

American as **Apple Pie**

By Kevin Fritz

Bourbon continues to be a favorite for whiskey enthusiasts, new players and recipes serving up some distinct tastes.

Buying American can be a tough rule to follow at times, but not when it comes to good, old bourbon. It's as American as it gets. Much of today's bourbon is still produced where it all began in an area of Kentucky called Bourbon County in the 1800s.

"It's all about being American," says aficionado **Tom Fischer**, one of the nation's foremost experts on the American spirit and creator of BourbonBlog.com. "There's a certain heritage that speaks to people."

Made from a fermented mash of grains like its brethren Tennessee, Scotch, Irish and Canadian whiskeys, bourbon distillers can also be found from New York to Colorado.

To be considered bourbon, it must contain at least 51 percent corn and aged in new, oak-charred barrels. Many trade agreements require the name bourbon only be used for spirits made in America. To be labeled "straight bourbon," the mixture needs to be aged for at least two years and not contain any coloring, flavoring, or

other spirits. While all bourbon is whiskey, not all whiskey is bourbon.

With some coaching from Fischer, I sat down with some friends who also have a taste for bourbon to sample some of the top selections on the market. We tried to stick to bourbons that can be found in stores and bars, although some may be a challenge to locate. There are also bourbons from micro-distilleries that are even harder to find, but worth the effort.

Makers 46. Maker's Mark's first new offering in 52 years, it is aged inside barrels with seared French Oak staves. Sweet aromas of maple and vanilla welcome the nose, followed by a taste of cinnamon and caramel. It's a spicy, complex bourbon that leaves a refreshing finish.

Devil's Cut. This selection from Jim Beam uses a unique process of extracting bourbon from the wood of used barrels and adding it to a 6-year-old barrel of bourbon. It's one of our favorites: smooth, buttery, vanilla aftertaste, especially evident when adding water or ice. We noticed hints of pineapple, coconut, and cinnamon, and although 90 proof, it feels much smoother.

Woodford Reserve. A local favorite in Louisville, as it's the official bourbon of the Kentucky Derby. A strong, woody nose gives way to a distinct flavor, emulating sweet corn. A good choice for beginners and connoisseurs. We found the finish dry and nutty.

Old Scout. Distributed by Smooth Ambler in West Virginia, but actually distilled in Indiana, this 99 proof offering has a sweet and mellow taste. Bottles are hand-dated, and its complexity offers hints of brown sugar, cinnamon, caramel and vanilla in the nose and palate, making this a crowd favorite.

Hudson. A New York entry, its Baby Bourbon and Four Grain Bourbon selections are all hand numbered. Hudson Four Grain Bourbon consists of corn, rye, wheat and malted barley, a balance that has a sweet, red-hot candy nose, and a peppery, sweet corn taste.

Overall, bourbon is a very approachable whiskey and also has a fair price point: All bottles reviewed can be found for \$25-\$42. **L**

