JAMES E. PEPPER

‘This is a Kentucky brand of the future.’
-Fred Minnick

Year Founded: 2008

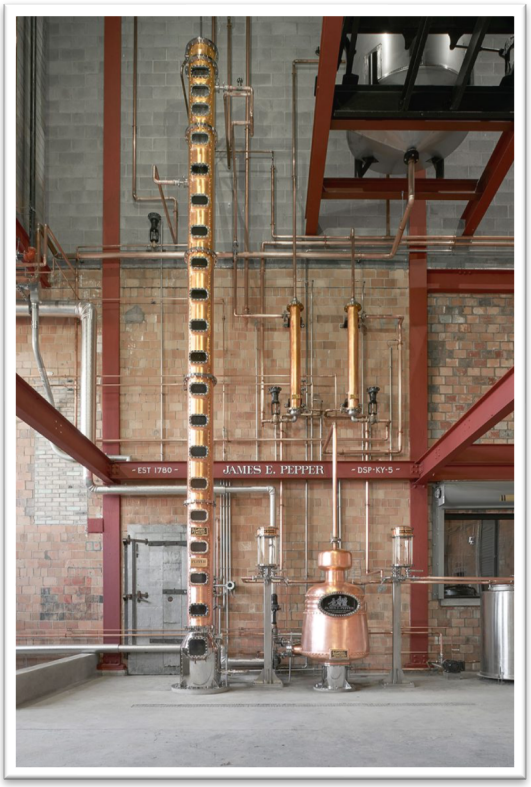
Region: Lexington, Kentucky

Owner: Amir Peay

Known For: The resurrection of the iconic James E. Pepper Whiskey brand.

Cool Fact: James E. Pepper whiskey was the choice of Presidents and statesmen for over 200 years in this country. It was ‘Born with the Revolution’.

The Pepper family brand of whiskey is an iconic Kentucky whiskey brand initially produced during the American Revolution and continued through 1967. The family built and operated two main distilleries: first founding the site that today hosts the Woodford Reserve Distillery, and later the James E. Pepper Distillery in Lexington. In the late 1960s the bourbon industry hit hard times, and both the brand and distillery in Lexington were abandoned for over half a century. In 2008 the brand was relaunched by whiskey entrepreneur Amir Peay. A decade-long campaign of thorough historical research and collection of historic materials was used to retell the lost story of this iconic American whiskey brand and to distill new stocks of "Pepper" whiskey (visit the History Page to learn more). To initiate the relaunch of the brand, partnerships with the Lawrenceburg Distillery in Indiana and the Bardstown Bourbon Co. in Kentucky were formed. Today some of our whiskies contain whiskies distilled at those distilleries. After a multi-year construction effort, the historic James E. Pepper Distillery—which after fifty years of neglect had fallen into a terrible state of disrepair—was completely rebuilt and restored. In December 2017, the distillery once again began distilling whiskey using the same historic recipe as when it shut down in 1967.





‘1776’ Straight Rye

Back in the day, Col. J.E.P. nicknamed his whiskey “Old 1776,” an homage to the Revolutionary-era recipes it followed. James E. Pepper 1776 Straight Rye Whiskey rejuvenates the Colonel’s “Pure Rye” recipe – the precise grain bills for which are laid-out in an historic letter, written by the Colonel and recently discovered during the extensive research that went into the Pepper brand’s relaunch. The Rye has a 90% rye mash bill, is bottled at 100 Proof in dark, vintage-style cork-stopped bottles, and is not chill-filtered. Its deep copper hue exudes leather, oak and caramel, is heady with spice and sweetened with a splash of clover honey. Pepper (appropriately) and clove command a flavor that’s chased by honey-sweetened blackberries. The finish is laced with peppered chocolate shavings long, and quite smooth for 50% ABV. Light citrus lingers with vanilla and mixed berry long after the initial finish fades.

Double Gold Medal – San Fran World Spirits Comp. 2019

Gold Medal – New York World Wine & Spirits Comp. 2018

Gold Medal – San Fran World Spirits Comp. 2016



‘1776’ Straight Bourbon

100 Proof - Not Chill-Filtered - Over 38% Rye in the Mash Bill. Rich Bourbon Sweetness and Rye Spice; vanilla, honey, chocolate and cloves. This Bourbon carries no age statement but has a solid structure to it. Modest wood notes here, with restrained yet polished sweetness. You get less of the typical vanilla notes but more citrus in their stead, a refined and balanced experience that provides a touch of racy red pepper, baking spices, and a little gingerbread on the finish.

Double Gold Medal – San Fran World Spirits Comp. 2019



Barrel Proof Decanter Bourbon

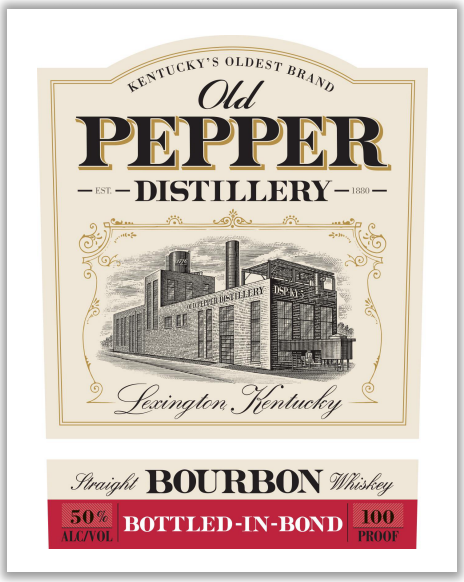
94 Points - ‘The 100 Best American Whiskeys’ - Forbes 2023

The rich history of our distillery and the legacy of Colonel James E. Pepper is celebrated in our newest product — James E. Pepper Barrel Proof Decanter. This custom bottle is a re-creation of a decanter from our distillery in the 1940s. We are thrilled and honored to continue the legacy of the Pepper family.

Unique blends of our oldest stocks and distinct mash bills, consisting of Corn, Rye, Malted Barley and Malted Rye; Aged in new toasted and charred barrels made from Kentucky oak, air seasoned a minimum of 18-24 months; Water source from the historic distillery well. Distilled and bottled at the historic James E. Pepper Distillery. Average age of whiskies is 5.5 years; bottled straight from the barrel, uncut and unfiltered. A balanced and complex flavor profile, tasting notes include toasted oak, walnuts, marzipan, dried dark fruits, citrus peel, creamy vanilla and nutmeg.

‘The most exciting bourbon for me in 2024. Absolutely delicious. One of the best bourbons of 2023. Once people start getting this product on their radar, and especially at the price point they are at, James E. Pepper is going to fly off of the shelves. So, get on it while you can. Their prices are not egregious. And seriously, the Decanter series, this is a beautiful bottle.’ - Fred Minnick

'The whiskies coming of age now are some of the finest from any American Whiskey producer. This Bourbon is arguably the most impressive you will find at this age.' - Astor Wines, NY, 2023



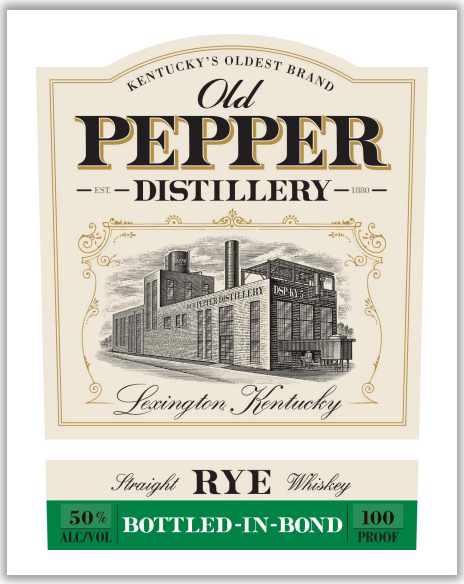
Old Pepper Bourbon Bottled in Bond

Bottled-In-Bond Limited Releases:

Unique blends of distinct mash bills.
Aged in new toasted and charred barrels made from Kentucky Oak
Air seasoned a minimum of 18-24 months
Water source from the historic distillery well

Bourbon: Earl Grey tea, vanilla, lemon, berries and oak wood.
There is a nice buttered toffee, chocolate and black pepper spice that comes through joining blackberries and citrus.

Double Gold – New York World Spirits Competition



Old Pepper Rye Bottled in Bond

Bottled-In-Bond Limited Releases:

Unique blends of distinct mash bills.
Aged in new toasted and charred barrels made from Kentucky Oak
Air seasoned a minimum of 18-24 months
Water source from the historic distillery well

Rye: Dark fruits like raisins and plums, cinnamon and allspice and oak wood flavors.
The dried cranberry brings out notes of chocolate and blackberries.

'30 Best Rye Whiskeys to Drink' - VinePair 2024
Double Gold – New York World Spirits Competition