate, thanks to a twist on aging devised by myself and ‘wood chef’ Brad Boswell, whose company has been crafting barrels (and distinctive bourbon flavors) for four generations,” details Smith. “Boswell created a ‘recipe’ for us using French White Oak and a searing technique that heightens original Maker’s Mark’s vanilla and caramel nuances. The process is completed by positioning ten of these planks into Maker’s Mark barrels so the aging spirit can flow freely and gain its unique flavor over two to three months.”

“It was ultimately our intention to create something our customers would like,” adds Samuels. “We were not setting out to create something better than Maker’s Mark but something they would like just as much that was just a little bit different. We wanted to try to create something that expanded the state of the bourbon art but also stayed true to the DNA of Maker’s Mark.”

**When Samuels assesses the early success of Maker’s Mark 46, he also sums up the current state of the bourbon category’s evolution. “When something surprises people, they talk about it and then encourage others to try it,” he says. “We’ve heard the script between people millions of times— ‘I know you don’t drink bourbon, but try this.’ Our strategy is to not get into the middle of that conversation, but to allow the conversation to play out among the consumers.”**

As the conversation evolves, in turn, buyers, bartenders and other tastemakers will play a role in keeping the discussion interesting.



## KENTUCKY LEMONADE

BY FRED NOE, NEXT GENERATION OF BEAM FAMILY DISTILLERS

One 6 oz can of Frozen Lemonade

(\*use the empty can to measure other ingredients)

6 oz Jim Beam Black

6 oz Orange Juice

12 oz of water

Combine the ingredients in a pitcher or bowl, and stir.

Serve each cocktail in a tall glass over ice

# KENTUCKY LEMONADE

