

They Put Class in The Bourbon Classic -



Bourbon's newest event, The Bourbon Classic, held in Louisville, KY on March 22nd and 23rd was a resounding success. We began the event at Saturday afternoon's Welcoming Ceremony. Eight master distillers spent a few minutes each at center stage answering questions. While most of the major distilleries were represented, noticeably absent was bourbon legend Jimmy Russell from Wild Turkey. Questions focused on a myriad of topics such as: "What is the 'sweet spot' for aging barrels?"; "What is the investment, in time and resources, for 'experimental projects'?"; and "Why are there no women master distillers?"

At the conclusion of the 90 minute event, there was a brief intermission before the first round of breakout sessions. "Balance and Flavor, Bourbon and Chocolate: Creating the Perfect Pairings", "How the Barrel Influences the Bottle: Exploring Maturation and Bourbon Production", "Entertaining with Bourbon Tastings", and "The Evolution of Bourbon" were on the agenda. Having heard many views on bourbon maturation, and since we were two of the lucky few to see the earliest iteration of Bernie Lubber's "Evolution of Bourbon", we chose "Entertaining with Bourbon Tastings", presented by John Shutt and Blanton's.

The session was extremely well done. Tailored for the home entertainer looking to add bourbon to their repertoire, Ancient Age, Ancient Age 10 Year, and Blanton's were in the glass. Plenty of spring water, almonds, and chocolate were on hand to add a variety of food pairings to the bourbon tasting experience. John Shutt was engaging, with concise delivery of some excellent suggestions. Top advice from the session included: 1. Know your audience, and cater your selections to the expected guests; and 2. Serve your guests a cocktail before the tasting begins. This will to: 1. Ease the mood; 2. Calm the apprehension of any novices to bourbon tasting events; and 3. Prepare the palate for the main event. Of course, neutral crackers and light cheeses should be available to clear the palate between samples.



The next round of breakouts included: "Culinary Tips for Bourbon on the Plate", "Making a Splash: New and Noteworthy Bourbon Trends", "Crafting the Perfect Cocktails (and Serving them Right)", and "Lives, Legends, and Legacies: An Interactive Conversation about the Bourbon Barons". Again, there was no dispute; we took our seats at "Lives, Legends, and Legacies" to immerse ourselves in a wealth of knowledge from noted bourbon authority Chuck Crowder; Lincoln Henderson, the patriarch of the family behind Angel's Envy; third generation employee of Buffalo Trace Distillery, Freddie Johnson; and Michael Veach, one of the foremost historians on bourbon at the Filson Historical Society.



The towering Chuck Crowder moderated the discussion as each man fielded questions about the rich history of bourbon and the pioneers of the industry. As the session concluded, Chuck Crowder exhibited the open, approachable nature of those throughout the industry, as he answered our many questions regarding his experiences and the industry that has drawn so many, from all over the country, to the Kentucky Center for the Arts.

As we exited this session, we found the lobby lined with table after table, each representing a player in the industry, from legendary distillers to the newest boutique blenders. In several key points were tables lined with the finest food available, not only in Louisville, but in any of the largest metropolitan venues in the world. With an unmistakable southern flair, dishes such as corn pudding, shrimp and grits, and pork and beef tenderloin would never the less be at home in the finest restaurants in New York. The gastronomic offerings throughout the well-appointed lobby were irresistible, so much so that, by the time we found our way to the VIP Lounge, sponsored by Buffalo Trace, we could hardly eat the jumbo shrimp cocktail, crab cakes, or roasted asparagus. Of course, we had no trouble making room for the E.H. Taylor Small Batch and Single Barrel offerings at the bar.



The evening culminated in an after-hours party sponsored by Four Roses, where several master mixologists were crafting signature cocktails. Fortunately, one or two were more than willing to put the Four Roses Small Batch in one glass, and the mixers in the other glass!

Our weekend did not end with The Classic on Saturday night, as we were excited to accept the generous offer for a private tour of a distillery on Sunday morning. That immersive experience developed into a private tasting at yet another distillery later that afternoon. Come back soon to read more about an amazing day with Willet & Heaven Hill distilleries, and a pair of the nicest guys (and our newest friends) from Portland, Oregon: Alan Davis, proprietor of Produce Row Café and Tommie Klus, curator of The Multnomah Whiskey Library.

We've said it before, and we'll say it again: for an inaugural event, the Bourbon Classic exhibited rich history. Far from high-brow, the warm, inviting atmosphere was never-the-less a four star experience from start to finish. Anyone looking to debut an industry breakout gala would do well to use this event as the perfect model.

- **The Bourbon Guys**