

# The Best Whiskeys in Every State Right Now

[www.esquire.com/food-drink/drinks/a54739/best-whiskey-distilleries-in-america/](http://www.esquire.com/food-drink/drinks/a54739/best-whiskey-distilleries-in-america/)

By Aaron Goldfarb



And the 10 best in the entire country.

By [Aaron Goldfarb](#)

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A whole lot of people think bourbon can only *legally* be made in Kentucky. That's not true. But the oft-repeated myth shows how indelible the relationship between Kentucky and bourbon is, a relationship that dates back to Alexander Hamilton and a despised whiskey tax that drove distillers from the mid-Atlantic region to the friendlier Southern state.

The absolute best whiskey in America still comes out of Kentucky, whether you believe it is Pappy Van Winkle, George T. Stagg, or perhaps a more offbeat selection. Likewise, Jack Daniels is, if not the best, the most *famous* whiskey in America, and the best-selling too. Jack has stamped Kentucky's neighbor to the south, Tennessee, as another state uniquely linked with the good stuff.



But what about whiskeys from other states? Are any worth a damn? There are now around 2,000 distilleries in America, at least one in each state. As this "craft" micro-distilling boom is only about a decade old, many of today's companies have not yet had the time (or resources) to create a good whiskey. Furthermore, some craft distilleries don't produce their own whiskey. Instead, they use the same "sourced" juice, usually courtesy of a giant factory called [Midwest Grain Products](#) in Indiana, and simply slap their own label on the bottle. We won't count those for our purposes.

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So can any of these smaller outfits (that actually distill their own product) one day help their state wrest the long-held whiskey crown from Kentucky and Tennessee? The search for the next great American whiskey begins with distilleries in the other 47 states, plus D.C., that aren't Kentucky, Tennessee, or Indiana.

*Note: Most of these distilleries' bottles are in the \$40 to \$60 range.*

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## The Best of the Best

*These distilleries are the ones most likely to cause Kentucky's "[Bourbon Trail](#)" to veer out-of-state. Most were founded in the 2000s, and many focus on more atypical whiskies, like hopped, mesquite-smoked, fruited, or finished. They all make undeniably delicious bourbons, ryes, and even single malts. The following 10 are ranked by quality.*

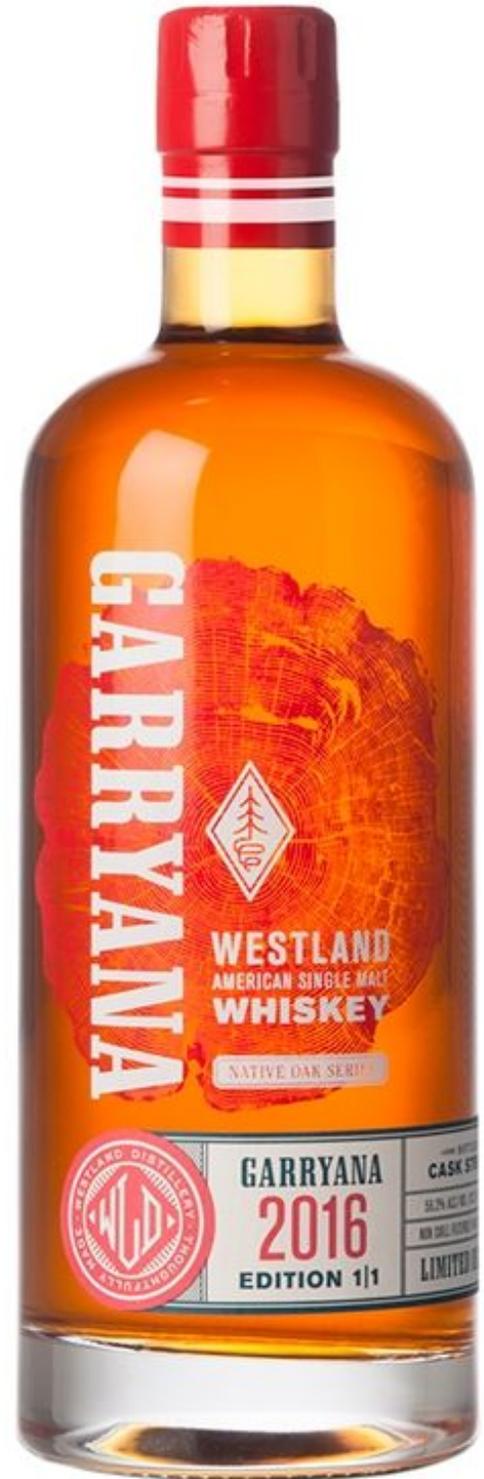
### 1. Washington — [Westland](#)

*City:* Seattle

*Founded:* 2010

*Distribution:* national

For the longest time, Westland was the independently owned "little guy" making the absolute best whiskey in America. Unlike most U.S.-based micro-distilleries that focus on bourbon, Westland set its sights on single malts. And, they were all quite good—mature, refined, yeasty, and quite flavorful—whether it was Westland Peated or Garryana, produced using barrels made from a unique local oak tree. In December 2016, Westland was acquired by French drinks giant [Rémy Cointreau](#), so it is no longer the independently owned underdog. It is still the best non-Kentucky/Tennessee/Indiana whiskey in America.



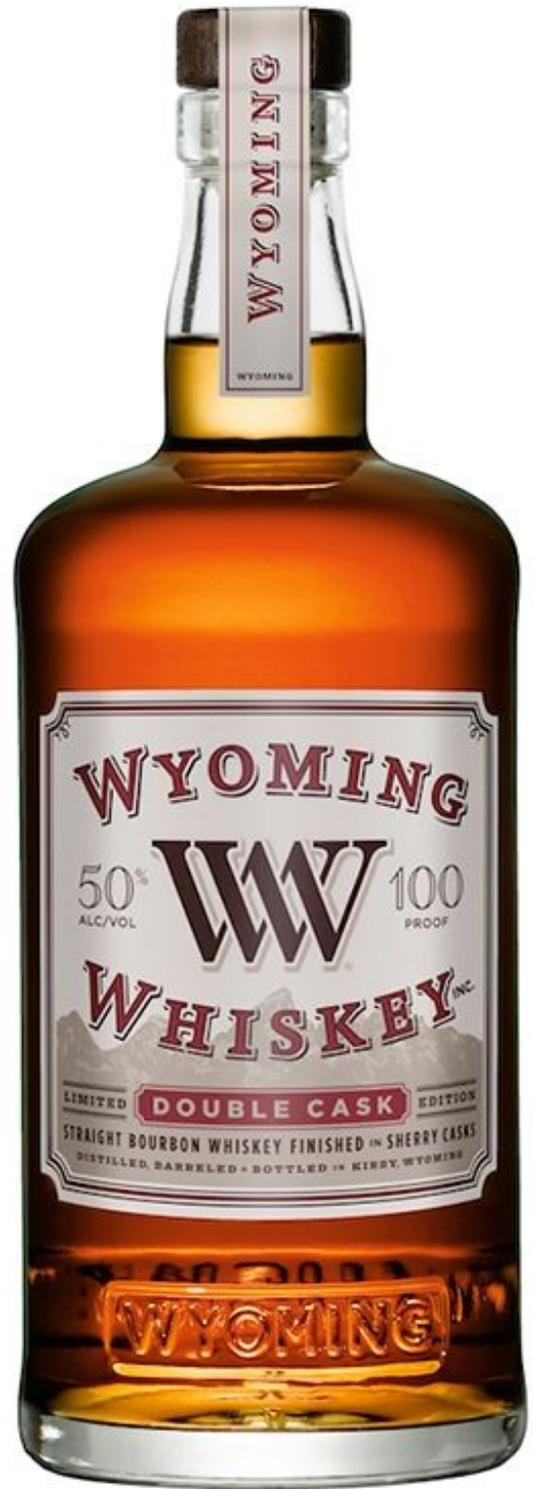
## 2. Wyoming — [Wyoming Whiskey](#)

City: Kirby

Founded: 2009

Distribution: national

You might not be too optimistic the first time you encounter Wyoming Whiskey, what with its bland name and simple packaging. The first batches of wheat whiskey from this joint weren't too swell either. But after it had enough juice to produce a five-year-old product, the distillery started killing it. Nowadays, it makes barrel-strength and high-rye products, and its recent Double Cask (finished in Pedro Ximenez sherry barrels) is its best whiskey yet. It is also our pick for the absolute best American craft whiskey distillery that distills *all* of its products and is not owned by a multinational conglomerate.



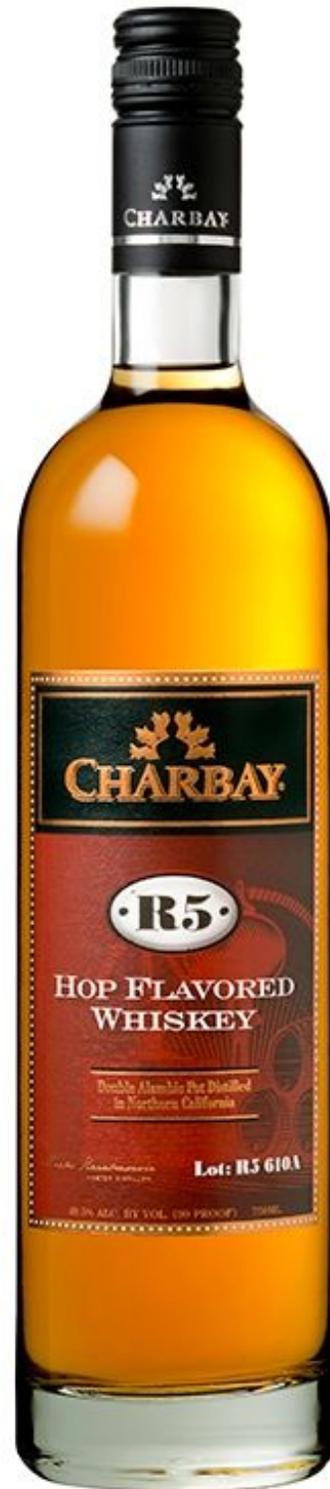
### 3. California — [Charbay](#)

*City:* St. Helena

*Founded:* 1983

*Distribution:* California a few other select locations

One of the most advanced micro-distilleries in the game is this Napa Valley outfit started by a European expat who wanted to distill grape brandy. Today, Charbay makes wine, tequila, vodka, rum, walnut liqueur, and some of the more interesting whiskeys in the world. Thirteenth-generation master distiller Marko Karakasevic is a mad man (and a truly fun dude to drink with), and he should probably be credited with inventing hoppy whiskey; he first distilled an IPA in 1999. By now he has refined his technique, and products like the hoppy Whiskey R5 and Whiskey S (distilled from Bear Republic Brewing's Big Bear Stout) aren't just unique, they are delicious.



#### 4. Pennsylvania — [Dad's Hat](#)

City: Bristol

Founded: 2011

Distribution: 15 states and countries like Andorra, French Guiana, and Iceland

If you thought we wouldn't honor anything standard, you would be wrong. Courtesy of Mountain Laurel Spirits is a series of classic straight rye whiskeys that are flat-out tasty—no bells and whistles needed. Products like Dad's Hat Pennsylvania Rye Whiskey might be returning the Keystone State to its roots as a preeminent maker of whiskey. Though, truth be told, the best product from Dad's Hat is a 94-proof rye finished in vermouth barrels.



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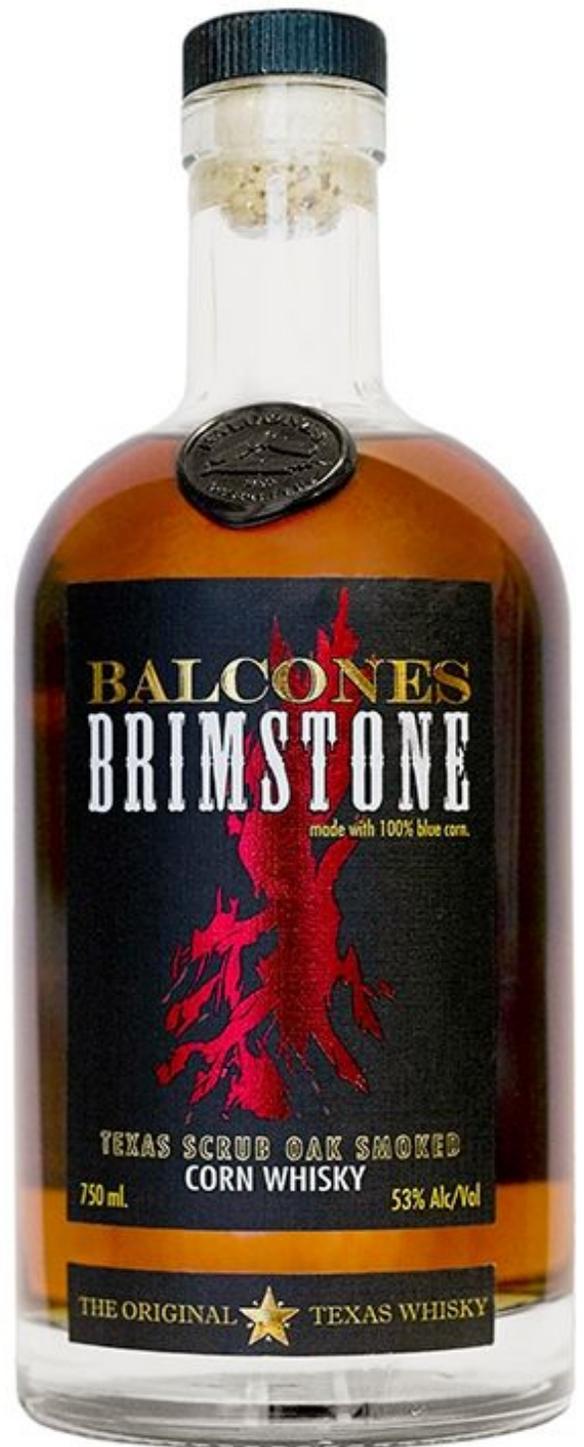
## 5. Texas — [Balcones](#)

City: Waco

Founded: 2008

Distribution: Texas, Illinois, California, and the tri-state area

Balcones was once the toast of the micro-whiskey world, back when the legendary Chip Tate helmed the Waco enterprise. Tate left under a cloud of investor squabbling in 2014, and Balcones lost some luster in the press, but it is still producing great stuff. Well, of course it is—its unique whiskeys like True Blue, distilled from blue heirloom corn, and Brimstone, smoked from sun-baked scrub oak, are based on Tate's recipes. And if you refuse to trust Balcones any more, Tate now runs [his own joint](#) down the highway, which will surely become Texas's best whiskey distillery as soon as it is old enough.



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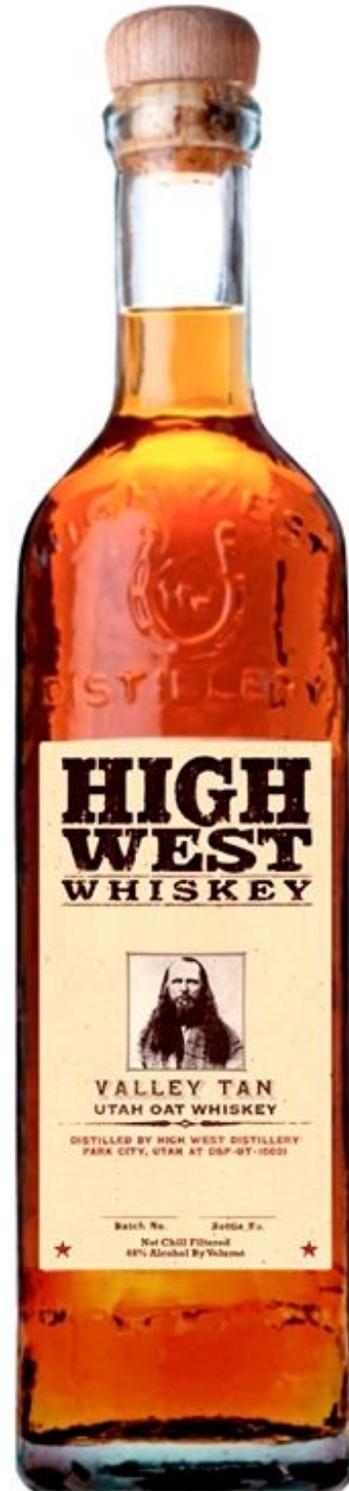
## 6. Utah — [High West](#)

City: Park City

Founded: 2006

Distribution: national

High West's products up to this point have mostly been sourced from Indiana. But High West does have a distilling component helmed by wiz kid Brendan Coyle, who has a masters of distilling from a Scottish university. While High West is quite adept at taking sourced juice and making intriguing blends like Bourye, Yippee Ki-Yay (finished in vermouth and Syrah barrels), and A Midwinter Night's Dram (finished in port barrels), it 100 percent distills its Valley Tan Whiskey, which is named after the alcoholic "refresher" Mormons used to drink. In 2016, High West was named Distiller of the Year by *Whisky Advocate*—and also was acquired by Corona's [Constellation Brands](#).



## 7. Arizona — [Whiskey Del Bac](#)

*City:* Tucson

*Founded:* 2011

*Distribution:* Arizona and five other states

If any little guys are eventually going to surpass the big boys at their own game, they will have to do something completely different. Which brings us to Whiskey Del Bac's Dorado, made with mesquite-smoked malts. It is always stunning when a new micro-distillery releases a standard, under-aged, corn-based whiskey, because the Wild Turkeys and Buffalo Traces of the world have pretty damn well perfected that recipe—and they can sell it a hell of a lot cheaper. But Whiskey Del Bac is single-malt, 100 percent barley, and truly one-of-a-kind, like drinking a bag of Barbecue Lay's.



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## 8. Colorado — Leopold Bros.

City: Denver

Founded: 1999

Distribution: 23 states and countries like Germany, Italy, and the U.K.

Colorado is one of the foremost states when it comes to craft whiskey, and Stranahan's, its most famous distillery, is indeed terrific. But the Leopold brothers, former brewers from Michigan, might be making better, more intriguing spirits. The 18-year-old company has a "pre-prohibition"-style whiskey and a Maryland-style rye, but its series of fruit whiskeys is the most interesting. Particularly good are the Rocky Mountain Peach and Rocky Mountain Blackberry, both lower-proof products that use macerated and blended local fruits to sweeten and add complexity.



## 9. West Virginia — Smooth Ambler

*City:* Maxwellton

*Founded:* 2009

*Distribution:* 30 states

Smooth Ambler has recently gained much acclaim from whiskey geeks for its Old Scout single barrel selections. Unfortunately, all of those single barrels come courtesy of MGP in Indiana. Earlier this year, however, the company released Wheated Bourbon, a so-called "Appalachian whiskey" completely distilled in West Virginia, which was highly sought-after amongst the cognoscenti. In December of 2016, Smooth Ambler was acquired by French company [Pernod Ricard](#).



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## 10. Vermont — [WhistlePig](#)

*City:* Shoreham

*Founded:* 2008

*Distribution:* 22 states

Keeping pace with High West and Smooth Ambler, this farm distillery has long sourced some of the best rye whiskey in America. It was Raj Bhakta and former Maker's Mark master distiller Dave Pickerell's genius to snap up barrels of Canadian rye back when no one wanted them. Its products like Boss Hog and Old World may be pricy, but it offers some of the better, older rye bottlings around. Just recently, WhistlePig start releasing its own "farm-to-bottle" distillate with Farmstock, a "triple-terroir" product partially composed of whiskey and produced using Vermont water, rye grains, and barrels made from local oak.



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## **The Best of the Rest**

*These distilleries are still in their nascent stages. Some are young but showing promise. Some are a little older but still coming into their own. And some aren't even all that good; they are just the only whiskey available in that particular state. All, however, distill their own products. The following 37 are unranked and categorized by region.*

## NORTHWEST



### **Alaska — [Alaska Distillery](#)**

*City: Wasilla / Founded: 2005 / Distribution: national*

The country's northernmost whiskey maker—located in Sarah Palin's hometown—makes Alaska Outlaw Whiskey, as well as a smoked salmon vodka.

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### **Idaho — [Idaho Whiskey](#)**

*City: Boise / Founded: 2013 / Distribution: national*

This distillery's flagship product, Idaho Whiskey, is a small-batch bourbon that has become a top seller in the state's [government-run liquor stores](#).

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### **Montana — [RoughStock](#)**

*City: Bozeman / Founded: 2008 / Distribution: national*

Micro-distilleries were illegal in the state until 2005, and Roughstock was the first to open after the ban was lifted. It makes products like Black Label, a deep and rich single-barrel offering.

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### **Oregon — [House Spirits](#)**

*City: Portland / Founded: 2004 / Distribution: national*

House Spirits makes Irish-inspired Oregon Straight Malt Whiskey, which is fermented with ale yeast—not surprising in such a beer-friendly area.

## **SOUTHWEST**



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### **Hawaii — Island Distillers**

*City: Honolulu / Founded: 2008 / Distribution: national*

There is not a single aged whiskey made in the Aloha State, but there *is* this distillery's Hawaiian Moonshine, based on the traditional okolehao spirit once imbibed by Hawaiian kings.

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### **Nevada — Verdi Local Distillery**

*City: Verdi / Founded: 2015 / Distribution: local*

Verdi makes an award-winning whiskey, Mahogany Whiskey, aged on mountain mahogany, as well as a Fireball-challenging apple cinnamon whiskey.

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### **New Mexico — Santa Fe Spirits**

*City: Santa Fe / Founded: 2010 / Distribution: national*

Founded by Englishman Colin Keegan, this distillery's Colkegan Single Malt is a scotch-style, mesquite-smoked whiskey aged in the high desert 7,000 feet above sea level.

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### **Oklahoma — Scissortail**

*City: Moore / Founded: 2013 / Distribution: local*

The only producer of aged bourbon in the Sooner state, Scissortail uses tiny barrels to try to speed up Father Time. The combat veterans who run the distillery produced Napalm, a cinnamon whiskey, and offered special #MAGA bottles for Trump's election.



## Alabama — [John Emerald](#)

*City:* Opelika / *Founded:* 2014 / *Distribution:* regional

The state's first whiskey distillery in 100 years—goody two-shoes Alabama started prohibition five years *early*, in 1915—has one product, John's Alabama Single Malt, smoked with peach and pecan wood.

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## Arkansas — [Rock Town](#)

*City:* Little Rock / *Founded:* 2010 / *Distribution:* national

Rock Town utilizes 100 percent Arkansas ingredients for products like its Hickory Smoked Whiskey and Single Barrel Bourbon.

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## Florida — [St. Augustine](#)

*City:* St. Augustine / *Founded:* 2014 / *Distribution:* local

This community-owned distillery, located in a historical commercial ice plant, makes a Port Finished Bourbon aged in barrels from nearby San Sebastian Winery.

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## Georgia — [Thirteenth Colony](#)

*City:* Americus / *Founded:* 2009 / *Distribution:* regional

Despite draconian alcohol laws in its state, Thirteenth Colony managed to produce a four-years-aged Southern Bourbon and a Southern Rye finished on French oak spirals.

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## Louisiana — [Atelier Vie](#)

*City:* New Orleans / *Founded:* 2011 / *Distribution:* regional

While most distilleries are focusing on corn, wheat, barley, and rye, Atelier Vie offers Riz, a whiskey made from rice.

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## Mississippi — [Cathead](#)

*City:* Gluckstadt / *Founded:* 2010 / *Distribution:* local

In a state mostly bereft of whiskey, Cathead makes a white whiskey, Gold Coast, distilled from Lazy Magnolia beer.

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## Missouri — [StiIL 630](#)

*City:* St. Louis / *Founded:* 2012 / *Distribution:* local

This distillery's Double Barrel Rallypoint won "Best in Class: Whiskey" at last year's American Craft Spirits Association awards.

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## North Carolina — [Blue Ridge](#)

*City:* Bostic / *Founded:* 2011 / *Distribution:* local

Located in a valley famed for its moonshiners, Blue Ridge Distilling makes an "aged" whiskey in 60 days, Defiant, by infusing its juice with spirals of toasted American white oak.

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## South Carolina — [High Wire](#)

*City:* Charleston / *Founded:* 2013 / *Distribution:* regional

This Southern distillery produces a biscuit whiskey, as well as a Sorghum Whiskey from sorghum grown on a Mennonite farm.



### D.C. — One Eight

*City: Washington, D.C. / Founded: 2015 / Distribution: local*

[Jos. A. Magnus](#) crafted one of the buzziest whiskeys in the business today, but unfortunately, its armagnac-finished Cigar Blend is MGP juice. Thus, One Eight Distilling's Rock Creek Whiskey is literally the only D.C.-distilled whiskey currently on the market.

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### Delaware — Painted Stave

*City: Smyrna / Founded: 2011 / Distribution: local*

Our nation's first state is not exactly a whiskey hotbed, but Painted Stave offers Diamond State Bourbon Whiskey, distilled using local corn and aged for a meager 12 months.

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### Maryland — Lyon

*City: Saint Michaels / Founded: 2012 / Distribution: local*

Once *the* state for the world's best rye, Maryland's current generation of whiskey makers is still in its infancy. This Chesapeake Bay-area distillery made rum upon opening and now has a 100-proof rye and a single malt.

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## New Jersey — Cooper River

*City: Camden / Founded: 2014 / Distribution: regional*

The state that gave America its first ever distillery is lacking in whiskey production today—though it does have Cooper River, owned by a Kentucky native who makes "Single Run" whiskeys distilled from local IPAs and saisons.

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## New York — Arcane

*City: Brooklyn / Founded: 2015 / Distribution: local*

Engineer David Kyrejko makes his hoppy and estery Lone Wolf Whiskey by vacuum-distilling beers from nearby Brooklyn breweries like Interboro and Grimm Artisanal Ales.

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## Virginia — Copper Fox

*City: Sperryville / Founded: 2005 / Distribution: regional*

Virginia Distillery Company's Highland Malt Whisky is one of the best craft whiskeys around—but it is sourced from Scotland. A solid in-state offering is Rick Wasmund's hand-malted Copper Fox product, which is smoked over applewood.



## Connecticut — Litchfield

*City: Litchfield / Founded: 2014 / Distribution: regional*

This northwest Connecticut spot's farm-to-bottle Batcher's Bourbon is currently being bottled at eight years of age, quite old for micro-distillery juice.

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## Maine — [Maine Craft Distilling](#)

*City:* Portland / *Founded:* 2012 / *Distribution:* local

In a city known for world-class beer, this Portland distillery makes a carrot gin and Fifty Stone, a Highland-style peated single malt.

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## Massachusetts — [Triple Eight](#)

*City:* Nantucket / *Founded:* 2000 / *Distribution:* local

Associated with Cisco Brewers, Triple Eight distills a 12-year-old single malt named Notch (a portmanteau meaning "Not Scotch") that has won bushels of awards.

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## New Hampshire — [Tamworth](#)

*City:* Tamworth / *Founded:* 2015 / *Distribution:* local

Tamworth's Sweet Lips Cherry Bounce, a rye whiskey blended with fresh Montmorency cherries, is based on a recipe from the *first* First Lady, Martha Washington.

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## Rhode Island — [Sons of Liberty](#)

*City:* South Kingstown / *Founded:* 2011 / *Distribution:* regional

This hip South Kingstown bar *slash* brewpub *slash* distillery makes whiskey distilled from its own beers, including an intriguing Grapefruit Hop Whiskey.

## **MIDWEST**



### **Illinois — FEW Spirits**

*City: Evanston / Founded: 2011 / Distribution: regional*

Named to subtly tweak Frances Elizabeth Willard, a local temperance worker of legend, FEW makes an award-winning rye that is spicy and quite good.

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### **Iowa — Cedar Ridge**

*City: Swisher / Founded: 2005 / Distribution: regional*

You can credit an Iowa pseudo-distillery—[Templeton](#)—for clueing the world into the seedier side of sourcing [after it settled a massive class-action suit](#). Cedar Ridge's bluntly named Iowa Bourbon is actually made in Iowa, from Iowa corn.

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### **Kansas — Union Horse**

*City: Lenexa / Founded: 2010 / Distribution: regional*

The company's five-year-old Reserve Straight Bourbon Whiskey was good enough to make *Wine Enthusiast's* list of [Top 100 Spirits](#) of the year.

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### **Michigan — Journeyman**

*City: Three Oaks / Founded: 2011 / Distribution: national*

This organic spirits distillery, located in a former corset factory once owned by a prohibitionist, makes nearly a dozen whiskeys, most notably of which is Kissing Cousins, finished in local cabernet sauvignon barrels.

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## Minnesota — [Eleven Wells](#)

*City:* St. Paul / *Founded:* 2013 / *Distribution:* local

Eleven Wells might disclose the most information of any distillery on planet earth with bottles, like Wheat Whiskey, that detail 13 different production elements, ranging from the usual (proof, age) to the more obscure (barrel char level, yeast type).

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## Nebraska — [Cut Spike](#)

*City:* La Vista / *Founded:* 2008 / *Distribution:* national

Cut Spike Single Malt is made using Scottish copper stills, a bit of a rarity in America, but one that worked—it won Double Gold at the famed San Francisco Spirits competition.

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## North Dakota — [Proof](#)

*City:* Fargo / *Founded:* 2013 / *Distribution:* local

The only whiskey distiller in the state makes a cinnamon whiskey called 2DOCKS Fire by Proof.

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## Ohio — [Tom's Foolery](#)

*City:* Chagrin Falls / *Founded:* 2010 / *Distribution:* local

Tom's Foolery is getting good buzz for its Bonded Bourbon, one of the few micro-makers who can claim such a "bonded" distinction.

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## South Dakota — [Dakota Spirits](#)

*City:* Pierre / *Founded:* 2006 / *Distribution:* local

South Dakota's only aged whiskey maker has an oat whiskey and a blended product, Bickering Brothers.

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## Wisconsin — [Yahara Bay](#)

*City: Fitchburg / Founded: 2007 / Distribution: local*

Yahara Bay Whiskey is made from four grains and is the first whiskey produced in the Badger State since prohibition.

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