

Making Their Mark

Vermont Team Helps Create a Green Mountain-Influenced Maker's Mark Bourbon



Maker's Mark Director's Choice:
From sample to barrel to Vermont.
(Courtesy photo)

Maker's Mark doesn't do trendy flavors or outlandish expressions. It makes a full-bodied bourbon whiskey renowned for its woody, caramel aromas, balanced flavors of vanilla and fruit and a smooth, subtle finish.

Now, however, it has produced a bourbon with a lot of Vermont in it.

Representatives from the Loretto, Kentucky, distiller collaborated with a trio of Vermont experts to create **Maker's Mark Director's Choice**, a bourbon crafted to reflect specific flavor profiles and characteristics decided on by a team from Vermont DLC.

DLC Director of Marketing Theresa Barrows, Liquor Purchasing Specialist Tonia Pryce and Director of Retail Operations Kim Walker worked closely with Maker's Mark Heritage Manager Brian Sturgulewski in a process designed to highlight the influence wood and time can have on a whiskey. The Private Selection Program

allows participants to blend a combination of Maker's Mark bourbon that has been finished with a variety of different wood staves, resulting in completely unique flavor profiles.

With the Vermont team at home due to pandemic travel restrictions, Sturgulewski and a group from the distillery led a virtual finishing process resulting in a spirit unique to the state.

"In a normal year, we'd invite representatives from the state to come down to the distillery," Sturgulewski says. "The best way to experience what makes Maker's Mark special is to come down to Loretto, Kentucky. In the absence of that, we put together a virtual opportunity where people can hand-select a barrel. We ship them a kit, jump on a video call, talk about why we make the selections the way we do, and we build the whiskey they all agree on."

The kit shipped to Vermont's experts contained a collection of 50 milliliter (about 1.7 ounce) bottles with single stave expressions of Maker's Mark. The bourbon that would become Director's Choice began with Maker's Mark 46 as its

base, which uses a wood stave finishing process to amplify flavors and create a bolder, more complex whiskey.

"It's built off the innovation of our second whiskey, Maker's Mark 46, which was the swan song project of our founder's son," Sturgulewski says. "He didn't want to make a different whiskey; he wanted to emphasize notes in his parents' whiskey."

With that as a starting point, each member of the Vermont team chose a combination of different wood stave-finished whiskey to use in the blending process. Each stave brought a unique character to the bourbon, changing and evolving with every new combination.

"You have in your head what it's going to taste like, but when it's blended it's not always how you think it's going to turn out," Barrows said of the selection process. "It's easy to get caught up in a witch's brew situation — you can get a little heavy on the smoke or the mocha in a way you didn't intend, so we kept it very simple."

Each of the three brought different >>

BY BILL BURKE

personalities to the process.

"Kim likes the bolder stuff, for example, while I like sweeter," Pryce says. "I was leaning more toward a mocha, and I think Kim was on the other side. The final choice was a good combination of all of it."

The resulting bourbon reflected each team member's personality — a little of each combining to create a great result.

"The nice thing is that all three of us blended our own whiskey," Walker says. "It was fun to see the flavor profiles each one of us chose,

and watching our personalities come out in the blending. I do have quite a few bottles of whiskey and I have flavors I lean toward, so it was fun to see what Tonia and Theresa chose and gravitated to as consumers."

The agreed-upon combination created a bold whiskey, Walker says.

"I like ryes, which are a little spicier with a little more bite," she says. "And this blend is great because it did pull each of our tastes into one blend. In the end we all liked this the best. It was nice to blend ourselves together as a whiskey."



The specific recipe for Maker's Mark Director's Choice:

- Baked American Pure — two staves
- Maker's Mark 46 — two staves
- Roast French Mocha — four staves
- Toasted French Spice — two staves

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Maker's Mark produces the whiskey based on the selected stave recipe, and the barrel is then aged for nine weeks, allowing the finishing process to impart flavors and aromas.

"The barrel you get is a completely unique whiskey," Sturgulewski says. "You built it, but it can never be replicated again. The odds that the whiskey will be that exact proof and stave recipe is like trying to hit a moving target."

That combination resulted in a bourbon with an approachable nose with heavy vanilla and fruit notes, specifically red delicious apple. It's sweet and decadent on the front of the palate, emphasizing creamy chocolate and toasted marshmallow flavors, with subdued but present oak notes. It's well balanced with a lingering spice that stretches the finish.

"I was pleasantly surprised," Barrows says. "I'm not a big fan of a pepper finish. I like mellow, smoother and sweeter. I'm not a fan of ryes, but this is a great combination that fits all our personalities together. It was nice to be able to do this and call it Director's Choice."

The Maker's Mark Director's Choice was bottled on December 15 and is available in state liquor agencies.

"One of the wonderful things for our team, and the state of Vermont as well, is that because whiskeys have grown so much, especially over the past 5 to 10 years, it's a nice opportunity for the state to bring in a select barrel for our bourbon and whiskey aficionados," Walker says. ☺

Maker's Mark Private Selection

makersmark.com/ca/makers-mark-private-selection