



The Spirit Of America Taking The World By Storm

Bourbons are on fire here and abroad. America's finest master distillers are releasing the epitome of their crafts. They've cracked open hand-selected barrels and bottled their best. As it turns out, their best is world class.

The chant "Buy American" can now be heard in bars around the globe. It's vivacious, satiny character and assertive bouquet are universally appealing, yet bourbons by nature are understated, preferring to saunter through life without pretense or conceit. Even as they ascend toward stardom, bourbons remain accessible to all palates and priced for all budgets.

Today there are roughly 50 brands of bourbons that merit a shot at making your squad. Like stocking single malt Scotches, however, you'll likely need a plan on what to carry, otherwise your backbar may start to buckle under the weight. The objective is to offer both neophytes and aficionados a balanced selection of bourbons, one that features tried and true performers, along with a few surprises.

Don't let yourself get caught up in ratings, awards or marketing budgets. Bourbons are fun and choosing the brands to feature at your bar should be an adventure. To give the process a push, the following are 20 brands certain to make anyone's short list. Bottoms up!

- **A. H. Hirsch 16 Year-Old Pot Still Bourbon** — Made at the now defunct Michter's Distillery in Shaefferstown, PA, this incomparable whiskey is the only bourbon available produced in a pot still. Act soon, only an extremely limited stock remains of this extraordinary bourbon. After 2 decades in oak, *A. H. Hirsch 20-Year-Old Pot Still Bourbon* is an American opus. The bourbon has a sultry, alluring bouquet, an expansive body, a luscious array of flavors and a warm, soothing finish.
- **Blanton's Single Barrel Bourbon** — Rich, smooth and full of nuances. Blanton's is like a well-aged cognac, possessing layers of flavor and a broad, round bouquet. This pioneer whiskey is a "can't miss" proposition.

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- **Booker's** — This impeccable handmade bourbon is drawn straight from oak barrels and bottled in its natural state without being filtered or cut with water. It is aged for 6- to 8-years and marketed at barrel proof, which varies between 121 and 126-proof. A paramount bourbon experience.
- **Buffalo Trace Bourbon** — Produced by the Buffalo Trace Distillery (formerly known as Ancient Age), the whiskey is a muscular, thoroughly satisfying Kentucky straight bourbon. Its mash bill contains Kentucky and Indiana corn, select rye and malted barley. Our sample of Buffalo Trace possesses every characteristic a great bourbon should. It has an enticing bouquet and a huge, mouth-filling palate loaded with tantalizing flavors.
- **Distiller's Masterpiece** — In every sense of the word, this a unique distilled spirit. After resting in oak casks for nearly a generation, the Jim Beam's Booker bourbon is finished in barrels previously used to age A. de Fussigny Cognac. The limited edition, 18-year old whiskey features an immense bouquet and a sensational palate. The influence of the cognac is most clearly revealed in the whiskey's finish.
- **Elijah Craig 18 Year-Old Single Barrel** — Despite spending the better part of 2 decades in oak, this single barrel bourbon has a fairly light bouquet and a well-rounded body. It's a carefully layered mosaic of flavors; including toffee, vanilla, and charred wood. Like all classic bourbon experiences, it finishes long and warm.
- **Evan Williams 1991 Single Barrel Bourbon** — This tremendous vintage-dated whiskey may be the best value of any whiskey, anywhere. The bourbon has a celebrated bouquet, layers of tantalizing flavors and a remarkably long and satisfying finish. Take a sip and you'll see why whiskey enthusiasts have snapped up the previous 5 vintages.
- **Jack Daniel's Single Barrel** — The fact that Jack Daniel's is not a bourbon — rather a Tennessee whiskey — does little to change that *Jack Daniel's Single Barrel* is a requisite selection. It is hand-bottled one barrel at a time from select whiskeys that display the deep copper color, the alluring bouquet and the rich, distinctive flavor that has made Jack Daniel's so immensely popular. *Gentleman Jack* is made from a recipe created by Jack Daniel himself at the turn of the century. It is an elegant whiskey with a distinctive sweet flavor and generous bouquet.
- **Jefferson's Reserve** — A handmade bourbon, aged in heavily charred oak barrels for 15-years. The whiskey has a medium/full body with a dry, robust palate, one that envelops the mouth with the flavors of corn, caramel, toffee and oak. Also made by the McLain & Kyne Distillery, *Sam Houston Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whisky* is distilled from a blend of corn, rye and barley, and is aged for 10 years in new white oak barrels. The bourbon is a spirited whiskey with a supple, rounded body and a complex, full-flavored palate.
- **Jim Beam Black** — Loaded with character and personality, this appealing bourbon has a well-rounded body and a complex of rich, exquisite flavors. *Jim Beam Black* is aged 8-years, the additional aging renders it exceptionally smooth and mellow.
- **Knob Creek** — Small batch *Knob Creek* is a sublime whiskey with an abundant bouquet, a flawless texture and a palate of sweet, chewy flavors. It is aged for a minimum of 9-years in new white oak barrels that are seared to create a deep layer of charred, caramelized wood. Also by Jim Beam is small batch *Baker's Bourbon*, a savory, 7-year old, 107-proof whiskey. Beam uses a family strain of jug yeast during fermentation that helps produce a full, balanced flavor that softens and matures in wood.
- **Maker's Mark** — Arguably among the most recognizable whiskeys in the world, *Maker's Mark* is skillfully crafted in small batches creating a superbly balanced, flawlessly textured whiskey. It is among only a handful of bourbons that is made with wheat instead of other cereal grains.
- **Old Fitzgerald Very Special** — This 12-year old issue of *Old Fitzgerald* is exquisitely balanced, with a fruity bouquet, a huge body and a dazzling array of fresh fruit flavors.

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- **Old Rip Van Winkle 15 Year-Old** — This prized bourbon is endowed with character, elegance and breeding. Bottled at 107-proof, *Old Rip Van Winkle* has a spirited bouquet and a complex palate of rich earthy flavors. The whiskey's long, silky finish belies its elevated alcohol content. *Pappy Van Winkle's Family Reserve* is a handcrafted gem aged for 20-years. It has a fruity bouquet, a huge, elegant body with a sophisticated palate.
 - **Sazerac 18-Year Old Straight Rye Whiskey** — A magnificent rye whiskey made with some wheat in the mash bill to spice things up. It has a compelling bouquet of vanilla, cinnamon, pepper and almonds, a muscular, well-textured body and an unsurpassed palate of sweet dates, spice and currants. The long lasting finish is dry, warm, oaky and relaxed.
 - **W. L. Weller Kentucky Straight Bourbon** — Renown for using wheat instead of rye in its composition, this 19-year old bourbon is exuberant and highly aromatic. Its sweet palate is stuffed full of fruity and oaky flavors.
- The finish is big and robust. *Weller Antique 107 Proof* is the brand preferred by those who began sipping bourbon decades before it became chic to do so. It is aged for 7 years and has a honey-laced nose, a big, round body and a crisp, spicy flavor.
- **Wild Turkey Kentucky Spirit** — This monumental bourbon has a seductive bouquet and a seemingly countless layers of rich, savory flavors that completely fill the mouth. It offers a tremendous finish, long, lush and unforgettable. Limited-release *Wild Turkey Rare Breed* is bottled undiluted, unfiltered and at barrel-proof, which ranges from 109.6- to-112 proof. It has an enticing, heady bouquet, a full, robust flavor and a fabulously smooth finish.
 - **Wild Turkey Russell Reserve** — This is an exceptionally delicious, small batch bourbon aged for 10-years and bottled at the distillery's trademark 101-proof. The whiskey is delightfully complex with a bouquet of vanilla and oak, a luxuriously soft, round body and a palate loaded with the rich flavors of vanilla, caramel and toffee.

Robert Plotkin is a judge at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition and the author of numerous books including the 5th edition of *The Bartender's Companion: The Original Guide to American Cocktails and Drinks*. To read more from Robert (and other members of BarMedia) visit his blog, BarMedia.com/blog. You can reach him at BarMedia— 1-800-421-7179 or robert@barmedia.com.

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