

THE

new age

SPIRITS



MARTINEZ ▶



◀ BEE'S KNEES

OF

spirits

DISTILLERS ARE ROLLING OUT THE BARREL FOR UNIQUE EXPRESSIONS WITH INTRIGUING AROMAS AND FLAVORS GLEANED FROM EXTRA TIME SPENT IN GOOD WOOD. **BY KELLY MAGYRIACS**

B

ARRELS ARE THE SPICE RACK OF THE BEVERAGE WORLD. MUCH LIKE turmeric adds a shock of yellow-orange to a curry, and a sprinkle of salt ties together the flavors in a stew, time in a barrel lends a spirit color, aroma, flavor and mouthfeel. These days, producers are throwing out the rulebook and experimenting with maturing spirits in casks that previously held dessert and fortified wines, liqueurs, even beer. The results are delicious libations with unique flavors and characteristics that help them stand out from other bottles on store shelves.

And it's not just whiskey. Take gin, for example, which already has so many flavors that a barrel can actually be considered another botanical, says Chris Zollo, luxury buyer for Fine Wine & Good Spirits. Philadelphia Distilling exclusively uses brand-new charred American oak barrels for its Bluecoat Barrel Finished American Dry Gin to fully control the aging process and assure consistency. "Our approach was to produce a gin with whiskey



AGE EFFECT

Aging gin results in nuanced flavors, which can add a new twist on classic cocktails like the Martinez and Bee's Knees.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **Brett Thomas**
DRINK STYLING BY **Joshua Neal**
PROP STYLING BY **Lauren Kozakiewicz**

notes and not a whiskey with gin flavors,” says founder and president Andrew Auwerda. It’s perfect in classic cocktails like the Negroni, Hanky Panky, Martinez or Old Fashioned. Jason Lonigro, general manager for Emeril’s Chop House in Bethlehem, says substituting barrel-aged gin can completely change a cocktail’s profile, like shaking a Bee’s Knees with a traditional gin versus another with Caledonia Spirits Barr Hill Reserve Tom Cat Gin.

More niche right now is aged vodka, but Zollo says it’s starting to have a following. “You can add a dash to a cocktail to give it a bump in alcohol and impart some oak notes,” he adds.

As for whiskey, it always comes off the still crystal clear and picks up its hue as well as the vanilla, caramel and toffee notes that fans crave from the charred barrel. Some producers also finish the spirit for a short period in alternative casks. Lonigro notes that in 1999, Jim Beam Distiller’s Masterpiece 18 Year Old Cognac Finish was the first major cask-finished bourbon, and the category has grown immensely since then. He points to products like Wild Turkey Master’s Keep Revival, finished in oloroso sherry casks, and the rising trend of rum-finished scotches such as the Balvenie Caribbean Cask 14 Year Old and Glenfiddich Fire & Cane Scotch.

Michael A. Anderson, certified sommelier and cocktail consultant for Richard Deshantz Restaurant Group in Pittsburgh, has seen some terrific whiskey finished in alternative barrels or staves. Angel’s Envy Straight Bourbon gets smooth drinkability from port casks, and Glenmorangie Nectar d’Or, aged 12 years, picks up sweet fruit notes from Sauternes casks.

But just as a dish that’s been cooked with wine will only be as good as the bottle that was used, a finished spirit will reflect the quality of the whiskey and the finishing barrel. “A finishing barrel can enhance a whiskey but cannot ‘save’ it,” says Michael Foglia, manager for innovation and product development at Wigle Whiskey and Threadbare Cider in Pittsburgh. Certain whiskeys seem to play nicer with particular casks, though. “The bright fruit and sweet spice of ruby port complements rye’s earthy, peppery bite, [and] rich toffee and caramel flavors from Madeira enhance and elevate the overall character of bourbon,” says Foglia. *(continued on page 66)*

FEELING WOOSY

Different aging techniques yield nuanced flavors in whiskey. Sip it neat or mix it into cocktails.

THE HENDERSON ▶



GOLDEN GIRAFFE ▶



wine, meet whiskey

Most winemakers select French or American oak barrels to mature their wines. The former adds subtle spice notes, and the latter gives more overt tones of caramel, vanilla and coconut. Both let in some oxygen, which softens tannins and makes the wine more expressive. But what happens when you use a bourbon barrel? “The char of a bourbon barrel imparts nuanced characteristics that we don’t get from traditional wine barrels: dried herbs, a bit of smoke, charred vanilla,” says Bob Blue, founding winemaker for 1000 Stories, which produces several bourbon-barrel-aged wines including the 1000 Stories Bourbon Barrel Aged Zinfandel. The Cooper & Thief Cellarmasters 2016 Red Wine Blend also spends time in bourbon casks, where it picks up soft, velvety tannins and a subtle heat. Big, bold reds can best hold their own inside these flavorful bottles, like Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon and Carignan.

**1000 STORIES
BOURBON BARREL-AGED
ZINFANDEL 2014**

Price: \$19.99 | Size: 750 mL

Code: 49886

**COOPER & THIEF
CELLARMASTERS RED BLEND**

Price: \$28.99 | Size: 750 mL

Code: 5962