

Bull's-eye Bourbons

Take a shot of these American icons at your local saloon

Whiskey is as much a part of the Old West as the OK Corral, Carson City and Billy the Kid. And while all bourbons are whiskey, not all whiskeys are bourbon – the same way that all actors ain't Clint Eastwood. A bourbon must be made from at least 51 percent corn, aged for a minimum of two years in new, charred white oak barrels and has to be produced in the good ol' U-S-of-A.

We've rated these 750 mL bottles on a 10-point scale and although these selections will cost you more than a couple of bits, they're well worth it. Drink them straight or – in case the higher proofs make your hairs stand on end – add a splash of water to “open them up.” Many of the distilling secrets were passed down through generations – so any way you try them, you'll literally be drinking in some American history.

SELECTIONS BY **EVANGELOS MIHELIS & HARRIS SIEGEL** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **FRANK GALIPO**

Booker's True Barrel
An uncut, unfiltered, straight-from-the-barrel bourbon with a bite. Hints of oak offset the intense flavor of this 6-to-8-year-aged small-batch bourbon. Adding a little water will open it up, but it'll remain a high-octane offering.
Price: \$55
Rating: 8.3

Distillers Masterpiece 20-year-old Port Finished
Booker Noe (the grandson of Jim Beam and creator of Booker's True Barrel) combined forces with award-winning wine maker Daryl Groom to create this special edition “wine-drinker's bourbon.” By blending two distinct spirits, they crafted a complex masterpiece. If money is not a factor, this is a must for your bar – that is if you can still locate a bottle to purchase.
Price: \$200
Rating: 9

A.H. Hirsch Reserve 16
The now-defunct Michter's distillery in Schaefferstown, Pa., was producing whiskey before Kentucky was even settled. Although the distillery closed its doors in 1988, the 16-year bottling is its legacy and the unobtainable 20-year is the stuff legends are made of. An alluring oaky nose and a rich toffee and vanilla taste make this a truly captivating spirit.
Price: \$70
Rating: 9.4

Blanton's Original Single Barrel
In 1984, Blanton's began bottling from one barrel, becoming the first single barrel bourbon. Its unique packaging with horse-and-rider stopper is rivaled only by the pumpkin-pie flavor of the amber inside.
Price: \$50
Rating: 8.6

Eagle Rare 17 Single Barrel
Complex doesn't begin to describe this member of the Buffalo Trace antique collection. This liquid copper has a fragrant wine-like aroma that gives way to an orange palate before a long, dry spicy finish. Although the contents are 90-proof, the silky texture makes a splash of water unnecessary. A perfect accompaniment to a mild Montecristo.
Price: \$50
Rating: 9.6

George T. Stag 2005 Fall release
The 2003 release was nicknamed “hazmat” for its flammable contents and this limited-edition – unexpectedly smooth – 141.2-proof release, likewise, is not for the faint of heart.
Price: \$50
Rating: 8.8

Elmer T. Lee
Well-balanced and dry with a spiciness not rivaled by many of its higher-priced brethren. A nose of malt and mint with hints of cinnamon and nutmeg flirt with your palate. The clean, dry finish makes a second helping mandatory and the price makes it even more irresistible. Would you expect anything less from the namesake of Buffalo Trace's master distiller emeritus?
Price: \$25
Rating: 8.4

Pappy Van Winkle's Family Reserve 20
At 20 years old, this wheat recipe bourbon may be the senior citizen, but it is an elixir full of youthful vigor. A dried fruit nose gives way to a vanilla/maple syrup palate before an elegant finish.
Price: \$80
Rating: 9.8

Wild Turkey Tribute
Created to honor Jimmy Russell and his 50 years as a master distiller, this small batch, full-bodied 15-year-old is hearty like mashed potatoes with gravy on Thanksgiving. If you're lucky enough to find one of the remaining 5,500 bottles, grab it – it's worth the price to see what Wild Turkey is capable of crafting.
Price: \$100
Rating: 9.2

Baker's 107
After the nuts, fruits and caramel leave your palate, the heat from this 107-proof firewater will set in. Named for Jim Beam's grand nephew, this 7-year-old is best with ice or a splash of H₂O.
Price: \$40
Rating: 8.2

