

Summer Spirits: Noteworthy Bourbons and Ryes to Consider This Season

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When summer rolls around, I tend to set aside my Scotches and Irish whiskeys in lieu of bourbon, rye, and rum, and the occasional gin or tequila—because that’s just what one does in stifling New York heat. Here are four exceptional expressions (from Michter’s to Sagamore and beyond) to consider for the coming Dog Days.

But take heed: A few of these are limited releases so you’ll want to get your hands on these bottles before they disappear into private collections.

MICHTER’S 10 YEAR KENTUCKY STRAIGHT BOURBON

Full disclosure: I’ve never met a Michter’s I didn’t love—whether it’s a bourbon, a rye, or the elusive unblended American whiskey. But this year’s limited-release 10 Year Kentucky straight bourbon is one for the books. Master distiller, Pamela Heilmann, and master of maturation, Andrea Wilson just went all out. The flavor profiles are deeply intense without being overbearing. Let’s just say that it hits all the right spots and is consistent with the Michter’s DNA, which is bold (yet balanced) with that signature hint of spice that tingles you mildly at the throat. Personally, I have more than seven Michter’s expressions in my humble abode—and you should too. It’s great for post-work decompression and sharing among good friends. Bonus points: You have to give it to Joseph Magliocco for handpicking two stellar *women* to lead the Michter’s operation.



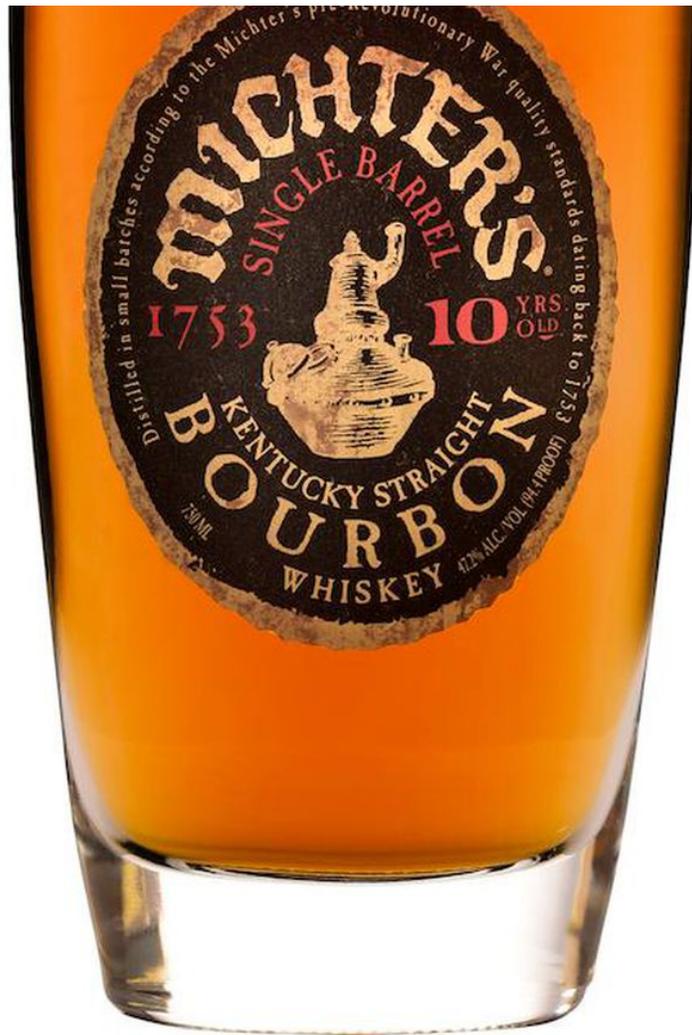


Photo: Michter's
BASIL HAYDEN'S DARK RYE

For anyone who has a penchant for sweet notes (think: Sauternes and Port), this is exactly the rye you need to have in your liquor cabinet. It was initially launched as a limited-release expression last year—but because the demand has been overwhelming (thanks to its unusual characteristics), Basil Hayden's decided to continue its production. When you take your first sip, you'll immediately notice its drinkability. Meaning: someone who isn't quite used to rye will have no problem taking to the Dark Rye expression. It's sweet, it's not overwhelmingly spicy, and it's bursting with complex flavor. The reason behind this boils down to the blend, which combines smooth Canadian rye whiskey with Kentucky rye—plus a small amount of port. And don't be misled by the word "dark." It doesn't mean that it's potently dangerous. The coloring of the rye is mainly attributed to the fact that port, which is significantly darker, is part of the blend—so that component contributes not only to the final product's coloring but also to its wonderfully saccharine notes.





Photo: Basil Hayden's
SAGAMORE SPIRIT CASK STRENGTH RYE

A relatively newcomer to the category, Maryland-based Sagamore Rye is coming in strong.

There are three expressions: cask strength, Sagamore Double Cask Reserve, and its core 83-proof rye. What makes this particularly noteworthy, is its unexpectedly complex flavor profiles. With ryes, you expect spice bombs—which you will get. But very rarely does a rye exhibit a depth of flavor that encompasses a medley of citrus, deeply dark chocolate, with a hint of dried fruit. Beyond that, it's truly a versatile spirit: one that can be enjoyed with a variety of dishes. (I like drinking my dram with sea salt chocolate or incredibly rich gelato or even with a medium rare lamb chop with mint jelly.)

MAKER'S MARK SEARED BU 1-3

If you don't already have one of these in your collection, I firmly suggest that you should get out there and go whiskey hunting. There are only 1,400 bottles of Maker's Mark Seared BU 1-3 and the expression certainly deserves a spot in your top shelf. Why? Because it's radical in its approach. The bourbon comes to life via 10 experimental virgin seared and *sous-vide* (yes, you heard that right) French oak staves. The notes and aromas of the spirit is quite extraordinary: a little sweeter, deeper, and darker. Initially, it was developed to perhaps join the coterie of the Maker's Mark Private Select program—but it won't be the case.

This special bottling will not exceed the original allocation. And take note: It's only available at the distillery and select Kentucky retailers—so if you're a devoted bourbon collector, now would be a good time to book a flight to the Bluegrass State.

