

Garrison Brothers: Real Texas Bourbon

The Texas Hill Country is known for satisfying many tastes—for wine, fine art, gourmet food, original music, and unexpected scenery. Add to that list Real Texas Bourbon.



Garrison Brothers Distillery is located at the town whose name is a greeting—Hye—between Stonewall and Johnson City just off the 290 wine trail.

Dan Garrison started Texas' first “legal” whiskey distillery in 2008. Making bourbon is a pretty simple process. After all, people have been doing it for centuries. But he wanted Garrison Brothers Texas Straight Bourbon Whiskey to be “the best bourbon ever made.”



To do that he decided to make it by hand. Well, 18 hands. Currently nine full time

employees take the product “from corn to cork.” Visitors can see the process on the distillery’s daily tours. Who can resist a trip that starts with a wagon ride and ends with a shot of bourbon?

To be called “whiskey” a liquor has to be made from grain. At Garrison Brothers, they use organic red winter wheat, corn, and rye, ground fresh daily. Bourbon has the highest standards of all distilled spirits. It can’t be called “bourbon” unless it follows the ABCs:

A is for America.

Bourbon has to be American made, as voted by Congress in 1964.

B is for Barrels.

The bourbon must age in barrels crafted of new wood, white oak from Missouri, dried for two years, made into barrels, then charred inside for exactly 53 seconds.

C is for Corn.

No matter what types of grain are used, at least 51% must be corn.

There is another important letter—G for Genuine. Bourbon must be 100% whiskey. That means no flavorings or additives. They can’t even add color. The coloring comes from being inside the barrel for six years.

Garrison Brothers recipe calls for 74% corn—higher than the 70% used by most bourbons. The rest is soft red winter wheat and malted barley.

That becomes the mash. This is the point where distillers extract the starches from the grain and convert them into sugar. The grain and yeast go into two 500-gallon cookers, where it is mixed with 300 gallons of good Hill Country limestone infused well water, and heated to the ideal temperature for the yeast to work. Yeast, you may remember from 8th grade chemistry class, converts the sugar into two by-products: alcohol—good, and carbon dioxide—bad.

The brew cooks for about eight hours, then ferments for five days. From here it is piped into the huge copper kettles for distilling. Anyone who has watched reruns of M*A*S*H knows how this works. The mixture is heated to the temperature that alcohol evaporates (lower than water). The steam is collected and passed through copper tubes where it is chilled by a water bath and converted back into liquid. And out comes a fiery liquid that is no longer mash yet not quite bourbon. They call it “white dog” because it has both a bark and a bite. It is so fierce they dole out samples in thimble size cups, and that is ample.

This stuff is about 70% alcohol and tastes like it. The white dog is mixed with rainwater to cut it to 94 proof, then put in barrels. The barrel will impart its color and flavors to the final product.

After six years comes the magic day that bourbon lovers across the state eagerly await—bottling time.



Eager volunteers come into help out, filling bottles, pigtailg with a deerskin lace, dipping in wax, stamping with a Lone Star, and hand signing every bottle.

It’s a party with lots of “quality control.”

The tour ends with a lesson on the proper way to drink such a fine product as Garrison Brothers Bourbon. It is a three-step process:

1) Nosing

Do NOT shove your nose inside the glass as with wine, unless you want to singe your sinuses. You kind of have to sneak up on the side of the glass, then take in a breath through your mouth.

2) Opening up your palate

Do NOT sip yet. Instead, place a tiny drop on the middle of the tongue and, like at the rodeo, let it ride for 8 seconds. After the “burn” goes away, you can taste the flavors.

3) Drink it

NOW you can sip that bourbon. And sip it straight, please. Maybe a little ice, but no soda water, juice, or other adulteration.

So... is Garrison Brothers the best bourbon ever made?

Better take another sip.

*Phil Houseal is a writer and owner of Full House PR. www.fullhouseproductions.net
Contact him at phil@fullhouseproductions.net*

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**215 West Bandera Road
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