

## Garrison Brothers Distillery Makes First Texas Bourbon Whiskey.

**T**he Texas Hill Country west of Austin is a beautiful part of the Lone Star State. Though more arid than usual after three years of drought, it is a gently rolling landscape of hardy plants and even hardier people.

The region's most famous son is Lyndon Baines Johnson. Not far from Johnson City, where the thirty-sixth president was born and raised, and even nearer to his famed LBJ Ranch is the town of Hye, Texas, where something unheard of is happening.

Dan Garrison is making Texas Bourbon Whiskey.

Texans have consumed prodigious amounts of bourbon whiskey and Texas is still a huge bourbon market, but bourbon has never been made there until now.

After obtaining the necessary licenses and building his small distillery in 2007, Garrison began to research different recipes and methods. He traveled to Kentucky to tap into the know-how of the famous bourbon-makers there. He read books and magazine articles. He bought equipment and supplies. He had his water tested.

He always intended to make bourbon, and do it right, but he also intended to do it his own way, Texas-style.

Unlike most micro-distilleries, Garrison Brothers does not make vodka, rum, gin, absinthe, brandy, *eau de vie*, or malt whiskey. Because he only makes bourbon whiskey, which needs to age, he has nothing to sell at the moment except T-shirts. He hasn't decided for sure yet when he will release his product, but he doesn't want to sell a work-in-progress either. "When it's ready," is all he will promise.

After a period of experimentation to find a recipe he liked, Garrison settled on one about a year ago and began to make that, and only that, on a full-time, six-days-a-week schedule. He is making a wheated bourbon.

By December of 2008, Garrison had filled 100 barrels. They are not standard 53-gallon bourbon barrels, however. Most hold ten gallons. A few are larger. Still, a thousand gallons is something. It sure represents a lot of work for Garrison and his two full-time employees, Fred Koch and Donniss Todd.

Every week, a few more filled barrels go into the barrel barns for aging. Currently, the barrel barns are two steel shipping containers, but a

*"How soon will Garrison Brothers Bourbon hit the market? 'When it's ready,' is all he will promise."*

proper barn is about to be built. The distillery building itself is a steel barn decorated with cedar on the outside and posters on the inside. It has a loft on one side, where grain is stored. The grain mill is up there too. It uses gravity to deliver grist to the main floor. Under the loft there is a refrigerator and a picnic table.

On the other side of the single, undivided room is the mash cooker and fermenters. The still is in the center. The boiler is out back, water tanks are out front.

Ground corn, wheat and barley malt are cooked with water in a stainless steel pot, then transferred to the plastic fermenters. A dry yeast is used. So far they haven't needed to cool their fermenters but this winter they did warm them up a bit.

They go through about 15,000 pounds of corn a month.

The Copper Cowboy is what they call their still. It is a hybrid with a pot on the bottom and a rectification column on top. Built by Louisville's Vendome Copper & Brass Works, it had two previous owners, Wild Turkey and Buffalo Trace. It's a beauty.

To succeed with consumers in any business, you need a good product and a good story. In addition to his Texas location, Garrison's story includes a commitment to sustainability. He sources his raw materials from Texas growers, uses only organically-grown grain, and is very careful about his water use. He has a well but also collects and purifies rainwater, and recycles process water. Water is a crucial ingredient in whiskey-making. It must especially be iron-free. Just like Kentucky, the Texas Hill Country has a thin layer of soil over limestone.

Garrison has been attempting to grow his own winter wheat, but hasn't had enough rain. No doubt he will keep trying.

How soon will Garrison Brothers Bourbon hit the market? The use of small barrels will affect aging, as will the hot and dry Texas climate. After two years in wood, the product may be called straight bourbon whiskey. In Kentucky, whiskey is seldom bottled at less than four years old, but Texas is not Kentucky. Building up an inventory of maturing whiskey is the biggest obstacle for any start-up whiskey business. When to bottle will be Garrison's next big decision.

The first whiskey put down will reach its straight bourbon milestone in about a year and unlike many micro-distilleries that may go months between batches of a particular product, Garrison will constantly have maturing whiskey in his pipeline.

Dan Garrison has a good story. That part of the equation is covered. He also seems to be doing everything right to ensure that his product meets the same high standard. We look forward to the next act. ←