

Title:

Jack Daniels an American Whiskey

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Summary:

The Jack Daniel's legend starts with the eponymous founder of the distillery, who allegedly owned his first distillery at the tender age of 13, having learned his skill at the knee of Dan Call

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Article Body:

The Jack Daniel's legend starts with the eponymous founder of the distillery, who allegedly owned his first distillery at the tender age of 13, having learned his skill at the knee of Dan Call - one of those moon shining preachers who pepper the history of American whiskey. Jack was a clever operator, but it's hard to imagine that he envisaged his brand would one day become the most famous American whiskey of all.

These days it's Jimmy Bradford who wearing Jack's shoes. The epitome of a Southern gentleman (unlike the short-tempered Jack, who died after kicking a safe in his office), he's been looking after the whiskey for 32 years, which, he drawls laconically: 'probably gives me some credibility to talk about distilling'.

They make whiskey slightly differently in Tennessee, though it's not - as many people think - sour-mashing that sets it apart. All Bourbon and Tennessee whiskey is made by the sour mash technique: the real difference lies in the Lincoln County Process, or charcoal mellowing, which all Tennessee whiskey must undergo.

For Jimmy, it's the combination of the limestone water drawn from Cave Spring and the mellowing that helps to give Jack Daniel's its personality. The mellowing involves dripping the new spirit though a 10-foot vat of maple charcoal, which leaches some fusel oils and esters from the spirit, while giving it a distinct softness.

There's only one mashbill - 80 per cent corn, 12 per cent rye and 8 per cent

barley malt - for all the Jack Daniel's brands; meaning that the sole difference between such diverse products as Green Label, Black Label and Gentleman Jack lies in the length of time they have been aged and where they have been warehoused. With a spread of traditional warehouses, the blenders can mingle whiskeys from different sites and floors to make up the desired product, and with 7,500 barrels a week being put into the warehouses, they have plenty of choice.

That figure gives an idea of the sheer scale of the operation. Owner Brown-Forman may, rightly, play up the Sleepy Hollow-type imagery surrounding the small town of Lynchburg, but don't be fooled: this is a bang-up-to-date distillery applying old techniques in a highly efficient and modern manner. Jack may recognize the site, but he'd be astounded by the three huge beer stills and intrigued by the way in which the vapour is fed directly into the doubler, making it a refined type of single distillation.

But you don't think of Jack Daniel's in production terms. The visitors who pour into the distillery aren't that interested in mellowing, distillation techniques or the pros and cons of mechanization. They come because they feel part of a family. When an Australian winemaker I know went to America for the first time, the two places at the top of her 'must-see' list were Graceland and the Jack Daniel's distillery. It's that kind of loyalty that makes Jack an American icon.

These days, Jack Daniel's is as recognizable a symbol of American rock 'n' roll rebelliousness as Harley Davidson. It hasn't gone out and developed a bad-boy image, but clutching one of those square bottles with the black label brings out the rebel in even the most mild-mannered accountant, and makes him feel, if only for one drink, the equal of Keith Richards or Dennis Hopper.

You would think that being in charge of such an iconic product would prey on Jimmy's mind, but there's no chance of that. He approaches this onerous responsibility with the same pleasant, measured good humour as he does the rest of life. 'It's a pleasure to assist in making this product. Just to drive in every day and see Jack standing there down the holler gives me a sense of pride'.

#### TASTING NOTES

Jack Daniel's Black Label 80°proof Very sweet and clean, with a touch of liquorice, smoke and caramel. A good mouthful with a great, sweet finish. \* \* \*

Gentleman Jack 80°proof

Even sweeter, with black fruit and a sooty, rich finish.

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