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THE **SOMM** JOURNAL*CLIMBING THE
LADDER OF***SUCCESS**

VINTAGE WINE ESTATES'
TERRY WHEATLEY
IS COACHING TOMORROW'S
BEVERAGE LEADERS TO THE TOP

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN



Amanda McCrossin, Wine
Director at PRESS Restaurant
in St. Helena, CA, pours Clos
Pegase Cabernet Sauvignon
for Vintage Wine Estates
President Terry Wheatley.

{ the ransom report }

The Ransom Report is a column by *The SOMM Journal's* East Coast Editor David Ransom. In each issue, David will discuss what's currently on his mind and in his glass gathered from conversations and experiences in the world of wine, spirits, and hospitality.



PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK

Bourbon Beyond Kentucky

AMERICA'S NATIVE SPIRIT SPREADS ITS WINGS

by David Ransom

THERE WAS A TIME when those seeking a good bourbon would automatically look to Kentucky. After all, most other whiskey-producing states—and there were few—labeled their expressions as something else. However, bourbon, while it is Kentucky's official spirit, need not be made exclusively in the Bluegrass State. It's a recipe, not a product bound by location, so it can be made in any state by anyone who chooses to do so. Intrigued, I thought I'd do some digging to see what's currently out there.

First, what exactly is bourbon? Distilling laws state that the spirit's mash bill must contain a minimum of 51% corn. Tradition and history dictate that the balance of ingredients is made up of rye, (maltd) barley, and wheat, though the exact recipe is up to the individual distiller's preference. "Like wine, bourbon is a personal choice,

and the first thing I tell my customers during my whiskey classes is this: Try as many different brands as you can," says Tommy Tardie of New York's Fine & Rare. "Eventually you'll find your own bourbon-profile sweet spot." (A lightbulb moment for this wine guy: Making bourbon is somewhat like making a varietal wine—as long as you meet the minimum percentage required to label it as such, the balance can be tweaked infinitely to create the final flavor profile you want.)

So what did I find? On my metaphorical journey across the country, I encountered many styles of bourbon based on distillers' flavoring grain of choice. Some are "high rye," some are "wheated," and another producer, the Texas-based Balcones, even uses blue corn. "Unlike with grapes and wine, distilling grain doesn't present terroir in the traditional sense—though climate

and proximity to the ocean definitely influence my products," says Richard Stabile of New York distillery Long Island Spirits, whose Rough Rider Bourbon is aged just steps from the sea. Adam Spiegel of California's Sonoma Distilling, which sources its grains locally, adds, "Since bourbon can be made anywhere, only when a distiller makes their bourbon with intention will it have authenticity."

After sampling spirits from all over the nation, I learned that the craft-distilling movement has opened the door to a whole new world of American bourbons of exceptionally high quality, and with a little homework, one can find a stylistic fit for their palate. It is, after all, "America's Native Spirit," even if roughly 95% of it is currently made in Kentucky. So get out there and find some new bourbons for your list: Your customers will thank you. 