



## BOURBON

# WHAT AFFECTS A BOURBONS TASTE?

We all love the taste of a bourbon. The more I taste, the more I'm impressed by the complexities a bourbon can offer. Even more impressive is the range of different flavor notes in bourbon. How is this possible? Let's take a look at how these different flavors develop.

Even with large improvements in automation bourbon flavor is still more of an art than a science. This is why Master Distillers spend a lot of time taste testing different barrels (tough job!). The following is how each aspect of the bourbon process affects the taste of the bourbon. The percentages may vary but after speaking with several Master Distillers and people in the industry, they all seem to agree on similar percentages.



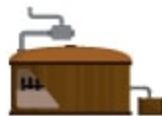
50%  
AGING



25%  
MASH BILL



10%  
DISTILLING



5%  
YEAST



10%  
OTHER



**AGING** - This includes time and place. How long was the bourbon aged? Where was it aged? That's geographic and warehouse location. Bourbon aged in Kentucky age much different than bourbons in Texas. Bourbons aged in the highest level of a warehouse age different than the same bourbon in the ground level of the warehouse. Read "Bourbon Aging Explained" for a more in-depth review of bourbon aging.



**MASH BILL** - The grains used to create a bourbon greatly affect the taste. We all know it has to be at least 51% corn but what about the other 49%. Did they use rye or wheat? How much barley did they use? Read "What is A Mash Bill" for a more in-depth review of bourbon mash bills.



**DISTILLATION** - The distilling process is possible because alcohol boils at 173 degrees and water at 212 degrees. The alcohol rises and is condensed back to liquid form and collected. The flavor is affected by different stills. Does the distillery use a column still or pot still? Do they distil the mash multiple times? Finally, at what proof does the white dog come off of the still? The higher the proof, the fewer flavor compounds are left.



**YEAST** - Yeast is single cell fungi. The beauty of yeast is they convert sugar to alcohol. Yeast is added to the mash bill that has been cooked with water to begin the fermentation process. There are hundreds (if not more) strains of yeast. Every distillery has a "proprietary" yeast strain that adds additional, different, flavors. Four Roses famously uses 5 different yeast strains. Try finding two of their private picks that are the same mash bill but different yeast and tasting them side-by-side. This exercise will help you understand the effects of yeast on taste.



**OTHER** - There are a lot of little things that can affect the overall taste of a bourbon. Some examples would be barrel entry proof, filtering process, proof.

**Homework:** Taste two bourbons side-by-side from the same distillery and mash bill. I.e. Eagle Rare and Buffalo Trace or Jim Beam Black and Knob Creek.