



THE BOURBON BUCKET LIST: 15 BOURBONS YOU NEED TO TRY AT LEAST ONCE

No other drink is as American as bourbon. Eastern Europeans can carry the vodka flag, the Scottish can bring their peaty single malts, we'll take a bottle of bourbon and a pigskin-loving bald eagle. And when you're stocking your home bar with some Kentucky classics (though not always from Kentucky), there are bottles that deserve a spot on a shelf. Not all of these are hard to find (though many are), but they're all extremely tasty, interesting, and worthy of a sip once in your life.



1. PAPPY VAN WINKLE'S FAMILY RESERVE 20 YEAR

Let's just get this one out of the way. Considered by many to be the world's finest bourbon, the 20-year-old hooch is the stuff of legends. Pappy hunting is now a pastime among bourbon fans, and while any Pappy is good Pappy, this is the nicest of the bunch. Its

super sweetness and long finish that seems to last 20 years itself is almost worth the \$100 pour we've seen at some establishments. So how to you get a bottle? Well, you could steal one, like the 222 bottles that went missing a little over a year ago, but we're not advocating you go to jail over some bourbon. Your best bet is to shell out the cash for a bit at a good bar or join a list somewhere and pray you get a bottle eventually. There doesn't seem to be any interest in upping production to meet demand, so it's not like it will just flood the shelves one day. Is it worth the price tag or is it just hype? That's up to you, but we will say it's the best we've ever tasted. (\$900) [Link](#)



2. HUDSON BABY BOURBON WHISKEY

The first bourbon to be distilled in New York makes this list for its 100% New York corn mash bill. Yes, it's 100% corn. Bourbon, by definition, has to be at least 51% corn, but rarely do you see only corn being used. It's also unique because it's aged in much smaller barrels than normal. Smaller barrels means more surface to liquid contact. What you're left

with is a truly unique bourbon that's very smooth. It might not be our favorite bourbon, but it's something you should try and it's far from bad. (\$40) [Link](#)



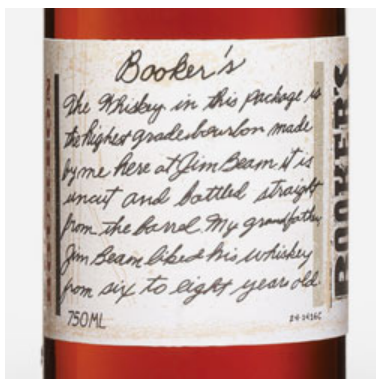
3. BLANTON'S

With numerous awards under its belt, Blanton's—or, “Blanton's Single Barrel Bourbon,” as it was originally known—is deserving of a spot on any Bourbon lover's bar. Since it's a single barrel bourbon, there can be slight variations, but we've found the nose to be packed with delicious vanilla and caramel notes, and, while the finish leaves a little to be desired, the overall aroma and taste are more

than fantastic. Frank Underwood drank it in House of Cards, and it'd be wise to agree with Frank. (\$65) [Link](#)

4. BOOKER'S

Want to taste pure bourbon? Pick up a bottle of Booker's. Booker's was the first bourbon to be bottled straight from the barrel. It's not cut or filtered. The cask strength bourbon is obviously pretty powerful stuff, and it delivers a raw and



smoky drinking experience. Singed tastebuds aside, Booker's is actually a fairly complex bottle of booze with nice little notes of coffee you can pick up. Booker Noe, the man who first created the whiskey, first gave it as a holiday gift to his friends, and we'd imagine you'd make someone very happy if you did the same. Just make sure you share a drink with them.

(\$55) [Link](#)



5. NOAH'S MILL

When we want to impress someone with a fairly affordable bottle of bourbon they probably don't know much about, we go with Noah's Mill. It's an incredibly smooth bourbon for something 114 proof. You get a nice bit of that rye right up front, and there's lots of vanilla present. From an aesthetic standpoint, this small batch bourbon has an old-timey label that would make the distillers of

yesteryear proud. You should get some, and you should make it your sneaky bottle of booze gift. (\$50) [Link](#)



6. BLACK MAPLE HILL 16-YEAR-OLD SMALL BATCH

If there were no Pappy, this might be the bourbon that people lost their minds over. Black Maple Hill is shrouded in mystery. There's little info out there on the independent label (actually a non-distiller producer), and the ingredients, sources, and blending is not shared with the public. This version, the 16-year-old small batch, was a limited production

that was only available in California. It packs a nice spicy punch so we'll go ahead and assume there is a decent amount of rye that goes into it. It will be pretty damn hard to find, so if you can try it, do it, and if not, try to at least sample the standard Black Maple Hill expression. (\$150) [Link](#)

7. W.L. WELLER 12 YEAR

You want Pappy but can't get Pappy. It happens. Forlorn hunters should seek out



W.L. Weller 12 Year. The wheated bourbon is about the closest you'll come to experiencing what a young Pappy tastes like. That's because it's basically, for all intents and purposes, Pappy that didn't quite make the cut to become Pappy. Super smooth and approachable, but still with plenty of complexity to make those tiny tastebud brains kick into gear. (\$30) [Link](#)



8. FOUR ROSES SINGLE BARREL

Okay, you want a bourbon that's a stunner and doesn't break the bank? This is it. Four Roses Single Barrel rivals many more expensive bourbons at half the price. It has a high rye mash bill (35%) and definitely delivers on that spiciness, but it does so without having that overwhelm everything else going on. The nose offers up all sorts of notes, and the finish is

nice and long. We're not saying it's cheap, but it's a steal for under 50 bucks.

(\$40) [Link](#)



9. WIDOW JANE 8 YEAR

Water is often an overlooked ingredient when it comes to beer and alcohol. Not the case with Widow Jane, which gets its name from the limestone quarry in New York where its water comes from. The mineral-rich water is an extremely important part of making this such a tremendous bourbon. It's nice in the sense that nothing is overly noticeable. No note juts out like a sharp razor, it's just a well-balanced and

easily drinkable bourbon that we happen to love. (\$60) [Link](#)

10. JEFFERSON'S OCEAN: AGED AT SEA

The obvious Jefferson's bourbon here would be Presidential Select. That wouldn't be the wrong choice, but we're going with something a little more interesting and with more of a story to tell when you pour someone a glass. Jefferson's Ocean: Aged at Sea is almost equally delicious and far more interesting. Jefferson's took the barrels and sent them on a container ship around the world to 30+ ports and



across the equator four times. The idea being that as the contents of those barrels swirled and sloshed with the rocking waves, more liquid would come in contact with the sides of the casks. More contact, more character and depth of flavor. A bunch of baloney? You can't knock the results, captain. (\$90) [Link](#)



11. OLD FORESTER BIRTHDAY BOURBON

You must be doing something right if you're the only bourbon still around that was produced before and during prohibition. Their birthday bourbon is an ode to their founder, George Garvin Brown, and it's meant to be released around the time of his birthday every year (Sept. 2). The glass is even a nod to the decanter-style bottles from back in the day.

While vintage profiles vary slightly, Old Forester Birthday Bourbon has taken home numerous awards in the 10+ years it has been produced. (\$60) [Link](#)



12. A.H. HIRSCH RESERVE

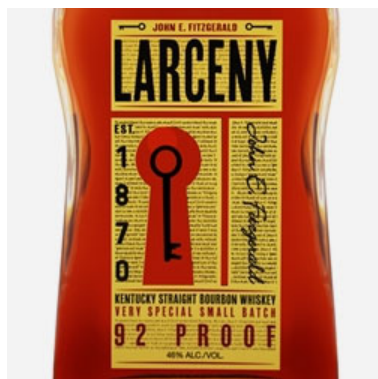
Want a bottle for your shelf that announces to the world that you're not f'ing around? Try getting your hands on a bottle of A.H. Hirsch Reserve. (The fact that it's no longer produced is your first hurdle, the price is your second.)

It's really expertly balanced, however, while leaning just a bit on the dry side. The aroma is powerful and memorable. Basically, if you made a cocktail with it someone might have a

heart attack. There's also a Humidor Edition which comes in a mahogany case with a cigar, but then you're just showing off. (\$1,000+)

13. JOHN E. FITZGERALD LARCENY

Like we said, some bourbons on this list will be pricey, very pricey, but not all are. Want a tremendous bottle that's less than 30 bucks? Get yourself some John E. Fitzgerald Larceny. From Heaven Hill, this wheated bourbon gets its name from John E. Fitzgerald's propensity to sneak into warehouses and steal the best barrels for his use. The taste is approachable but still full of flavor. It's like a



Maker's Mark killer. Seriously, this is a small batch bourbon you can, and should, get.

(\$25)[Link](#)



14.

GEORGE T. STAGG

The finest of Buffalo Trace's Antique Collection, George T. Stagg is a high proof beast that opens up like a folded paper fortune teller with a drop of water. It's rich and loaded with dark fruit and other punchy notes. There's a burn, hell it has an ABV of around 70%, but it isn't like taking a flamethrower to your tongue. Consistently highly rated, George T. Stagg is a rich bourbon perfect for cold winter nights. (\$100) [Link](#)



15. WILLET POT STILL RESERVE

For the pot still bottle alone, Willet Pot Still Reserve is worth a spot on the shelf of your home bar. Of course, if it was swill inside, it would just make a nice unopened accessory, but luckily that couldn't be further from the truth. It has a nice citrusy and floral nose, honey and caramel sweetness, and just enough spice. In the world of craft bourbon, it's a

winner that's fairly easy to acquire. (\$35)