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# The story behind a North Fork bourbon: Rough Rider

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Rough Rider Straight Bourbon Whisky. (Credit: Cyndi Murray)

Bourbon.

The drink evokes a wide range of images from dive bar toughs slugging shots to Hemingway-esque men of means and leisure sipping amber liquid from crystal glasses in posh libraries.

But what exactly is it?

Bourbon is a whiskey (but not all whiskeys are bourbon). To be considered bourbon, the mash (the goopy, oatmeal-like sludge that provides the fermentable sugars that will become bourbon) *must* consist of at least 51% corn with barley, rye, wheat and other grains making up the difference. The ratios of the grain will affect the drinking experience. For example, a higher

concentration of rye (rye bourbon) will create spicier notes while more wheat (wheated bourbon) tends to result in a smoother sip.

It also must be fermented in a *new*, charred American white oak barrel and cannot be distilled beyond 160 proof (80% ABV). Water is added to bring the barrel strength to 125 proof or less and is usually bottled at minimum of 80 proof (40% ABV).

To be called bourbon the whiskey must also be made in the United States. Otherwise it's just whiskey. Or, if it's from Scotland, Ireland or Japan, a simple matter of nomenclature drops the "e" and it's labeled "whisky".

The cost of a bottle of bourbon can vary greatly.

Ubiquitous Jack Daniels goes for about \$15 while high end bourbons can soar to ridiculous heights on the secondary markets, often reaching into the thousands.

Though the higher prices can be attributed to availability and the rabid nature of high-end bourbon collectors, the good quality stuff usually costs a tad more because of aging, blending and choice of ingredients.

But upping the bourbon game doesn't require refinancing the house.

Best known for LiV, a vodka made from local potatoes, Long Island Spirits in Baiting Hollow also offers its own line of bourbon whiskey.

The Rough Rider series, named for the volunteer cavalry unit founded by Teddy Roosevelt, offers four, tasty variations: Happy Warrior Cask Strength Bourbon, Straight Bourbon, Bull Moose Three Barrel Rye Bourbon and The Big Stick, a barrel strength rye bourbon.

Happy Warrior is blended with older bourbon and aged for a minimum of four years in American oak casks before finishing in brandy-washed French Oak casks.

Rough Rider Straight Bourbon is aged a minimum of two years before entering wine casks. No colors or flavoring are added so the subtle berry notes and caramel are entirely from time spent in the secondary vessels.

Bull Moose Three Barrel Rye is spicier. As expected it begins in oak casks before being transferred to the barrels that held the straight bourbon and finally into the ones used to age their Pine Barrens whisky (an American Single Malt Whisky).

The Big Stick is a barrel-strength bourbon blend of eight specially selected casks aged in smaller, 30-gallon barrels. Tasting notes included spice, a malty sweetness and a smooth, warming finish.

All these bourbons are "double casked" meaning they spent extra time maturing in French oak casks that previously held brandy. The practice is similar to the "Old World Scotland" practice of finishing whisky in Port barrels, which is why founder Rich Stabile chose to label their bourbon as "whisky" rather than using the American appellation.

Stabile feels the North Fork is a perfect location for a distillery due to the proximity to local resources.

"We are able to source everything we need from about 15 miles around the distillery. People are surprised to learn that there are still so many active farms," Stabile said. "There is great abundance of field corn and the rye we use is vastly abundant as it serves as the cover crop for [wintering] potato fields. It is deep rooted, so it picks up a lot of *terroir* from the area.

"Of course being so close to the wineries is essential as well, since we finish the bourbon [in their used] brandy casks."

Ingredients are important, but the quality can also be attributed to the careful hand of Head Distiller Brandon Collin's who came to the North Fork after having worked with Master Distiller Harlan Wheatley at Buffalo Trace in Kentucky; producers of world-class bourbons such as Eagle Rare, Sazerac and the legendary Pappy Van Winkle.



The days of Jack and Coke and shots of Wild Turkey are (mostly) in the past and company isn't needed to break out "the good stuff." Grab a favorite glass and pour something nice for yourself. You deserve it.

[LiV Vodka, Long Island Spirits, Rough Rider Bourbon](#)

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