

HOW HERITAGE STORYTELLING AT DISTILLERIES CREATES A COMPETITIVE
ADVANTAGE ON THE BOURBON MARKET

A Project presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

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MAY 2022

Acknowledgements

I leave Mizzou feeling fulfilled, excited and grateful for such a wonderful experience. Thank you, dad, for introducing me to the fascinating world of bourbon. Thank you, Jim, Jamie and Jon, for allowing me the space and time to explore a topic and industry I have been so curious about. Every single person I interviewed was both jealous and impressed that I was conducting my research on such a unique topic. While not every part was easy, the fact that I was exploring something I was so passionate about made it feel like anything but work. I am excited to share this research with other bourbon lovers and continue exploring such a fantastic industry. I hope everyone gets at least one opportunity in their life to explore a topic that makes them as excited and curious as this did for me. As I wrote in my professional analysis, cheers to good bourbon, great people and the stories that unite the two.

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Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

Enjoying a glass of bourbon can be an art. The warm liquid touches all your senses, from the rich smell to the golden-brown color and the smooth heat as it hits your taste buds. Some of the best memories can come from enjoying a rare glass of bourbon with friends. My dad has a collection of over 50 bottles of bourbon that sit in the sunroom at my parents' house. His friends enjoy chatting over shared pours of their most recent find and I have begun my own collection. We are not alone in this love for collecting and drinking America's native spirit: over the past two decades, the popularity of bourbon has skyrocketed. The \$8.6 billion industry has a following of novel, loyal and avid consumers that are willing to pay a pretty penny for a bottle. The "bourbon boom" as many have coined it, has led to new distilleries popping up around the country and brands trying to differentiate their product from the rest. During and at once following prohibition, people reached for whatever they could get their hands on—but we are no longer in such a drought. As the market has continued to evolve, the need for updated marketing strategies has become more important. Due to the rich history bourbon has in the United States, many distilleries turn to heritage storytelling as a marketing strategy. Heritage storytelling is built on the brand's past, embodied in its values, and with a specific tone (Aime, 2021). Whether it is family heritage, recipe heritage, ethnic heritage or other, there is always a story when it comes to bourbon. Heritage storytelling often is the driving force behind a distillery's mission and purpose—you can see evidence of this on brand websites, facility tours, and sometimes even on the bottle itself. What makes the bourbon marketplace unique and complex is the constraints in which bottles can be distributed. State liquor laws and the three-tiered system are measures the government has put in place to protect public safety and collect tax revenue. Distilleries (top tier) allocate their product to wholesalers (middle tier) who then distribute it to retailers for sale to

consumers. Distilleries are marketing to consumers to drive up demand, but allocation from the state and wholesale distributors determine who gets what bottle and how many. To make this even more complicated, there is an illegal secondary market that people turn to when they cannot find the bottle they are looking for on the shelf. Selling alcohol without a license is prohibited in the U.S., proving how desperate people are to trade and buy a rare bottle. The complicated relationship between marketing and consumer demand is what makes the bourbon market both unique and fascinating—not to mention the long-game nature of the industry. Bourbon ages anywhere from 2 to 25 years, which means marketing for the product takes many forms and it's hard to predict who the target consumer will be by then—or if people will even still care. This research sits at the intersection between bourbon heritage, marketing and consumer demand. Despite earlier studies that focus on the wine or craft spirit industry, there is none specifically focusing on bourbon and the role heritage storytelling plays in the marketplace. This gap in research has resulted in these questions:

RQ 1: How do distilleries believe they make an impact on consumer demand through heritage storytelling?

RQ 2: Do distilleries believe this marketing strategy makes a similar impact on the secondary market?

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In 2019, Kentucky distillers alone filled more than 1.7 million barrels of bourbon—nearly four times greater than the total in 1999 (Kentucky Distillers Association). What used to be considered an “old man’s drink” is now appealing to the 25 to 54-year-old range according to an article from Vine Pair (2020). Age is not the only bourbon demographic that has shifted; according to the same article, while white males make up 78% of bourbon drinkers in the U.S., consumption among non-white drinkers has increased across the board. The number of Black or African-Americans who drink bourbon was up 22% from 2013 to 2020, while the number of Asians who drink bourbon was up 36% (Kentucky Distillers Association). One of the biggest downsides to this rise in popularity is the availability of products to consumers. Liquor laws and the three-tiered system for distribution makes it hard for consumers to find bottles that once used to populate the liquor store shelves. In recent years, consumers have been turning to secondary markets—including online auction sites and private groups on social media channels-- to find rare bottles of bourbon that are hard to come by in typical brick-and-mortar stores. Selling alcohol without a license is prohibited in the U.S., making these transactions illegal. How is this illegal market changing the way distilleries are marketing to consumers? How do distilleries feel about this illegal buying and trading? In addition to investigating how heritage storytelling impacts consumer demand, this research will try to answer these questions.

Principles of Storytelling Theory

The interviews and structure of this research will be conducted through the lens of consumer storytelling theory—specifically heritage storytelling. Storytelling is the art of telling a brand’s story, by using emotions and images, to make consumers adhere to brand values or buy the product (Amălăncei, 2021). Rather than replacing the brand story, it supplements those ideas

by providing some depth and context to the consumer. According to Gerber (2013) storytelling “designates the brand story, but it is not confused with the story, yet it is based on it and involves communication objectives, a context and public target analysis, a strategy and evaluation tools”. The evaluation tools Gerber addresses will be an essential part of this research to show how the stories distilleries tell drive consumer demand. Using stories to tell a brand story is “one of the most powerful tools available to effective communicators” (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2017), which is why many companies use it for marketing their product. Brand-consumer storytelling and pleasure outcome builds on the idea that “people need help in finding what makes them happy, and this is where marketing comes in” (Bagozzi and Nataraajan, 2000). Storytelling is an essential tool in promoting products, especially in a well-saturated marketplace, such as the bourbon industry. The story of a brand helps differentiate and position the distillery, which is important due to the similar nature of the product being sold.

Telling historical stories to consumers can create brand engagement and loyalty (Dodd, 1995). Heritage storytelling is built on the brand’s past, embodied in its values, and with a specific tone (Aime, 2021). This nods to the concept of ‘heritage brands’, where with careful ‘brand stewardship’, a company’s heritage could ‘be harnessed and employed as a strategic resource’ making it a ‘key component of its brand identity and positioning’ and providing opportunities to communicate persuasive stories to potential customers (Urde et al., 2007). In the bourbon industry, heritage is the basis of every distillery. From the first distiller to prohibition to crafting unique mash blends, heritage is not just the roots of a bourbon brand, but also the limbs. This research will look at how the use of heritage storytelling as a marketing strategy at distilleries drives consumer demand for bourbon.

Heritage storytelling research in the alcohol industry

There have not been many academic studies conducted that focus specifically on heritage storytelling at bourbon distilleries, yet it is everywhere in the industry. If you take a tour of a distillery, you would hear stories of heritage and tradition throughout each step of the process. If you visit a distillery website, chances are they have an “Our Story” page that details how their brand came to be. The same is true for the wine industry; Strickland et al. (2013) found that family heritage is a legitimate marketing technique for “New World” wineries. A study from Frost, Laing, Strickland, Smith & Maguire looked at how wineries use heritage storytelling at the cellar-door to seek a competitive advantage in tourism (2020). The study found that heritage gave marketing value for the wineries and many of the participants said such storytelling techniques give “authenticity” to their brand. Another study from Williams, Atwal & Bryson (2020) investigated how craft spirits distilleries in Chicago use elements of storytelling narrative as a part of a storytelling marketing strategy. The study found seven categories of storytelling themes: craft, innovation, origins, myth, celebrity, provenance and collectability. The research I am proposing will be focusing on the “origins and myth” categories and specifically how that is translated through stories of history. Like the wine tourism study, Williams et al. (2020) found that storytelling consisted of functional and emotional benefits that promoted authenticity of the brands. The conclusion that both studies make is that storytelling leads to a more meaningful, valued customer experience. Bourbon is marketed as an experience just as much as it is a product, so it makes sense to assume that storytelling only enhances the customer experience.

Jones and Comfort (2019) conducted a study looking at storytelling in the beverage industry as a whole. Within the research, they looked at Suntory and Diageo, two of the largest brewing and distilling company groups. They found that in the stories companies were telling, while they discussed a variety of themes, they all have a very corporate stamp. This will be

something to note and look for in the heritage stories I look at during this research. Authenticity is a theme that appeared in nearly every article regarding storytelling in the alcohol industry. If a story holds truth, then it gives the brand authenticity, but if there seems to be a fallacy in the story that is being told, a brand can lose that trust. When looking at how heritage storytelling drives consumer demand, it will be important to identify how authentic the story being told is and what the distillery is doing to ensure that the story is being portrayed as so.

Most of the current relevant research is focused on sectors of the alcohol industry outside of bourbon, and the research that is done on bourbon focuses on general marketing strategies. My research will fill this needed gap in the bourbon distillery sector, looking at how storytelling with the purpose of establishing heritage drives consumer demand both directly and indirectly on the market.

Heritage and bourbon

“Bourbon is more American than apple pie, existed before baseball, and has built more roads, schools, and government infrastructure than any non-petroleum domestic product,” wrote Fred Minnick in *Bourbon: The rise, fall and rebirth of an American Whiskey*. Today, 60% of the average bottle of bourbon goes to tax; thus, bourbon builds schools, roads and government infrastructure (Minnick, 2016). Aside from being a drink to enjoy, the meaning of bourbon in American history sets the foundation for this research.

In September 1991, the Kentucky Bourbon Festival began. Sixteen years later, the U.S. Senate declared September 2007 “National Bourbon Heritage Month” signifying the importance of America’s Native Spirit (Minnick, 2020). The resolution stated, “Whereas the history of bourbon-making is interwoven with the history of the United States, from the first settlers of Kentucky in the 1700s, who began the bourbon-making process, to the 1,000 families and

farmers distilling bourbon in Kentucky by the 1800s...The Senate recognizes bourbon as ‘America’s Native Spirit’ and reinforces its heritage and tradition and its place in the history of the United states.” It was a resolution for only one year, 2007, but the celebration has not died. Every year since 1991, the Kentucky Bourbon Festival has brought bourbon fanatics from across the world to Bardstown, KY to sip, smell and celebrate America’s Native Spirit. Bourbon has been around since long before prohibition and its unofficial headquarters is in Kentucky—where corn, the base ingredient for bourbon, grows particularly well.

For most of the 19th century, marketing of bourbon was mostly done by word of mouth and through newspaper advertisements (Bourbon Veach). When E.H. Taylor, Jr entered the distilling business in 1870, distillers relied on customers recognizing their brand name on the barrel head at saloons and taverns. Taylor changed the game by customizing his barrel heads with intricate art work and brass hoops to stand out from the rest. He then pursued written endorsements from whiskey doctors and Civil War Generals (Bourbon Veach). Once glass bottle production was mechanized and bottling the spirit became economically feasible, embossing and label designs became a marketing tool for brands. As marketing product became more important, brands turned to sex, drunkenness and racism to catch the eye of consumers. During this time, women were featured in seductive poses on bar art, newspaper ads featured drunkards and alcoholics, and advertisements depicted Black people as either poor, rural hicks, or the servants to “Southern Gentlemen” (Bourbon Veach). Once Prohibition hit in 1920, the industry realized they needed some regulation on marketing their products, which led to “cleaner” advertisements. In 1996, the American liquor industry ended its voluntary ban on advertising liquor products on television and radio (Elliott, 1996). The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS), came to the decision after Seagram Company, the nation’s second-largest seller of distilled spirits

at the time, began defying the ban that had been in effect since 1936 for radio and 1948 for television. This decision likely created opportunity for brands to reach a broader, more diverse audience that they were unable to prior. Today, DISCUS, the Kentucky Distillers' Association (KDA) and other organizations still maintain regulations on bourbon advertising and marketing (Bourbon Veach). With a higher demand for product and more distilleries popping up all the time, brands are continuing to evolve their marketing strategies.

A new meaning of heritage

It is important to note that until recently, the heritage storytelling strategies embodied by the bourbon industry were very white man focused (Risen, 2019). The typical story that a distillery tells mentions how the original distiller (a white man) learned to distill bourbon and what makes that distillate different from competitors. Whether it was Jack Daniels, Jim Beam, Rev. Elijah Craig, or Henry McKenna, the “stories” are a variation of the same concept. Just as society has changed to evolve and become more inclusive, so has the bourbon industry. In April 2019, Samara Rivers founded the Black Bourbon Society. The Black Bourbon Society aims to “bridge the gap between the spirits industry and African American bourbon enthusiasts through social media platforms, brand-partnerships and exclusive excursions” (Black Bourbon Society). Uncle Nearest Premium Whiskey, founded in 2017, is the best-selling African American owned and founded spirit brand (Liu, 2021). The founder, Fawn Weaver, created her company in honor of Nearest Green, nicknamed ‘Uncle Nearest’ who taught Jack Daniel how to make whiskey. Uncle Nearest is an example of a distillery whose story is based on ethnic heritage—a sector that is predicted to grow in the future.

The Three-Tiered System and Liquor Control

To really grasp the complexity of marketing within the industry, it is important to understand how the process goes from maturation in a barrel to on the shelf at your corner liquor store. When Prohibition was repealed in 1933, the federal government passed responsibility of regulating alcohol to states. Most states sought to increase public safety and collect tax revenue by introducing a three-tier system: alcohol production, distribution and retail (Barton, 2020). To make things even more complex, no entity may occupy more than one tier, meaning a brewery cannot own a bar and a distillery can't sell directly to a liquor store. The federal government awards licenses to producers (top tier), as well as distributors and wholesalers (middle tier). Retail licenses are awarded by the states (bottom tier). The producers consist of a few companies that own the majority of distilleries. A depiction of this ownership can be seen in Figure 1.

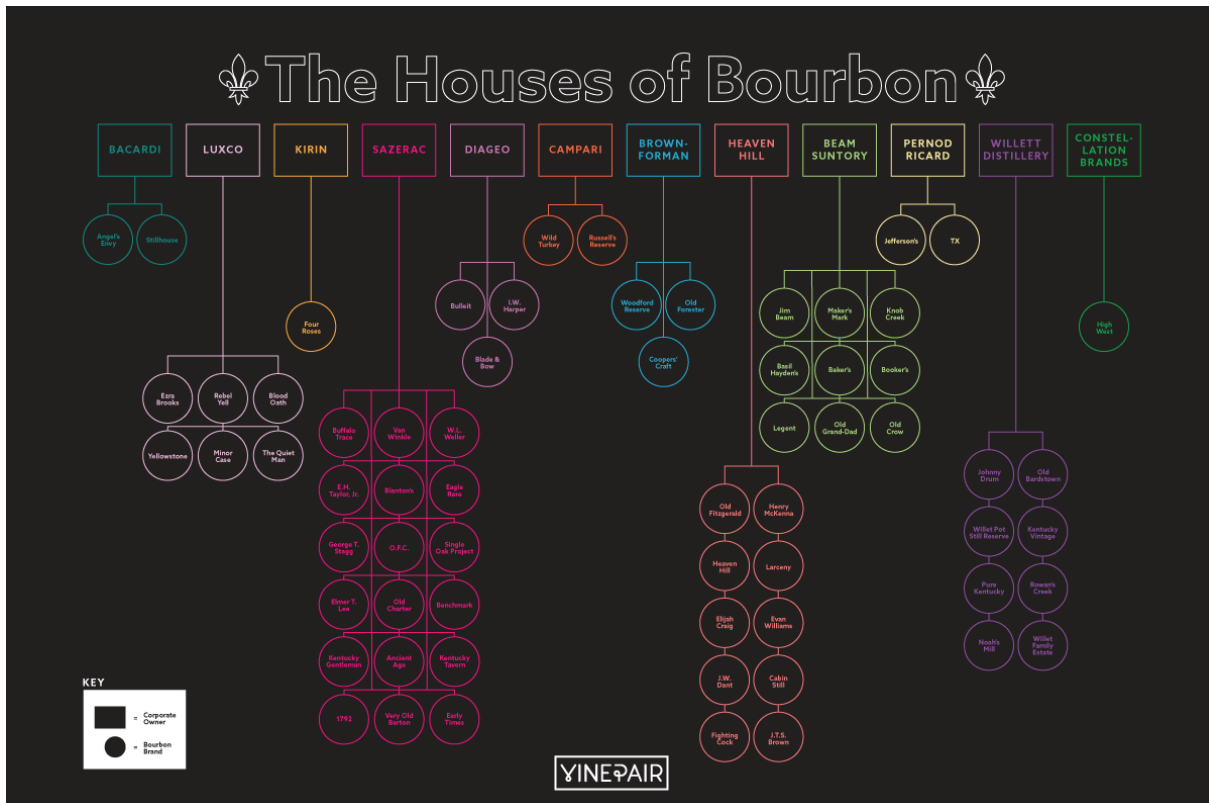


Figure 1

States also decide how they want to regulate distribution, local taxation, and sales of alcohol. Some states are more restrictive than others, stricter states, or “control states”, maintain a monopoly over distribution--there are 17 control states and jurisdictions in the U.S. These states include: Alabama, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, Wyoming (NABCA). Bourbons with limited supply, such as single barrel or small batch bottles, are allocated based on demand, per the distillery (Barton, 2020). For example, New York might get more bottles than Ohio. However, once the bottles are passed to the distributor, the distillery loses control and the distributor decides which stores and bars get bottles, and how many they receive. This allocation system is why certain bottles may be more accessible and cheaper in one state compared to another. The three-tiered system is fairly standard across the country, although some states make exceptions for small craft producers. Many states allow craft breweries to operate brewpubs and taprooms where they can sell their product without having to go through a distributor—this has increasingly been extended to craft distilleries as well (Barton, 2020).

It is important to note that there has been a recent push to allow direct-to-consumer shipping for alcohol producers in the US. Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of e-commerce, the liquor industry wanted a way to better meet increasing consumer demand. In April 2021, the Kentucky House of Representatives passed House Bill 415, allowing the use of third-party fulfillment centers to proficiently ship bottles; set a level playing field for state tax collection on distillery gift shop sales; and create guidelines for shipping alcohol samples to media, business and marketing partners, among other measures (Kentucky Distillers Association).

Consumer demand

According to an article from Vine Pair (2020), when the KDA founded the Kentucky Bourbon Trail in 1999, it launched with less than 10 distilleries—in 2020 bourbon tourists would visit 38 across the state thanks to the Trail. In 2018, 1.4 million tourists visited distilleries along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail. What has now been labeled as the “bourbon boom”, consumers who are buying bourbon have not only grown, but diversified as well. The number of Black or African-Americans who drink bourbon was up 22% from 2013 to 2020, while the number of Asians who drink bourbon was up 36% (Kentucky Distillers Association). While there is no research that specifically looks at the cause of this growth, Eric Gregory, president of the KDA, has four key factors he hypothesizes sparked this boom (Vine Pair, 2020). The first factor was the introduction of small-batch and single-barrel bourbons in the late ‘80s and ‘90s. This gave credibility to bourbon as being a high-quality spirit. Secondly, a global export market emerged in the mid- ‘90s. The signing of the NAFTA agreement and the EU agreement leveled the playing field with Scotch whiskey and other global whiskeys, pushing American bourbon as a global export. The third factor attributes the rise in cocktail culture at the turn of the century, which exploded with the resurgence of classic bourbon cocktails, such as the Old Fashioned. In the Vine Pair article (2020), Gregory refers to this time period as the “‘Mad Men’ effect”, giving a nod to the popular TV show. The last factor Gregory credits is the rise in bourbon tourism. The KDA looked toward their wine counterparts in California wine country to inspire the Kentucky Bourbon Trail. Gregory said this sparked popularity because “People, especially younger drinkers, crave authenticity. The ability to visit a distillery and put your finger in a mash tub, taste whiskey from the barrel, and see the spirit being bottled provides that experience.” This research will explore a factor Gregory and other researchers do not mention, heritage storytelling, and its impact on consumer demand.

Black Market bourbon

As the demand for certain brands of bourbon has grown, supply and allocation has not been what it once was. That \$50 bottle of your favorite bourbon you bought at the gas station down the street? Now you can't find it—and if you do, it's \$200. To fulfill the rising demand, Facebook, Craigslist and eBay all became the home to the buying, selling and trading of bourbon bottles. The only problem? It's illegal—selling alcohol without a license is illegal in the U.S. The three-tiered system and state liquor laws are in place to provide some control over how product is distributed—this illicit secondary market goes around that. Rather than going through the hard work of “hunting” for a rare bourbon, people turn to online groups to do it for them. The bottles that are being sold on this market are going for outrageous prices, yet people are willing to pay it to get their hands on a rare bottle. To make this even crazier, there are websites such as “Bottle Blue Book” and “The Bourbon Brown Book” that track secondary sales and list the prices bottles are going for on the illicit market. If that sounds like stocks—it's because many of the buyers and sellers on these platforms treat their bottles like an asset. Lennon and Shohfi (2021) investigated the secondary market and assessed bourbon's potential as an alternative asset. The crazy thing—they found that secondary markets work quite well. According to their findings, “When studying bourbon's investment performance, we find that bourbon returns have low correlation with stocks, bonds, and commodities, provide solid inflation protection, and appear to enhance the risk-adjusted returns of traditional portfolios”.

The online platforms that house secondary sales began to catch on and many, such as eBay, began getting rid of any groups or sales they believed were illicit. According to one article (Evans, 2020), in order to get around the website algorithms and watchdogs looking for illicit bourbon sales, groups change their name to things like “Brown Water Appreciation Society” or

emoji's instead. Heaven Hill Distillery wrote a blog post (2020) investigating how the secondary market is changing American whiskey. In this article, they also highlight the five types of secondary market buyers: drinkers, traders, funders, flippers and "flip-o-crites", or flippers who criticize licensed vintage bottle sellers for buying low and selling high (Heaven Hill, 2020). This shows how truly diverse and large the consumer market for bourbon has come. While there is research that shows the secondary market can be successful in filling a consumer's demand, there is no research correlating the impact distilleries play on influencing this market. Can the distillery impact the secondary market with strategic storytelling? Do they think they should have a role in this? My research will seek to answer these questions.

Research to Fill the Gaps

While there is research in the other sectors of the liquor industry about the effect of heritage storytelling on the consumer, there is very little with regard to the bourbon industry. Based on the review of literature, it can be assumed that the structure of distribution within the industry plays a role in how distilleries market to consumers. The three-tiered system and state liquor control laws have led to a prevalence of illegal secondary marketplaces for the sale of hard-to-get bottles of bourbon. With new entrants of distilleries to the market and rise of bourbon popularity amongst consumers, this research will help better distilleries better understand how to use their story to market to consumers and what effect this could have on the secondary market.

Chapter 3: PROFESSIONAL ANALYSIS

Not Your Grandpa's Whiskey *The Present and Evolving Sense of Storytelling at Distilleries*

Distillery tours are magical.

Picture this: you're driving down a winding road, through towering trees and rolling green horse pastures to arrive at a compound of rustic barns and warehouses. As you pull in, you're welcomed by the sweet smell of America's spirit maturing in charred white oak barrels. If you have never had the chance to visit the beautiful countryside of Kentucky, you are truly missing out.

Arriving at the distillery is just the beginning. If you thought you'd show up and try a couple bourbons then leave, you'd be sorely mistaken. Before tasting, a passionate tour guide spends 20 minutes recalling the history of the brand, the founder and the recipe. By the time you actually reach the tasting room, you almost feel like part of the family. This experience is nearly universal across all distillery tours—about 65% heritage storytelling and 35% production and tasting.

As a professional working in public relations, this fascinated me. Why, out of all consumer packaged goods, does whiskey lend itself so well to history? Why do some distilleries feel the need to incorporate history into their branding, even though they are not a truly historical company? And, the most important question of all, why has America's spirit gotten so damn expensive?

In hopes of answering these questions, I spoke with 10 distilleries, including craft distilleries, corporations and some in-between, to determine why so many whiskey producers turn to heritage storytelling as a marketing strategy, how this has evolved and what new distilleries can learn from the past.

Storytelling and Bourbon

“Bourbon is more American than apple pie, existed before baseball, and has built more roads, schools, and government infrastructure than any non-petroleum domestic product,” wrote Fred Minnick in *Bourbon: The rise, fall and rebirth of an American Whiskey*. Today, 60% of the average bottle of bourbon goes to tax; thus, bourbon builds schools, roads and government infrastructure.

“The history of whiskey is really the history of this country. If you look at any history book, and dive deep enough, there's whiskey involved in some way, shape or form,” said Preston Van Winkle, fourth generation bourbon-maker The Old Rip Van Winkle Distillery. “It's a big part of who we are and what we do and it's fun to be a part of such a historical industry.”

The complicated relationship between marketing and consumer demand is what makes the bourbon market both unique and fascinating—not to mention the long-game nature of the industry. Unlike most consumer products, bourbon takes anywhere from 2 to 25 years to be

shelf-ready, which means marketing for the product takes many forms and it's hard to predict who the target consumer will be by then—or if people will even still care.

“I think the reason that whiskey brands invest so much in the history aspect of whiskey is because whiskey is a commodity that ages,” said Colin Spoelman, co-founder of King’s County Distillery. “It suits the storytelling to talk about history because inevitably, that's going to sort of whet your appetite for this thing that's been sitting in a barrel for five or more years”

While most people wouldn't argue that Kentucky is the bourbon capital, many of the companies that own the most well-known brands are based elsewhere—some even overseas.

Due to the nature of corporations, many feel that authenticity gets lost, especially with storytelling. While many of the brand heritage stories owned by corporations can be traced back in a history book, there are many that can't be.

This bothered Colin Spoelman, co-founder and Head Distiller at King’s County Distillery, which is based in Brooklyn, NY.

“The reason I got interested in distilling in the first place was because I noticed that in Kentucky there was a lot of storytelling around history, but none of it had any credibility,” said Spoelman. “It was largely these giant corporations, many of them not even based in the United States, misunderstanding their own brands.”

One corporation spokesperson, who wishes to remain anonymous, said that while history should be considered, the marketing strategy may stray from actuality.

“Part of it is smoke and mirrors. Part of it is that some of this might be bullshit. You can't tell everything about every family secret or mash bill or recipe. So sometimes you use marketing speak for brands.”

This is not to say all brands housed under corporations are hiding behind a facade. Pappy Van Winkle is produced by Buffalo Trace Distillery, which is owned by New Orleans-based Sazerac Company. Four generations of bourbon-making speak to the authenticity.

“It's unfortunate that there are companies that get away with, you know, some sort of made up narrative based on a name they pick a name out of a history book that really doesn't have anything to do with the actual product,” said Van Winkle. “They take it and weave this tale that may or may not have any basis in reality.”

Rise in Demand and the New Consumer

According to a 2020 article from Vine Pair, when the Kentucky Distiller’s Association (KDA) founded the Kentucky Bourbon Trail in 1999, it launched with less than 10 distilleries—in 2020 bourbon tourists would visit 38 across the state thanks to the Trail. In 2018, 1.4 million tourists visited distilleries along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail.

“I don't know any distiller in the business that isn't running their distillery as hard as possible,” said Spoelman. “But even still, it's not enough to fill demand.”

It is important to note that until recently, white men dominated the heritage stories shared by distilleries. The typical story that a distillery tells mentions how the original distiller (a white man) learned to distill bourbon and what makes that distillate different from competitors. Whether it was Jack Daniels, Jim Beam, Rev. Elijah Craig, or Pappy Van Winkle, the “stories” are a variation of the same concept. Just as society has changed to evolve and become more inclusive, so has the bourbon industry.

“The bourbon consumer today is more educated about the spirit in general. They are younger and a lot more women are drinking bourbon. When I started in this business 20 years ago, and went to trade shows it was 90-95% men and more recently, it's maybe 60%,” said Van Winkle. “A lot more women are drinking bourbon. And I think that has a lot to do with the knowledge around whiskey in general, has changed. It's no longer your grandfather's spirit.”

What has now been labeled as the “bourbon boom”, consumers who are buying bourbon have not only grown, but diversified as well. According to the KDA, the number of Black or African-Americans who drink bourbon was up 22% from 2013 to 2020, while the number of Asians who drink bourbon was up 36%.

Uncle Nearest Premium Whiskey, founded in 2017, is a best-selling African American owned distillery. The founder, Fawn Weaver, created her company in honor of Nearest Green, nicknamed ‘Uncle Nearest’ who taught Jack Daniel how to make whiskey and was deemed the first African American distiller.

“When you look at the data that we collect, through our programmatic ads, and so forth, we definitely over-index women and people of color. We still have a very large white male consumer audience, which we definitely want to keep that as well, but the amount of women, the amount of younger people, and the amount of people of color, for us, especially African Americans, is much higher,” said Lucia Creed, director of marketing at Uncle Nearest. “So I think the difference over the last 10 to 12 years is huge. Considering that back when I started there were very few women that felt comfortable outside of maybe Kentucky and Tennessee, that were drinking whiskey regularly, especially straight or maybe in a cocktail.”

Old Dominick Distillery opened in 2017, marking the first time whiskey has been legally distilled in Memphis, TN since prohibition. Zoie Wilson, director of marketing at Old Dominick Distillery, said that while history is important to their brand strategy, they are constantly looking forward. Part of that comes with having a female Master Distiller paving the way.

“Whiskey is becoming more approachable,” said Zoie Wilson, director of marketing at Old Dominick Distillery. “I think more and more females are coming on board and they love the fact that our Master Distiller is female, because she's relatable. She's creating products that not only fit her taste profile, but will fit the seasoned bourbon consumers’ taste profile, and those who are new, you know, she wants to create a more approachable product.”

As the industry continues to evolve, the marketing strategies and products that were once successful may need to be tweaked to accommodate new consumers.

“We have offerings to all of those palates, and all of those stages of whiskey drinkers,” said Zoie Wilson, marketing director at Old Dominick Distillery. “I think we need to keep putting products out there that are gonna fit that new demand. That’s another reason why we have a lot of wheat whiskeys for those people who are newer to whiskey, and so they want a more approachable product. And as their palate changes, they’ll graduate onto our 100 proof and then maybe our single barrels.”

The Secondary Market

To really grasp the complexity of marketing within the industry, it is important to understand how the process goes from maturation in a barrel to the shelf at your corner liquor store. When Prohibition was repealed in 1933, the federal government passed responsibility of regulating alcohol to states. In order to increase public safety and collect tax revenue, most states introduced a three-tier system: alcohol production, distribution and retail. To make things even more complex, no entity may occupy more than one tier, meaning a brewery cannot own a bar and a distillery can’t sell directly to a liquor store.

As demand has increased over the years, the three-tier system has led bourbon hunters and collectors to capitalize through an illegal secondary market.

Chances are, if you have heard of Pappy Van Winkle, you are familiar with the insane prices a bottle of their juice will go for. According to the Old Van Winkle website, the suggested retail price for Old Rip Van Winkle 10 Year is \$69.99. But, if you think you can find it for that price, a quick google search will be humbling—prices range from \$550 to upwards of \$1,200.

According to Preston Van Winkle, the majority of retailers **are** selling at our near suggested retail prices, but they sell out within days or hours via waitlists, lotteries or customer loyalty programs, so the bottles don’t even see a store shelf.

“The consumers who aren't plugged into a network aren't seeing those prices reflected in the marketplace. They're only seeing the handful of greedy retailers who are charging an arm and a leg for the product. So, they think that their best bet is to either pay those greedy retailers what they're asking for, or buy on the secondary market. Which for one, is illegal and two it's risky, because you don't know if you're getting what you're paying for,” said Van Winkle. “We've seen a number of examples of refills. We haven't seen an outright counterfeit yet, but I can't imagine we're too far off from that considering what some of these bottles are going for on the secondary market.”

So, why are people willing to risk legality and quality just for a bottle of bourbon? Is the juice really **that** tasty?

“There is something in Human Nature that loves the chase,” said Joe Michalek, founder of Piedmont Distillers. “I want what I can't have. And then if I can actually get it and my peers can't, I've won.”

An issue with the three-tier system is that distilleries lose most of their control once the bottle leaves a distillery. Storytelling becomes even more important for these brands in order to combat any negative perception that might stem from how their bottle trades on the illegal secondary market—particularly with demand.

“Instead of letting writers, bloggers and internet trolls tell our story for us, we're trying to get out in front of it and tell our story ourselves,” said Van Winkle. “It is important for people to know exactly who we are and what we stand for both historically and moving forward.”

The future of bourbon storytelling

As the lineages of bourbon's founding fathers begins to dwindle and the market becomes even more saturated, how can distilleries set themselves apart while staying true to America's spirit?

For The Bardstown Bourbon Company, this means pushing the boundaries on what it means to be a distillery in historic Kentucky. Unlike most distillery websites, you won't find an “Our Story” page at Bardstown Bourbon. Instead, you will read “Creating the modern, authentic bourbon experience. The Bardstown Bourbon Company is a New Blend of Bourbon Makers, pushing the boundaries through innovation, while honoring the traditional art of whiskey making.”

“We bring a lot of people with experience in, and then try to innovate with traditional roots. What we do as a brand is very much push the boundaries of innovation and discovery through our blending processes and with collaboration by bringing in other storied brands,” said Brandon Smith, digital media manager at The Bardstown Bourbon Company. “What's unique is that we get to tap into their audience of passionate followers and collaborate with them. It's a very innovative philosophy within the bourbon industry.”

The Bardstown Bourbon Company is just one example of a new generation of distilleries hoping to carve a new space within the bourbon industry.

What can “new bourbon” learn from “old bourbon”? Here are some questions distilleries should ask themselves when creating a brand that wasn't pulled from the history books.

What do you have that others don't?

“So I think that for new brands coming in, they're going to have to either get very creative in terms of how they market, which most often won't be a heritage story, because it's hard to come up with those, those brands already exist,” said Lucia Creed of Uncle Nearest. “You know, we had a story that hadn't been told, but I don't think that there are very many of those lying around, I think that you will start to see brands like Du Nord and different brands that may not have the

historical component of heritage, but are African American owned or female owned and tapping into kind of the more **modern heritage story**, but it's hard to go back in time and find these, uncovered gems, like we have.”

This could mean engaging in new consumers.

“Ask [customer], ‘okay, what don’t you like about it?’ There are so many different kinds of whiskeys. ‘Tell me what you usually drink and we can go through and find a whiskey that you like’,” said Creed. “Often we would find many that they’d like and they would say, ‘**wow, I had no idea whiskey could taste this good. Nobody’s ever marketed it to me like this, I always thought that it was something that was just for men.**’”

Or creating a unique allure that entices bourbon fans.

“At the end of the day, **exclusivity is the root of all luxury**. It’s what creates the hype. It’s what creates that premium aspect,” said Brandon Smith of The Bardstown Bourbon Company. “People have an innate DNA trait that says if they feel like they really want something and they think they’re not going to be able to get it, they are going to pay over value on it. That is just human nature. I want it, I’m going to pay for it. I’m going to get it at all costs and make that happen”

“You eat a meal, drink a drink, you do whatever, you consume something that was made with love and with passion. There is something about it, that you're going to feel the way that the maker felt when they made that product. It’s this magical thing that happens with you know, it's the energy of the universe. It's humankind connecting,” said Nelson. “So to me, that makes all the difference. **If I know that I'm making this because I love it, and it's something that I feel I'm meant to do, and I want to do it right and do it well, people will feel that in the final product.**”

Because in the end it’s all about the experience. These details enhance the experience. They can come from a heritage story, but new brands will need to find other ways to captivate the imagination of consumers.

What is your story?

No matter how innovative a distillery can be, everyone agreed that storytelling still needs to be top-of-mind.

“People can go see a distillery anywhere,” said Andy Nelson, owner and head distiller at Nelson’s Green Brier Distillery. “A distillery is a factory, you know, at its core, it just is. But what no one else has that we do is this **specific story**. And that's, again, the reason that we're in business at all.”

“It’s not enough to have a brand with a cool package,” said Preston Van Winkle. “**People really appreciate and need a story attached to it.**”

“We're trying everyday to find that perfect **balance between 150 years ago and now**. We have a master distiller with a lot of history-making herself and so I think every day, we try to find the perfect balance between our history and our products,” said Wilson. “But then I think we weigh that by figuring out what the consumer wants, so that's what we need to deliver.”

“Younger generations are so focused on authenticity and sustainability and finding ways to create change and diversity, that **there will always have to be some kind of story**,” said Creed. “I don't know that it will be heritage, because at least in the whiskey space, I feel like most of those opportunities have already been taken.”

Who is telling your story?

“There's several things that really set Wilderness Trail apart and, you know, one of the biggest things is just Shane and Pat [Heist]. Making all the wheels turn there, it's not a big corporation like so many of them are,” said Emily Toadvine, brand marketing at Wilderness Trail Distillery. “They're the 14th largest and it's not publicly traded, it's Shane and Pat that just built this up out of nothing and have had all the success. **They don't have a 50 year history, they just had a lot of knowledge that they put to use to make a good product.**”

“I continue to think that in addition to having history, you also have to have a personality,” said Colin Spoelman of King's County Distillery. “Ideally, that's **a person who actually knows and has some influence over what the whiskey tastes like**. That is why Pat [Heist] at Wilderness Trail has become such a rock star, because he genuinely is a Master Distiller in the old sense. He's the person who's there every day, he's making decisions. The creative aspects of the control, the ownership, and decision making, are all interesting factors that I think a brand needs. Who's making decisions? Who owns what? Who's in charge of the finances? Who's in charge of the product? And, you know, if a company can't answer those questions, with a pretty good answer, people get turned off.”

While bourbon will always be written into the history books, as the industry and consumer continues to evolve, trailblazing distilleries will begin to craft their own chapter.

“I do think ultimately, craft distillers will find their audience, a huge audience and find, in fact, that the same people excited about Pappy Van Winkle today, in 20 years, they're going to be excited about King's County and Wilderness Trail and maybe New Riff and Peerless [Distilling Co.] and some of the smaller newer distilleries,” said Spoelman. “**Novelty is on a 25 year cycle in whiskey not a six month cycle.**”

So, cheers to good bourbon, great people and the stories that unite the two.

Chapter 4: KEY LEARNINGS

The heart of this research lies in storytelling. I originally sought to discover the role storytelling plays in consumer demand, both on primary and secondary market. As I spoke with each distillery, I learned about the role storytelling plays in their marketing strategy, specifically in branding and customer experiences and how they think this helps attract customers. This is what I learned about the impact of heritage storytelling on consumer demand:

RQ 1: How do distilleries believe they make an impact on consumer demand through heritage storytelling?

- By building authenticity and creating allure. Since whiskey is a product that ages, heritage storytelling creates an innate aura that other marketing strategies cannot. The distilleries I talked to said that not only is heritage storytelling important for brand strategy, but also important in signifying uniqueness and authenticity to consumers.

RQ 2: Do distilleries believe this marketing strategy makes a similar impact on the secondary market?

- Yes and no. Due to the nature of the secondary market, the distillery itself does not have a ton of leverage in what is bought and sold illicitly. If the allure of the heritage story is so great that it impacts demand, then that will increase the chance of a product being sold on the secondary market. That said, no distillery I talked to believed they could make a direct impact on the secondary market.

Through these interviews I also learned about the role heritage storytelling plays within the larger industry and this begged a new question: As new distilleries begin to emerge and they don't have a heritage background or bourbon lineage to point to, what will be their story? These

are the takeaways I learned from talking to heritage distilleries about the direction they think bourbon brand strategy will go:

- Allocation and allure, balanced with creative brand storytelling, is the key to creating demand within the marketplace of bourbon. If a distillery has a compelling story, but it is easy to find, it loses the exclusivity factor that many bourbon consumers are attracted to. That said, if a bourbon is impossible to find and the brand has no story, consumers will not get excited about the hunt.
- The demographic of bourbon consumers is changing and distilleries need to adapt to the new audience by engaging in new marketing strategies and meeting this audience where they are in their bourbon journey. For example, since women historically have not been huge bourbon consumers they may feel intimidated as they enter the space, so it is important to be approachable. This can be done by educating customers on products for varying palates and being transparent on the process will make women (and other new consumers!) feel like they belong in the bourbon space.
- Even if a distillery doesn't have innate heritage, storytelling and bourbon were made to go together. Distilleries should think about how they want to write their own specific, unique, story in a compelling way by asking 'what makes us different'?
- Investing in brand ambassadors and consumer experiences to help promote the brand story is key to tapping new audiences. Due to liquor advertising limitations and the desire to create allure, marketing needs to be more hands-on. Having passionate people to help share product offerings, information about the brand and answer questions will help earn loyal customers.

Appendix I: Sources

I. *Bardstown Bourbon Company*, digital media manager **Brandon Smith**

The Bardstown Bourbon Company is a New Blend of Bourbon Makers, pushing the boundaries through innovation, while honoring the traditional art of making whiskey. Brandon Smith has been the digital media manager since March 2021.

II. *Nelson's Green Brier Distillery*, owner and co-founder **Andy Nelson**

Nelson's Green Brier Distillery was a pre-Prohibition historical distillery that operated under the ownership of businessman Charles Nelson and later his widow, Louis, in Greenbrier, Robertson County, Tennessee from 1870 to 1909. The brand was re-launched by the Nelsons' great-great-grandsons (Andy Nelson and his brother) in 2011 and they began operating a distillery in 2014.

III. *King's County Distillery*, co-founder & distiller **Colin Spoelman**

Kings County Distillery is New York City's premier craft distillery and among the most acclaimed small distilleries in the United States. Focused exclusively on whiskeys, Kings County has made a name for its Bourbon, Peated Bourbon, Empire Rye and other creative whiskeys. Colin Spoelman is the co-founder and distiller of King's County Whiskey. He is also the co-author of *The Guide to Urban Moonshining* and *Dead Distillers*.

IV. *Limestone Branch Distillery (Luxco)*, brand manager **Caitlin Jackson**

In Lebanon, KY, the Beam brothers founded Limestone Branch Distillery in 2010 to continue their family's 220-year legacy of making bourbon and moonshine using the same DNA as their great-great-grandfather did. Caitlin Jackson has been the brand manager at Limestone Branch Distillery, Yellowstone Bourbon and Minor Case Rye Whiskey since January 2019. All of these brands are owned by Luxco, Inc.

V. *Old Dominick Distillery*, marketing director **Zoie Wilson**

Following the surprise discovery of an unopened bottle of Old Dominick Toddy from the late 1800s, Chris and Alex Canale decided to reinstate the storied spirit brand started by their great great grandfather, Domenico. Old Dominick Distillery was

officially reopened in 2017. Zoie has been the marketing director at Old Dominick Distillery since it opened in 2017, prior to this position she worked at Brown Forman.

VI. *Old Rip Van Winkle Distillery, Preston Van Winkle*

Julian “Pappy” Van Winkle, Sr. said, “We make fine bourbon at a profit if we can, at a loss if we must, but always a fine bourbon.” This was the beginning of a Kentucky whiskey family dynasty now in its fourth generation of distilling. Preston Van Winkle is the fourth-generation member of the Van Winkle family to enter the bourbon business.

VII. *Piedmont Distillers, Joe Michalek*

Founded in 2005 as North Carolina’s first legal distillery since prohibition, Piedmont Distillers has spent over a decade innovating unique, finely crafted, all-natural spirits. Joe Michalek worked as the vice president of marketing at RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company for 10 years before founding Piedmont Distillers in 2005.

VIII. *Uncle Nearest, Lucia Creed*

Founded by Fawn Weaver in 2017, Uncle Nearest, Inc., is a distillery located in Lynchburg, Tennessee. The distillery is named after the formerly enslaved man, Nathan “Nearest” Green, who taught a young Jack Daniel the craft of distilling. Lucia Creed has been the director of marketing at Uncle Nearest since September 2020. She previously worked at Del Maguey Single Village Mezcal as the Juez leader and Brand Leader.

IX. *Wilderness Trail Distillery, Emily Toadvine*

After years of working with distilleries around the world to provide advice and fermentation products, Pat Heist and Shane Baker launched Wilderness Trail Distillery in 2012 with the focus on making the highest quality Bourbon, Rye Whiskey and Vodka. Emily Toadvine has led Wilderness Trail’s brand marketing efforts since September 2016.

X. *The Glenturret, Lucy Armstrong*

The Glenturret is Scotland’s oldest working distillery, creating hand crafted single malt whisky since 1763. While this distillery was not featured in the professional analysis portion of my research, the findings were used to compare U.S. distilleries to global distilleries, which provided rich insight to better inform my research. Lucy Armstrong

has worked at The Glenturret for 3 years, first as the development manager and then as a project manager. She previously worked at Edrington for 12 years in various roles, including the brands heritage assistant.

XI. One source works for a large corporate distillery and asked to remain anonymous

Appendix II: Interview Discussion Guide

1. **Building Rapport:** What is your title at the distillery and what role do you play in brand strategy? How long have you worked at this distillery? What is your favorite part of your job?

PROVIDE DEFINITION OF HERITAGE STORYTELLING: Heritage storytelling is built on the brand's past, embodied in its values, and with a specific tone (Aime, 2021). Whether it is family heritage, recipe heritage, ethnic heritage or other, there is always a story when it comes to bourbon.

2. How important is heritage storytelling to the marketing of your brand? **(RQ1)**
3. What aspects of your heritage story do you hope to resonate with consumers? **(RQ1)**
4. What aspects of heritage storytelling do you believe have the greatest impact on consumer demand? **(RQ1)**
5. What aspects of your brand's heritage story signal authenticity to consumers? **(RQ1)**
6. Do you have any data to support heritage-storytelling based marketing campaigns driving consumer demand? **(RQ1)**
7. What type of marketing campaigns do you find to be the most successful with your products? **(RQ1)**
 - a. Listen for: limited release, small batch, single barrel
8. How are you sharing your brand's heritage story with consumers? **(RQ1)**
 - a. Listen for: website, packaging, owned media, paid advertising, earned media
9. What is your personal opinion of the secondary bourbon market? **(RQ2)**
10. How, if at all, do you think distilleries can affect the secondary market? **(RQ2)**

11. What role do you think strategic brand storytelling plays in impacting demand on the secondary market? **(RQ2)**
 - a. Listen for: allocation, limited release, small batch, special edition
12. How do you believe the illegal market is changing the way distilleries market to consumers? Has this changed the way you market to consumers? **(RQ2)**
13. What role does the secondary market play in your marketing strategy? **(RQ2)**
14. As more distilleries enter the market, how do you think brands can differentiate their story from the rest? **(RQ1)**

Appendix III: Interview Transcripts

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I. Bardstown Bourbon Company

JB: I've been providing my definition of heritage storytelling from an academic perspective. Heritage storytelling is built on the brand's past, embodied in its values and with a specific tone. Whether it's family heritage, recipe heritage, ethnic heritage or other there's always a story when it comes to bourbon. And so just from that definition, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?

BS: Yeah, well, I think, you know, what really identifies Bardstown bourbon company is the fact that we are so new, right? So, we brought in a lot of fantastic industry experts. And, you know, a good example is Steve Nally, who's our master distiller. He's actually celebrating his 50th year in the industry next month. So he's, you know, he was with Maker's Mark, he helped start Wyoming whiskey, you know, we bring in a lot of people with experience, and then try to innovate with the traditional roots in place, you know, so really kind of what we do as a brand is, is very much push the boundaries of innovation and discovery through our blending processes and practices and with collaboration by bringing in other storied brands, like, you know, Chateau Della BOD and Armagnac house out of France, we just brought in, we just launched a founders collaboration with a beer company called founders brewing out of Grand Rapids, Michigan, we've done prisoner wine, and so many different, you know, finishes in the collaboration space like that. And what's unique about that is that we get to tap into their audience of, you know, history, and these are, you know, these are brands that have very large foundations of followers, and they're very passionate about the community. So for us to be able to partner and collaborate with them is a very innovative philosophy with the bourbon industry, right? Most of it's rooted in the tradition. You know, we've been doing it for, you know, 100 plus years and so this is how we do it and we're gonna make it this way. And that's just kind of the way it is. Storied brands kind of like the Buffalo Trace's and Heaven Hill, Four roses, Jim Beam. I mean, a lot of those companies, you know, their audience and who they communicate with is, you know, it's kind of limiting and restricting, in a sense, because they have to cater to this flavor profile. That is what these people look for and if they get something different, they're like, 'Oh, that's too crazy for me like I don't, you know, do that.' Whereas for us, we get to work with the collaborative partners, right? So, we make Kentucky straight bourbon with our with our fusion series, which is our core product. But we'll be launching over the next year, our house distilled 100%, Bardstown bourbon company products as well. So those really honor the nod to the tradition, the more traditional facets of bourbon making and style and flavor profiles, where we get to be innovative and be different and kind of identify ourselves. In our drug discovery series, which is, you know, the most recent one blended, a little bit of Canadian whiskey, some Indiana whiskey, Kentucky, Tennessee, so we're bringing, you know, the best of distilling products from different places. And we're showing and highlighting the art of blending, which is what we do really well. And then the collaboration side of it, whereas we lean into the you know, the brands that typically have these rooted in tradition, legacies, like the founders, and, you know, Mason Peron cognac out of France. And so we're leaning into the houses of that have built this tradition and have been around for decades, and sometimes over a century. And, and so that is, where we truly are different from a lot of other distilleries. We're not handcuffed in that regard.

JB: So even though you are a newer company, and your focus is on innovation, since bourbon, just like in itself is a historical product that has historical roots. How are you weaving in that

history? From like, a marketing perspective with innovations? You're, you know, emphasizing the innovation, but also like maybe staying true to the roots? Or maybe not, however, you see that.

BS: Yeah, I think we do that by a couple of ways, right? So, you have a diverse product portfolio. So, if we just had one whiskey, and it was all one type we're really not being innovative, we're either leaning on the side of innovation where everything's crazy, or we're on the traditional side where it's all one style. And that's what I think is exciting for the brand prospect for us as we have you know, our core products launching which are going to be traditional high rye bourbons, a wheated bourbon, very similar to Maker's Marks, because our master distillers love wheat. But then, you know, we try to create a product portfolio that has a lot of different flavor profiles, price points, different opportunities for consumers to enter the market, or be fans of our brand. You know, we don't want everything to be \$100 or 50 bucks, right? Like, we want to have a diverse option for the consumers. Because if we're truly being modern, and you know, looking at who our customer is, then we need to have those options. Just by pure, you know, data for, for who's looking at our company. You know, we look at our data, from emails to social media, to who goes and books in our restaurant for any avenue that we have a touch point that someone can come in book a reservation, we can get valuable information out of that. And so, you know, to truly try to appease them all, and honor the tradition, but still be innovative, is by I think having a diverse portfolio of options, and then try to communicate that's what really kind of routes people to a brand, right is the more transparent storytelling you provide more people feel connected to it, if you just put out a product that they don't know anything about, it just looks pretty, you know, and there's a lot of that out there, then naturally, you'll probably attract the certain person who likes that aesthetic bottle or they heard something good about it from a PR website or something. But when you provide transparency and real storytelling and ensure that the people are getting the right information they, you know, feel connected to it. That's how you develop that kind of foundation.

JB: How have you seen the average bourbon consumer change over the past couple of years, especially since COVID when people were at home, I mean, that obviously shifted everything but even not being able to go to the distillery and coming out and people on the secondary market like a lot has changed the past five years with the landscape. What specifically have you seen change from a consumer standpoint?

BS: Yeah, I would say that people are interested in the category now because of the secondary markets, like you mentioned, and direct consumer options. A heavy push in the consumer space in general is that we can we can put this product in someone's house, right? There's direct to consumer laws in Kentucky where distillers can actually legally ship to about seven states now as well, Kentucky, Nevada, Alaska, DC, Nebraska, New Hampshire, like, we can actually ship from the distillery now, you know, in a handful of years ago to, you know, being able to sell on site, right. So, it provides more opportunity, I think, for a lot of distillers because they can actually get this product in someone's hand, and they can avoid the middleman, aka the distributors, who kind of have a tight grasp on, on where product goes. And that severely eats into the, the ROI and the money that these brands, you know, can reinvest in their brands, you know, from a production standpoint, bringing more people on the team paying competitive salaries, it has really opened a lot for them as well. And in the past, I believe, six months, they

reapproved the craft laws. So, if you produce over 100,000 Proof gallons, you get taxed a lot different than if you make under that. So that threshold, means for a lot of craft distillers that they're getting taxed significantly less, and it's like multiple 10s of percent's, it's big, it makes a huge difference for those brands. Because the bigger you are, then you're going off of volume, right? And so the scalability, you can, you can kind of factor that, that taxation in there, whereas a lot of the smaller brands, you know, they're trying to build a brand, they're trying to create a product that the consumer likes. But, you know, the root of where I think that question is, is, you know, you're really seeing younger demographics come in, we're seeing a lot more women come into the play, what I think, typically has been a, you know, an older, affluent hit, you know, I don't like to say it, but you know, a white man string, and you're seeing a lot more diversity from not just gender but also from, you know, skin color. And, you know, I think it's because a lot of people are excited to learn about these. Right? There's, there's so much history here in the industry. And so, I think the consumer has changed a lot over the last few years is, it's very exciting, because new people are coming in the passionate about it, and they're excited to learn they want to know more.

JB: Yeah, so something that I was interested about with Bardstown specifically was, you know, you think of the Jack Daniels, the companies that base their branding on sort of that history and have that story. And you're looking at consumers now. And I was talking to someone, I think it was someone at Uncle Nearest and we're running out of stories to be told, you know, like, rather than just making up stories, but this new sort of consumer, and especially as like Gen Z gets to the point where they're drinking bourbon to appreciate it and not just drinking bourbon to drink it. How do you think the marketing for that will change where it used to be such, especially in Kentucky, history focused and now you hang your hat on innovation? How do you see that sort of marketing angle change?

BS: Yeah, I think, well, that's kind of multifaceted, right? I think the brands that are making up stories that are not rooted in any truth, or you know, they're kind of, they're gonna be dated, they're, you know, there's so much information out there and people can see right through that stuff. Now, the consumers too educated, you have to be honest, you have to be transparent. I think that evolves with a new brand like us is that we have to lean more into, you know, the way that we try to bring people into the category. So, I think we can do that in a couple of ways. I think one of the most important ways is know you know, when do you remember a whiskey that you had that was really good, right? Do you remember that whiskey because you were sitting on your porch by yourself? Probably not, you probably remember hanging by the bonfire with your friends and you can you know, you can visually see who was there you can remember it's very sensory, it's very, you know, connected to a to a memory, or experience. Or maybe it's, you know, around the dinner table and you're having a higher end meal. It's typically been seen with wine and you know, everyone does a wine tasting and there probably is food around right. And it's not really any different for whiskey, it just hasn't been done well. So, I think that there's a huge opportunity there. And then from the collaborative stilling set, or from the collaboration series, we work with these worldly recognized brands that we partner with, from, like I said, from Armagnac to, you know, wine out of California, we've got founders brewing, this launch, that's up in Grand Rapids, and that's a huge beer house, I mean, we can tap into that, that beer community, and they're like, this is amazing, but not just say, you know, beers or whiskies finished in, you know, wine casts or stout casts or newscasts, like, there's an example right here.

You can kind of see the label here, you know, it's got the founders right here, and it says the KB right here. So every one of our collab brands like that is highlighting the people that we work with. So you know, we're trying to take it to another level, we're trying to, you know, have it truly be collaborative, not just the transactional partnership, where hey, we buy those barrels, from finisher whiskey, and then we'll send it out, say hey we've finished this and these type of barrels, and it's something different than what we produce, right? It's like, no, we want to highlight the people, we want to bring them in, we just had their team, their entire team down here, like, two, three weeks ago for the product launch and the dinner series. And they got to see how the whiskey evolved, they got to see how the whiskey started, how it was, you know, 12 months in and then how it was 15 months. And so it's cool for them to kind of see the process and get them enrolled in it and get them passionate about it as well, because then they are going to go tell their audience and the people that they are super excited to be, you know, around and, and I think that for me, as a as a traditional whiskey lover, just independently, you know, that it's, it's so different than what everyone else is doing author and it gives us an opportunity to really connect with people.

JB: What is this new marketing strategy, not new marketing strategy, but the collaboration and the innovation--how do you think that sort of differently signals authenticity to consumers, rather than having to hang your hat on like, whatever historical perspective?

BS: Yeah, well, I think a lot of that is, you know, the fact that someone says, 'oh, well, I got this from my grandpa has been making whiskey and, you know, for 100 years, and they get this recipe, and so we're making it right, because it's a family tradition, or comes from something like that.' You know, while I'm sure there are some kernels of truth to a lot of it, I think, I would probably say a lot of it is a little more fabricated than what's put out there. But when we're working with these partners like that, it's there's no fluff or filler. I mean, it's like, we are working with their team, like we, we have their team out on our site to see what we do and how we do things, we go to their team, and we go spend time with them and see how they function and how they do things and, and understand their philosophy, and then we can try to fuse those back into one cohesive product. You know, a good example is we finished the blind about a month or two ago with it with an Irish distillery called Powers Court, and they have a product that we brought 80% of the unique mash bill of American whiskeys sent to their team, and said, 'hey, you know, here, we'll send you five different, you know, flavor profiles and styles and, you know, you let us know which one you like, and then we'll go through certain flavor profiles that you guys have produced, and then we'll try to balance the two and, and create this fusion between like American and Irish whiskeys, right, which are two totally different styles, and very distinctly unique in their own right.' But, you know, the distiller who's involved with this program is like Irish royalty, I mean if you look at the name in Ireland across the board, it's such an iconic family name, it's, you know, the true royalty of Irish history. And you know, he has been the face of Irish distilling for 25 plus years. So, you know, the storytelling behind that is, it just is what it is, right? We're not making this up like this is just real, this is what we are doing. And we want to share that, that, you know, that passion, you know, and it's not cheap to do those things either, right? So, we make the investment to buy high end barrels or to, you know, do specific things to then pay to capture the content. You know, there's a lot of components that go into it, but it's worth it at the end of the day, because it's bringing the consumer with you on the journey, from concept and creation to a product that they get to actually enjoy. You're very much taking them on a journey,

right? The storytelling ties back to a sense of place and ultimately connect someone more to you. I mean, you know, I think our whiskies are great. And I would feel confident giving it to anyone saying 'here, hope you enjoy,' and they're going to enjoy it. But if I need to be able to tell them the story, or they're able to follow along on that journey, they're going to be advocating for more than I even need to try to, you know, like, sell, I don't need to sell them there. They just felt, you know, followed along for the whole experience. So I think that it's just, it's, it's just authentic, transparent. It keeps people engaged.

JB: So as more distilleries enter the market. And some would argue that it's starting to get pretty saturated, especially with craft distilleries. How do you think brands will differentiate their story from the rest in an authentic way?

BS: Hard to say, I think they'll differentiate their storytelling through creative content. Right? So you know, good example is actually a brand that we distill for, we bottle for them. They're a very trendy hot brand and bourbon right now called Blue Run. And, you know, they built their brand, in, you know, I think three very key components. They sourced a lot of really good product at first, and then they blended it really well. So they had this allocation of whiskey and they said that they were going to release it. And then we're gonna start to build up this hype between this brand by using high end products. And then what do they do they built, you know, they brought in a great team of people who understand the digital landscape. They brought in Devin McKinney, who is a former Nike designer, if you wore a Nike shoe, like the Air Force One or any kind of Nike, he's probably had his eyes and hand and stamp of approval on it. Like he's, you know, a true designer. And then they brought in a great product. So you have, you have a beautiful bottle, you got a great designer, and you got a good team that knows how to get information, and convey a certain story and look and aesthetic to consumer, you know, you can put your product in front of anyone now, with the right amount of funds and the right strategy. You know, it's I mean, that's just the nature of the digital world that we live in. And you don't have to do everything grassroots anymore, where you need to, you know, go to the local bar and have a tasting and try to, you know, tell your story and do it grassroots. And I think it's multifaceted. I think we should do both right. And you've done well. But I think the more you know, the digital space evolves, I think you'll continue to see brands like them pop up. Some will fail, more of them will fail than I think succeed. But I think the ones that really nail the storytelling and are able to create that foundation of consumers, digital storytelling, they're going to be the ones that really succeed. And I think it's having the right team, but having a good product, and then the direct consumer side so they can sell, you know, free to the consumer versus having to go you have to go to a liquor store or something to buy. It's like no, we can actually ship it straight to you. And the direct to consumer space will really evolve in that direction.

JB: Yeah, so we'll touch on this quickly, just so I don't take up too much of your time. But the secondary market was something that was interesting to me whenever I was doing this research and just the fact that you'd like you were talking about how The product gets to the consumer. And it is a little trickier rather than normal consumer facing products. What role? Or how have you seen the secondary market sort of change the landscape of the bourbon industry in which it used to, like, you know, you used to get certain bottles on the shelf for X amount of money, and

now you can't even find them? How do you think that's changing brands? Or how do you think that will continue to change?

BS: I think a lot of it is, it's kind of a double-edged sword, right? When you have a product that goes on to the secondary markets, you're really getting a lot of interest from, you know, a trusted source. And so what happens from that is, you know, you inherently are building a brand around quality in the very, you know, kind of, not like the black market, so to speak, but like the true passionate base of your audience and somebody who's really, really like the whiskey geek, right. So they're, secondary groups and auctions and Facebook groups and things of the sorts, and, you know, yeah, it has two parts to it, right? It's like, now all those people, they want to go out and hit every single place, and they can try to buy that product at a fair price, and then sell it for 10x. Right? And so, from that standpoint, it's unfortunate, because, you know, the consumer that is truly just interested in getting it and drinking it and trying it at a normal price, they can't. But then at the same time they're creating this hype behind your brand, where, you know, it almost like, it creates this, this energy, where people are like, 'Oh, my gosh, I heard that it's so good, and goes for upwards of \$500, but I can go to the store and get it for 80 bucks, like, I gotta go get one of those,' so then it creates like a little bit of a sense of urgency, but it really kind of gets buzz to the brand. So it does generate awareness, and interest and buzz in that regard. But then again, it kind of, you know, it has the other side, you know, a lot of these people, they're not even buying these just to buy them, or to drink them and enjoy them, they're literally doing it to make a buck. And I'm not gonna sit here and say that it's wrong, maybe that's how they pay their bills, or maybe they buy three, and sell two of them. So they can drink one for themselves and support the interest in the passion. Right. And I think there's a lot of that that goes on. But, you know, if, if we sold all of our bottles for 120 bucks, and none of them ever made it on the secondary market, it would probably mean that we're not really doing our job as a brand. Because we're not creating, you know, a product that these people are like, super excited about, or they feel it's worth this value, because they can't get it. So there's a little bit of exclusivity there. And, you know, I don't think that the secondary market is entirely bad. I think it gives a lot of access to people who can't get a lot of products and, you know, the money side of it is very, very subjective, right, like, you know, \$100 to one person, you know, is, you know, I think \$100 is, you know, still 100 bucks, right? But maybe somebody who makes a lot of money, they're like, at 500 bucks, whatever. I mean, you know, some of these guys spend 1000s of dollars on bottles, and they'll buy multiple, right? I know guys that have whiskey collections that are hundreds of 1000s of dollars, million dollars plus, right? And they're not just buying them to buy them like they truly are passionate whiskey drinkers. I find that the ones that really make the biggest investment and they do spend a lot of money they're still passionate whiskey people, right? And it's probably a little bit more ego driven. They just want to show off to all their friends. Like I got this one of kind. But, you know, it's like anyone with their friends. I have buddies come over and I know that they're interested in whiskey and I'm like 'you want to pour this. You want to pour that? Like, what do you like, you know, let's find a flavor profile you like. I think, it's exciting, right? And everyone gets there. They get their excitement in different ways. It's probably an evil if you had to, like pick a side. But I do think that there is there is value there for consumers to find products. I, being behind a brand, think it does help brands in some capacities as well.

JB: How would you rate how a product gets on the secondary market from three things: supply, allocation and demand? So think of Pappy because they only have x amount of product every

year that gets pushed out. So, the demand, actual taste of the product, like they just really love that bourbon, it tastes really good, or sort of the like, allure story behind it, like the brand that's been built up. What would you say is the biggest factor?

BS: Exclusivity for sure. Because realistically, you know, 99% of consumers who buy a bottle of whiskey are not whiskey experts. And they're buying it because they heard that it's good. And realistically, you could probably line 10 whiskies up in front of them, they're not going to be able to pick one from left or right, right. They might be like, Well, that one's good. This one's good. I don't like this one. Like that. That's a that's a very, you know, open ended, it's much more opinion, and, you know, centric to the person who has their style about. And so, you know, they might say, 'Oh, I like wheated whiskies. That's why I love pappy,' well, I can I guarantee you that I could put down five whiskies in front of you and not pick one wheated whiskey in there. And you'd be like, 'Oh, I like this one, I really taste the wheat coming through.' But none of them are wheated. So that's where marketing comes in. I mean, at the end of the day, exclusivity is the root of all luxury. It's what creates the hype. It's what creates that premium aspect. People have an a DNA trait that says they feel like they really want something and they think they're not going to be able to get it, they are going to pay over value on it. Because that's just human nature. I want it, I'm going to pay for it. I'm going to get it at all costs, and they will make it happen.

II. Nelson's Green Brier Distillery

JB: I want to lay the base on how I'm defining heritage storytelling just so we're on the same page, it sounds very academic, but it's just pulled straight from my research. So, heritage storytelling is built on the brand's past, embodied its values and with a specific tone, whether it is family heritage, recipe heritage, ethnic heritage or other there's always a story when it comes to bourbon. And so it was interesting to me that aside from many like consumer facing products, bourbon lends itself so well to history and like history being its brand story. The spark for my research here was just wanting to talk with people on how heritage storytelling has sort of led your brand direction. And why you think that bourbon lends itself so well to that. So when I say that definition, or sort of set the tone, what are like your initial thoughts?

AN: I concur with that. I mean, it's really interesting, because, you know, every brand of bourbon has a story, as you know, whether it's true or not. And so it's an interesting thing, because it's so clear that the heritage part of it is like, kind of the core of bourbon marketing. I mean, to me what makes it clear is the fact that people try to make up stories that are just made up in order to, like, latch themselves on to that core of bourbon marketing. And so it's, I mean, obviously, the genesis of these stories is history. I mean, that's the genesis of any story that you know, you have something to talk about from, you know, a long time ago or not so long ago, or whatever, but like, I think part of it is the fact that you have to age it, and it just takes so long for the product itself, to be ready to serve, or to bottle up or whatever. I mean, that is kind of hard to put into words. But it has a romance about it that no other product has. One of the things getting used to this industry, when we first got into it was the idea that trying to convince people, particularly people who had money, who we were trying to get to invest. People that typically know business. And they understand that you build widget, widget sits on shelf, widget loses value on shelf, sell that widget. But this is the direct opposite, where you build widget, which is a barrel full of whiskey, and it gains value over time. And so it has this weird thing that it kind of flipped

on its head. And I had a way to tie that back to the heritage storytelling, but I think it just such an interesting thing. That's not your typical business plan or whatever. I don't know, it kind of sits outside the bounds of everyday, normal business. From the business aspect. And so therefore, the marketing, is like, this is hard to do this takes a long time. The slow down and take a sip kind of thing lends itself to naturally to like the earlier time, you know, back in the good old days when times were slow, and people could take a minute to relax. So I think that's another that's kind of a roundabout rambling way. My kind of thoughts on that.

JB: That totally makes sense. And I spent some time looking through your heritage story at Greenbrier and how you market that on the website. Whenever you and your brother decided to jump back into the business, what and how did you go about compiling that story? Because the way that it's written it's like very romanticized even on the website, you know, like the niche little details and stuff. So what was sort of like your thought process on like rebuilding that, especially because it used to be set and now it's like reminding people of this history.

AN: When we were growing up, we knew like a little bit about it. But very, very little, meaning like we had heard our dad tell this story, like once or twice this vague story about our family ancestor falling off the boat with gold, you know, sewn into his clothing—very little detail beyond that. Then that there was some sort of whiskey thing in Greenbrier, Tennessee. So Greenbrier the town is like 30 minutes north of Nashville. But growing up, we had no reason to go there. So we didn't know where Greenbrier was. But again, it's not a story that we heard, like, once a week or anything, it was just, every now and then every few years, it was like, some small hint to it. So that was our context to it. And then when we went in 2006, I mean, you know as the story goes, we went to go pick up a bunch of meat from this butcher and saw the historical marker at the gas station before we got there. We saw that, and we're just kind of blown away and then went to the butcher's house and asked him about it. And, you know, we're even further blown away by like, this was real, like that crazy story, that vague story that we heard was not only real, but how did we visit the butcher who lived on the actual land it was insane. So, there's that as context for how that all happened. Then we decided that day, this is what we're here to do, I was a year out of college, and my brother still had a semester left. So like, we didn't have families, kids, careers, or whatever to look after, and maintain or take care of. So it was kind of the perfect timing. We studied philosophy, humanities with concentration in philosophy was the major for both of us in school. And so we weren't like great business minds, we didn't know, distilling as a business or a trade, or a craft or anything like that. So it was all about like, starting from scratch. And so it was just talking to individuals about, you know, not only how to do the business well, and how not to do the business, really. But then our business is based on the history that is, if we did not have this history, we wouldn't be in this business at all, like in this industry, probably. And so it is the number one reason that we exist in the modern day in this in this industry and so for us, the most important part was figuring out the family history. So we went into all the archives that we could: state, city, county archives, and oral history, just like listening to people tell stories about it, like people from Greenbrier, who had, families whose, you know, ancestors worked at the distillery as well. I mean, the distillery was like, the biggest kind of the center focal point of the whole town. So one of the things that we learned was that the town of Greenbrier was named after the distillery, the distillery was Greenbrier distillery because of the Smilax which is the scientific name for the Greenbrier like Vine, which is, of course adorns our logo and everything like that. That grew kind of rampant around where the distillery was. And so it's called the

Greenbrier distillery. And the distillery was like, there were something like six families that lived in the town before that, and then the distillery popped up and grew and grew and grew. And so it became the town of Greenbrier. So like, it was through all of those methods of just learning and researching, you know, old newspaper articles, like Charlie pretty well blinded himself just looking at microfiche, you know, in state and city archives. All that kind of stuff, to find the sort of family history of it. And so that was mostly it. And we continue to hear from people you know, every now and then we'll like hear stories from you know, whatever random people who knew something about the distillery or whatever.

JB: What about having this history attached signals authenticity to the brand? And you just talked about all the different steps and time you spent gathering all this information. How important was it for you to get the story right? Because you could have also, you know, added some flourishing, romanticizing, but what about that sort of was important for you and authenticating the brand?

AN: Yeah, I mean, I'm glad you asked that, because for me, personally, I was adamantly against embellishing any part of the story, because the more we uncovered, it quickly became clear that this is a perfect, like, shining example of truth is stranger than fiction kind of a story. Like when you look at all of the details of the you know, particularly about the kind of origin story and the immigrant story, my quadruple great grandfather had the family fortune of gold sewn into his clothing, and he fell off the boat, like, into the Atlantic near where the Titanic went down, like that, by itself, is completely insane. But it's totally true. And we have absolute proof to show all of the details of it. And so, to me, it was like, we just can't embellish any of this, because, you know, it's a bulletproof story, if we tell it and I just mean bulletproof because sometimes I get cynical, because people are always trying to tear someone down, you know, just being totally honest, it's an unbelievably cool story. And that's why we're doing this. And so people understand that too. I mean, there's this, this human element like that Charlie and I are the ones who, I mean, now we have a lot more people kind of, sort of being ambassadors for us, and that kind of thing, whether they are paid or not, or just enjoy telling the story. But like, at the beginning, it was just us. And no matter who you are, like, human beings connect to human beings, and they can detect bullshit. And it's as simple as that. Like, even if they don't know it, like they know it in the moment, they feel something. But, and oftentimes, they'll kind of just try to choose to believe it anyway. But like, they know something is weird in their gut, they're like, I don't know, if I trust this guy, but that's part of being a human. And so, to me, that's all the more reason, to just be honest, be authentic, be real. You don't have to worry about remembering some, I'll just call it a lie or an embellishment or whatever detail, like, there's no point in doing that, because it's just going to add complication. This is very specific to me, and not even to Charlie, but I grew up a very shy kid, like, very little self-confidence. Charlie was just like, the cool kid, very gregarious, always believed in himself somehow. And, to me, doing this whole business has given me a lot more confidence and kind of part of it an identity, which really changed my life for the better in a lot of ways, but that's a whole different paper. To me, part of my confidence is the confidence to fully tell the truth and know that I can back up my story. And there's something that I know, isn't literally true, historically, there's something in my head that's like, well, okay, I'm just not going to be as passionate about it, and people are going to pick up on it and be like, 'well, that doesn't sound like possible or whatever.' And so, where I was going with that, was that our story is already so crazy that people sometimes do challenge us and say

you know, there's no way that could have happened, nice story like way to make that up. But because it absolutely is true, I have the confidence to stand up and say, I mean, that's fine, you don't have to believe this, we're not pushing us on anybody. If anybody wants to enjoy it, then that's that. And so being able to do that, with honesty and conviction, and confidence makes all the difference. And again, because of that simple human connection, people are natural kind of lie detectors, and they can sniff out a fake story pretty easily. I mean, it's just natural.

JB: How do you hope that attitude translates to your product and how people perceive your bourbon and your product offerings.

AN: I read in high school in Spanish class, this book called *como agua, para chocolate*, and the English translation is *Water for Chocolate*, have you ever read that book or know anything about it? So it was kind of cool in the moment, but I never thought it was gonna be like this sort of life changing thing. And it wasn't a life changer. But like, the point is, the book is about this little rural family, I can't remember if it was based in Spain or in Mexico, I want to say in the 1800s. And the grandparents were, you know, it was like three generations under one roof kind of thing. And the grandmother would always cook the big meals. And the of theme of the book was magical realism, where whatever emotion, the grandmother felt, physically, while she was cooking the meal was literally physically transferred to those eating the meal. So for example, there was one of the big meals they had after her husband had passed away, the grandfather died, and they were having the big meal after the, you know, so she felt this deep sadness. And while she was cooking the meal, and as soon as people you know, have a bite of that soup, or whatever, they, you know, break down in tears, and just like, so that kind of thing. Obviously, a little bit of an exaggeration and just sort of literary What do you call it a tool. But there's something to that. And to me, it really is like, you eat a meal, you, you know, drink a drink, you do whatever, you consume something that was made with love and with passion. There is something about it, that you're not necessarily going to feel exactly the way that the maker felt when they made that product. But again, it's just kind of this magical thing that happens with you know, it's the energy of the universe. It's humankind connecting. And so to me, that makes all the differences that if I know that I'm making this because I love it, and it's something that I feel I'm meant to do, and I want to do it right. And do it well, people will feel that in the final product. When I would go to conferences, like ACS, distiller's conferences and stuff like that. I was a philosophy student, I'm not a science guy at all. And then I'd meet these distillers who were like chemists and scientists and things like that, who decided to quit their jobs and make whiskey. And they intimidated the shit out of me because I was like, these guys know, the real science they can make some really good stuff and like, who am I? What do I know? But over the years, I realized like, it doesn't mean I am not valid, you know, like, I'm just coming at it from a different angle. And the blend of art and science to me became a kind of a cornerstone of our philosophy and feeling on what we do. I may not know the science, but I can learn that, you know, on the flip side, the science guys, they know all the science but it's hard to learn that. I mean, you can gain a passion for it, but it's a different kind of a kind of a thing. If you're coming at it purely scientifically, this is not a knock on anybody, like I've met these guys, they're really good at what they do. But if you're looking at it on paper, if you're coming at it from a purely scientific perspective, there's something cold about that, you know, whereas if you're looking at it, our artists point of view, there's that passion, there's that feeling. And even if it's not, like, technically perfect, like, you're, you're more drawn to it, because it's, I mean, Hell look at the, figure skating in the Olympics,

they've got a technical score, and then an artistic score, and the crowd goes wild with the good artistic performance, you know, even if it's not technically perfect. That's just human. Again, it's like people are drawn to that. And so I forget what your exact question is, but to me, it's all about the passion and love that goes into it. And we can learn the science to, you know, get better that way. But if we're coming from a naturally passionate sort of place, we're working from a good spot to begin with.

JB: You mentioned having some people, maybe like ambassadors, that are able to tell your story. But since you're selling your product, you know, not just from the distillery and they maybe can't hear the heritage or your passion behind it, what are some strategies that you use? Whether it's like branding, or marketing campaigns, like, what do you do to push that sort of energy out?

AN: I mean, you've kind of hit it yourself. The tours are a big part of what we do. And, you know, probably over 90% of the people who come through for tours are tourists, like people who come to Nashville, from elsewhere. It's not a ton of locals. And so, you know, that's a big part of it. But it is also constantly evangelizing, it's just telling our story to anyone and everyone who will listen, whether that be me and Charlie personally. And you know, over time, as we've built out a team in the sales force we've realized that there are now kind of, there are levels of impact that each person can have when they're telling us the story. When it comes directly from Charlie and me that's what people listen to most, because we are the direct descendants. And we researched it ourselves. And we know every little minute detail. Whereas if we, you know, if you hear the story from someone who's a salesperson on the street, and they've got a different whole portfolio of products, they need to be selling, they know, part of our story and the big high points. But, you know, they don't know every single detail because they weren't physically there. And they haven't been working on only this for like, over half their lives, like we have. So I'm the production guy, Charlie is more sales, marketing, that kind of history storytelling guy. I'm pretty good at telling the story too, but our personalities are such that I get bogged down in the details. I'm in the science portion of it. Like, I'm not literally scientific. But as far as my brain goes, I'm like, 'let's get the mechanics down. Let's get these exact details, right.' And Charlie is the one who worries about like, spinning it into something interesting, and being the face of the brand. I'm the head distiller and so I make it, he sells it. And so we naturally are inclined toward those things. And it bothered me for such a long time when we do our tours, it was like, say, it's an hour-long tour, and we spend, let's say 35 minutes on the history portion itself, and then we spend five minutes in production, and then the rest of the 25 minutes on the tasting. And for a while I felt so shortchanged because I was like, come on, like people want to see this production, it's cool to see how it's made. And what he said to me was like, 'well, yes, but people can go see a distillery anywhere'. A distillery is a factory, you know, at its core, it just is. But what no one else has that we do is this specific story. And that's the reason that we're in business at all. And so I kind of absorbed that and understood that because obviously, my name is still on the building. My name isn't only on the production aspect of it, it's on the whole building. And so being able to embrace that, we've kind of gotten to a happy medium where, you know, maybe we talk a little bit more about the production, because I remember going to Jack Daniels years and years and years ago. I couldn't tell you how to make whiskey. Now after going on that tour. It's a whole different campus for every part of the production process. And it was just like, really confusing. Big, different buildings and all that. And then the time that like really light bulb went off in my head was when we went to go see the Mount Vernon distillery, like George

Washington's Mount Vernon distillery, and it was like, you know, an 18 by 20 foot room with no electricity and they had everything like, here's the mash, you know, grinding process. Here's the grain mill, the mash, cooking, the fermentation, distillation, all within arm's reach done by fire, you know. And I could see, in my head, it was like, okay, rudimentary mechanics, here's how this works. That makes sense. Now, I can build off that and see how it gets to Jack Daniels. But to me, that was so fascinating, because I was someone who was like, this history is really cool. Obviously, it's George Washington. But also, like, how do you make it. The history means a lot. But also it means so much more if you can actually connect it with the physical product. It's like, a whole experience on the tour, if you get the history, and then you can actually understand some of the science behind it. Maybe not even the science, more of the engineering, it's just, it's simple. I mean, the fact is, it's pretty simple. But all this equipment makes it look complicated. You know, like, the way that I put it is like getting, it ain't rocket science, you know, people have been distilling for 1000s of years. You cook up the mash, you ferment it, and you pull the alcohol out of it, simple as that. I want people to understand that and not be intimidated by the idea that of how it works. So it all kind of works in unison, but to your point, the reason I think everybody has some sort of history is that a factory is not as cool without the history behind it. But at the same time, if you only have the history, then you're a museum, you're not a distillery.

JB: We're changing gears here. What was fascinating to me is the way that bourbons allocated by the three-tiered system. If people are not able to physically go to a distillery and go through the process that you were just talking about, sometimes I feel like that could get lost. And it becomes a matter of how the products allocated. And especially, it seems like in the past, like three years during COVID, for some reason, people have become even more collectors and they're not necessarily caring about you know, I mean, they'll go spend \$20,000 on a bottle of Pappy and it's like, do you even want to drink the Pappy? Like, most of the time, they probably won't. They're just holding on to it. And so the idea of this illicit market, the secondary market, how do you think if any, your opinion sort of how has that changed the way? Or maybe are we diverging away from this, like the roots you know, the good ole you go into Kentucky, all that people are now like lining up to get bourbon just so they can go resell it for X amount of money. Do you think that that is like just sort of what's your opinion on that?

AN: Well, my opinion has evolved on that a lot. And I have learned just to, you know, go with the flow. At first I was really kind of upset and offended about the secondary market because it's, I mean, not personally but it was just kind of like 'Oh, God should we be charging \$800 a bottle for certain things?' People are just doing that, buying it from our shelves for 75 bucks and then selling it for 800 the minute they get into their car. It's so much more complicated than that, again, because humans complicate things. When we started, it was a big point of conversation for us internally for a little while. But what we realize is that for one, let's pretend like we've got two options, right, we've got the option of just letting it be, or trying to take action and stop people from selling it on the secondary market. If we try to stop it, then people are just going to be like, 'Why are you being such a jerk, like, you don't have any control over this, like, I'm going to do whatever I want. And then I'm going to be pissed at you.' And, you know, therefore the value of your products are not going to be as great to them and you know, all of that. But if we just let it go, this is what we chose to do, I mean it's go with the flow, it's realizing that these people, particularly online, will do the secondary market stuff. We are fortunate to have had products that people get really fired up about, our honey cask finish bourbon in particular is the biggest

one, where it's free marketing for us really is the way that we see it. And there's no point in trying to stop that, like the secondary market, that's human nature, people are gonna do that. And if you just try to regulate around it, they're gonna find another way around it, and they're just going to resent you for trying to stop them anyway. So just embrace it, is how we feel about it. Now, there has been recently yet another sort of wrinkle in that where people have gone to another level that is still kind of bothersome to me, well very bothersome, and I think other distilleries are starting to catch on as well and be bothered by it to the point where they won't sell products to certain people. A whiskey lover or group of whiskey nerds will buy a single barrel from a distillery and they will take the bottles that they purchased and put their own kind of logo sticker on it, and they'll name that barrel. There's nothing wrong, with naming a barrel and kind of putting your own sort of identity on it. Or even say the name of your whiskey club, but what they have started doing is actually covering up the brand logo itself and showing everybody 'Hey, this is the whatever unicorn, pink baby unicorn surprise bottle' and people know it as say Belle Meave bourbon or whatever. I just totally made this up. But it starts really infringing on the sort of the intellectual property, but also the branding and the whole, I mean the entire value of a company is wrapped up in your intellectual property and your logo and your branding. And so when groups start to totally bastardize that they're kind of usurping everything, all that you've done all the hard work, and the money and blood sweat and tears that you've put into it, the permits the processing all of that stuff. And then they just buy it, put their logo on it. And like that's just not cool, man. So, we've had that done before. And I've tried to tell people like, look, I understand you want to do this, but like we can't this, this is like a legal issue. And this goes to the entire value of our company and brand like, so please don't dip your own wax, you know, to totally change the bottle and then tell the world like this is what you've done because we did this and you dipped in and wax like this is still our product. We're the ones who decided to put this out and all that. I have heard that certain distilleries have now refuse to sell to certain or maybe all whiskey clubs. It becomes kind of dangerous from a from an actual business perspective.

JB: So that's interesting, why do you think they're doing it? Because they love the product so much like the actual bourbon in it? Or is it supply and demand? Or is it the allure of the product? What do you think the root of that is?

AN: I think it's all of the above? I mean, for one, they wouldn't do it if they didn't love the product itself. And I, you know, I don't think there's anything like, malicious about it, like the intent is not that it's, it's simply that they, you know, someone just doesn't take the time to understand all that it is that goes into it. I don't go and imagine what it takes to do all the fun paperwork that like a sales rep has to do or that a doctor does all that stuff. Like, I don't care about that. I don't need to know about that. So I don't begrudge anybody for that. But secondly, then, as far as the supply and demand, yeah, to me, it becomes like you mentioned before, people being willing to buy a bottle of pappy for 20 grand or whatever it may be, it becomes a trophy and just a bragging rights thing. It's what hipsters do with bands. Nobody's ever heard of them before. And then as soon as they get big, they're like, nah. Well, I knew them before anybody knew them. But they're sold out, they're not cool anymore. And so it's just like, there's this limited amount of product that someone can attach their own identity with. And that's just appealing. 'Hey, I've got this and you don't therefore I'm more important than you,' you know, on the sort of caveman base level. So there's that, and then there's the creativity involved. It's just the level of ownership. And of course, I appreciate that and want people to support us and love

our products. But there's kind of a happy medium there where we can, we can work with it and do both. But, you know, at some level, it's like, pardon my language, but like pump your own fucking distillery, man, like, come on. What are you? What are you trying to do here?

JB: Do you think and this may be, you know, pulling teeth here. But do you think that there's a way that distilleries can sort of go into that allure and affect the secondary market? I guess it's gonna take me a second to get here. Um, what I'm specifically thinking about because you're not directly I mean, you're indirectly benefiting from the secondary market, right? Because people see it, the demand goes up, they want to buy more. Do you think there's a way that through a story or through this sort of like, allure that you can create? Do you think you can indirectly or directly affect that sort of secondary market demand? Does that make sense?

AN: Yeah, um, God, I'm sure there is a way.

JB: Like other than just allocating because obviously if you're only going to sell one barrel, I guess this is a good example, okay? You have this barrel of bourbon. It's not really that different than the other product that you make. But you're like, 'I really want to use this an experiment, push this out there.' And you create this story. Maybe it goes through like, this whiskey club that you have, like, oh, this stuff is going to be great. Like, XYZ happened to it. Someone stole it, we put it back in the warehouse, like it has nothing to do with the actual impact of the bourbon, but like creates a story. Do you think that that is a possible way that distilleries could affect in theory, the secondary market?

AN: Well, sure, I have a specific bottle in my, I hesitate to call my whiskies a collection because my intent is not to just collect it, although I have a lot that I've purchased over the years and all that, but I have a very specific bottle, a EH Taylor, and warehouse XX tornado surviving, you know, there's this specific barrel or you know, and I bought that bottle, years and years ago, it was because I truly actually liked the whiskey. I tasted and I was like, this is really good. And at that time, it was the most expensive bottle I've ever bought in my life. It was \$75 on the shelf. I've heard that now it's worth, like, I could probably sell it on the secondary market for \$2,000. And so there's nothing, I mean, it's good whiskey. That's the reason that I bought it. And I had no idea that it would be like, I mean, it's a cool story, too, like, there was a tornado. And that barrel, you know, didn't get destroyed. And so there it is. And so that's a very specific example of I think, exactly what you're talking about. But they didn't have the secondary market in mind, I don't think, with that. I guess. So I guess it seems like there would be a very unique and specific difference between doing it because it's like, this is interesting, this will sell right now. And this is interesting, this will sell right now, but it'll sell even better on the secondary market. And so I guess, I don't know, I'm curious, what you were kind of thinking in terms of like, manipulating the secondary market, because I feel like it would be, to be honest somewhat easy to do just based on what we know, people latch on to or get excited about. But now my mind is going to like, is there some way you can manipulate it in an almost negative way?

JB: Yeah. I mean, I guess if you were just straight up lying, then that would probably be a negative manipulation. Or if it was like somebody's favorite bottle of bourbon, and like they truly loved it and now it's been put up on this sort of pedestal that now it's in the hands of people that maybe don't necessarily actually appreciate it for what it is, but they're just trying to make a

quick buck and like resell it. I don't know how that that affects the distillery at all, maybe the image of the distillery, but I, I guess it probably would only positively affected if you were manipulating it. I don't know. I just thought about that during my research. And I was like, would you intentionally want to do that? Would distilleries want to do that? I don't know the answer to that. Because a bottle pappy sells for 20 grand, the distillery is not making 20 grand the person who sold the bottle is, you could get it at \$80 MSRP. You know, and they're selling it for a large sum of money. So it's not really affecting the distillery other than the fact that it's driving demand for it.

AN: Where I was trying to go was that is there some way to do something not to the product physically, but like, the allure of the product, so that it would actually like drive down the cost. But yeah, obviously, that's not going to happen. The secondary market doesn't exist for people to lose money on like that. It just wouldn't. People just wouldn't buy it. Simple as that. But I yeah, I was kind of I was thinking of a way of is there a way we can kind of put out some product that would somehow almost like a, like a Trojan horse to like, bring down the secondary market, or something like that. That'd be something awfully magical. And I don't mean that in a good way or a bad way. But I just think that if there's something people don't like, or I don't think that's

JB: I guess this could be an example of that. Like, going back to Pappy, nobody can get their hands on it if you don't have a large sum of money or you don't somehow find it you can't get it. And so I feel like for some people and like I've been to bourbon auctions where people will talk badly on Pappy because become this product that no one can get it and if you get it like, oh, yeah, we know you spent a large sum of money on it. So I guess it could negatively impact the brand in that sense of like, it's almost like too good for some people.

AN: Yeah that I think that goes deeper into, again, a whole other kind of thing where it's like, if people are really that offended by it [expensive bourbon] like they've got bigger problems like, you know, people or the world has great things and terrible things. And that's what makes the world go round, you know. And so like, the people who get online to complain about how expensive a bottle is, or like, just don't buy it, like, No one's forcing this on you. And there are people who can't buy it. So you can sit there and stew and your own anger or whatever and resentment but like, not doing anybody any good by that.

JB: I've seen grown man fight over bourbon at a bourbon auction before.

AN: I mean it's one of these things that gets really crazy to me. The other thing about these people who take this so seriously, is, I'm amazed more people don't like start their own distilleries, because of this. Like, we are not curing cancer here, it's just whiskey, calm down, this stuff is just not that important in the long run. And so like, I take it seriously, because it's my job and my profession and livelihood. And I love it, and I have a passion for it. But I know, in the greater scheme of things, like I said, we're not curing cancer, like this is a luxury product. But I mean, like, whiskey is not a necessity for humankind like food, water, shelter. Whiskey is not among those, so being able to like understand your place in the world about it. It's really interesting to me to see that kind of from the sidelines, people fighting over those things like priorities, man.

III. King's County Distillery

JB: So just to kick it off. Could you tell me your title at the distillery and what role you play in brand strategy?

CS: So I am the Co-Founder and master distiller at King's County distillery. So you know, it's really my company. It's been around since 2010. I guess my role is pretty much everything, and has been everything over the years. But if I had to say specifically what it is, it's kind of product direction, which sounds very corporate, but whiskey, bourbon direction, whiskey direction, and then marketing and storytelling.

JB: Awesome. What would you say your favorite part of your job is?

CS: Well, drinking old whiskey is really the best part of the job. But I mean, there's a lot of good things. I mean, you're building this kind of visitor experience around whiskey, which can be fun. There's a lot of storytelling. I mean, the advantage of drawing on history is there's a lot of whiskey history that can be an asset in a way that you know, if we were a cryptocurrency company, we would not be able to draw and so you know, that's a sort of fun opportunity for somebody like me who has sort of a history predilection are sort of.

JB: Cool. Well, I'm just gonna go ahead and provide the definition of heritage storytelling that I've been using just because it is kind of vague. And this sounds super academic. But it's, not that serious. So, heritage storytelling is built on the brand's past, embodied in its values and with a specific tone, whether it's family heritage, recipe, heritage, ethnic heritage or other there's always a story when it comes to Bourbon. And so after hearing that was sort of like, your immediate thoughts, and where do you sort of like hang your hat for your brand when it comes to heritage storytelling?

CS: Well, I mean, we okay, so we have no heritage. Like, I mean, I grew up in Kentucky. And I have some personal heritage in the sense that I grew up in this state that people associate with bourbon. But that is like, where it ends. My dad was a minister, he didn't drink. You know, I don't have any, like bourbon family members or anything like that. But it's enough that people invest in that idea, because we are so trained to sort of perceive whisky geographically. So that's sort of one side of it. Let me back up even further and just say, I think the reason that whiskey brands draw so much, or invest so much in the history aspect of whiskey is because whiskey is a commodity that ages. So it suits the storytelling to talk about history, because inevitably, that's gonna sort of wet your appetite for this thing that's been sitting in a barrel for, you know, five to 12 years. So while we as a business have no history in New York City, we do invest a lot in you know, we picked old buildings to, to locate the distillery and, and we tell a lot of the history of New York City's distilling, on our tours, even though that history is available to everyone. It's not our history necessarily. But it is the history of our place. And it's a history that's been sort of co-opted or marginalized by Kentucky over the last 100 years, Kentucky sort of took the mantle of whiskey in America away from places like Pennsylvania, and Tennessee, and Indiana and Ohio. And in a deeper history, New York, Boston, Philadelphia. So it's whose history and what heritage and I think there's a lot of heritage that goes undiscussed, because there's so much focus on the Beam family and certain, like certain brands that have won the contest of history. And of

course, there were so many that were great and didn't survive the contest in history. And so those stories get lost. So, you know, who's heritage is always an interesting question. And I think that's where we get to enter in. But the other thing that I will say about history is, we are just in a cultural era when people I don't know whether it was like, all of a sudden, every movie about Batman now you're going to go through the whole back story of how he became Batman, Spider Man, you know, there's this kind of like, everybody wants to know, the formation myth of everything. And I think it is because as a culture through the information revolution of the internet, now we want to know, you know, we don't want to be told sort of a pithy slogan or a funny cartoon, we want to know what's behind everything that we're buying and consuming. And that is an ethical calculation, and it changes a little bit the dynamic of how things are sort of marketed and sold. And I think that's true of all consumer products, why, you know, the farm to table movement and slow food and a lot of things that are more broadly in food culture, tend to square with a lot of what distilling has always done in marketing itself. So that explains why American whiskey is on such a huge surge of growth because it feeds what people want to know about consumer products.

JB: What I found so interesting while digging into this research, was the three-tiered system and allocation. The way that bourbon is distributed has always been interesting to me because it makes marketing interesting for the product because you're selling the product, but then it could be put on XYZ illicit market and be knocked up, you know, 10 times. I just wanted to know your personal opinion on the secondary market and how that's become prevalent in the past, five years where, especially during COVID, it seems like people have suddenly discovered bourbon. I remember, you could get Eagle rare on the shelf for 35 bucks and now you have to wait outside your liquor store when you hear it's being dropped. And so how do you think that changed the industry at all?

CS: Going back to the aspect of whiskey that it has to age, which makes it very poor to respond to changes in demand. Well, there's this great story in, like the history of alcohol, that people sort of swing between clear spirits and brown spirits every, like 30 years, because that's basically nobody wants to drink the same thing their parents do. There are sort of like predictable fashion trends and whiskey that go back, you know, to the beginning of whiskey. It should have been predicted that whiskey was gonna explode based on how popular it was when I turned 21. But, you know, double the amount of Jack Daniels produced is nearly, it's an incredible capital and investment, it's years of aging, it just can't be done, you can't increase the supply quickly. For the big brands, any increase in supply is going to be incremental. There's this huge demand. I don't know any distiller in the business that isn't running their distillery as hard as possible. But even still, it's not enough. An interesting question is, to what extent are people able to feed the demand, I mean, Buffalo Trace is a great example. They, oh, you know, all of their products around allocation. And it seems like Buffalo Trace is somehow least able to keep its products and supply, but it also has the largest still in American whiskey. If there could be a way, Buffalo Trace wanted to be making pappy for the last 15 years, when everybody has no, for the, for the time being that everybody has known the baptism thing they could have done that they could have just made happy for, you know, 15 years straight. And it would start to hit shelves now. The allocation aspect of everything is a little bit fabricated. I mean, it's not entirely fabricated because obviously the more expensive stuff is the older stuff. And every distiller sort of plays the game where I'm gonna release 5% Is my super age category. And then 10% is my nicely aged

category. And then I have my flagship products that are the youngest. And you know, I suppose everybody's kind of playing that game a little bit, but as a distiller, and as a consumer, I'm both curious how Buffalo Trace and Buffalo Trace is also selling contract whiskey to people so why wouldn't you know, what's behind the business decision to sell a barrel to a contract bottle or for like \$3,000 when you could save it for your own and sell it for if it's a barrel of pappy \$100,000 all of that is at some point, a business decision. I had a brand manager in New Jersey once say, if you want to sell bourbon, make it allocated, that's all you have to do. And, you know, to some extent, that only works if there's demand for that stuff. But we're certainly in a moment where that stuff exists. And the secondary market I am sort of unable to pay attention to, because it just is so far beyond my profession. You know, what people do after the bottle gets through the three tier system is in the business of law enforcement, and people play that game. But there is certainly a lot of perceived value. Not a lot of like blind tasting going on. I mean, let's say if you strip the age statement, and the "produced by" line item from the label, how would people drink whiskey? It would be amazing, you would have all this great whiskey that would be available to them. And they were like, where with this stuff it's only \$40 a bottle and they're now drinking, you know, Four Roses small batch or Buffalo Trace flagship brand. There's not a whole lot of difference to the palate, but people invest in the romance of age statements. We as producers assume that people invest in age statements and that's why we create them.

JB: Besides the allocation and demand, do you think distilleries can affect that sort of secondary aspect of the market where people? I mean, it is kind of demand, but that sort of background, driving people not via actual supply, but via maybe the story that is told, if that makes sense?

CS: Well, 100%, you can trust Bulleit, which is a brand that that is, you know, there is Tom Bulleit, who kind of created the brand for an export market. It kind of conflicted with an internal brand that was being developed by Seagrams. So rather than scuttle the plans that they were working on, they just acquired that sort of Bulleit project and adapted it really to what they were going to do all along, which was this kind of like, Frontier, wild west whiskey thing. And, you know, it really represents like a different era in storytelling, which is kind of, or marketing to kind of present a brand and a sort of theme around the brand. And that's enough that people will buy it. But Bulleit is a pretty thin story. It doesn't really resonate with anybody that I know. And, you know, it doesn't hinder Bulleit's sales, but nobody's trading Bulleit on secondary market, you know. And so I do think ultimately, is that going to harm them as a business? I mean, probably not, they're still selling plenty of bullet. Because the demand for American whiskey is there, whether they're a huge corporation, so they can make it inexpensively. But, you know, are they developing the sort of fan? Well, I mean, I think the people who--bourbon nerds or bourbon heads--to what extent are they actually like changing the broader dynamics of the business, I don't really know. I mean, certainly in the case of Buffalo Trace it has that's a big brand, or a big family of brands, that has really benefited from this phenomenon, but Bulleit has done just as well without much of a story behind it. It does refute the idea that you have to have the like bourbon nerds to win the game of bourbon.

JB: As more craft distilleries pop up or younger distilleries like your own, despite the fact that you say there's no like, straight up heritage inherently with your company, you do still sort of hang your hat on an aspect of history. Do you think that maybe as consumers continue to age up, and as younger distilleries pop up it'll continue to have sort of that history aspect? Or do you

think bourbon could ever be, you know, the sort of, like, cool, canned thing that's going on right now or marketing in a different way, other than history? Or do you think because of bourbons inherent history of the actual product itself that'll always be sort of in the background?

CS: Well, this is a topic that has fascinated me, because I've seen so many fashion brands, you know, to be in New York City is to be at the center of all kinds of novelty and trend and fashion. And so many brands have like come and gone and sold for huge amounts of money in the 12 years that we've been in business. We're still trying to get bartenders to take us seriously. Much of what happens in culture really applies to whiskey, which is, you know, the more old timey you can be, and the more you know, unchanging but the reason I got interested in distilling in the first place was because I noticed that in Kentucky there was a lot of storytelling around history, but none of it had any credibility. Because it was these giant corporations, many of them not even based in the United States, misunderstanding their own brands. I mean, Diageo is a great example of Diageo, kind of mismanaging their American whiskey portfolio. Bulleit is another example of their mismanagement of American whiskey portfolio just like never recognizing that their brand wasn't connecting to American whiskey consumers. They had done well in the sort of cocktail space but also in the means of production. So if you look at bourbon from the 1900s, or the sorry, 1800s, 19th century, a lot of stuff was made on pot stills or three chambered stills. It was well established that pot stills make better whiskey in Scotland, it was so important to that culture, that they wrote it into their laws that you can't make single malt whiskey without a pot still. Woodford had a sort of show distillery that made very little actual spirit. So you know, for me, the opportunity was to undermine, or to sort of call the bluff, of the big brands and say, Well, you know, Wild Turkey says they're full of tradition, and yet here they are owned by Kampani, making this column distilled whiskey in this brand new facility that opened four years ago. Like, besides Jimmy Russell, who is super cool, what is there? There was a shift from the master distillers being the people who were actually making the whiskey and then occasionally going on the road to talk about why they did what they did to the master distillers sitting in the gift shop all day long and really just being put out the pasture, whereas you had, you know, engineers and flavor companies and marketing companies coming in to do all the actual work of shaping the brands and, and what kinds of products that we're making. So I do think ultimately, craft distillers will find their audience and find the huge audience and find, in fact, the same people that are excited about Pappy Van Winkle today. In 20 years, they're going to be excited about Kings County and Wilderness Trail and I don't know maybe New Riff and Peerless in some of the smaller newer distilleries. But, you know, novelty is on a 25 year cycle in whiskey not a six month cycle.

JB: It's almost like how the news is sort of moving towards, especially papers, this like conglomerate where you've got like the Gazette, you know, owning like 10 or more than that, including the local paper here in mid Missouri. They've got the St. Louis paper, they've got Dallas and they own all these "local" papers. But it's a big company, you know what I mean? It's just like Diageo is trying to make a niche, small, historic brand. And it's just not. And so that's, that's super interesting that you bring that up too. And the other story that has always been funny to me and sort of sparked, I've mentioned this in my original research proposal, but you know, you go on the Four Roses tour, and they walk you around, and they sit you down, they tell you about the history of Four Roses, and the whole story is made up. How they got the name of Four Roses, and it's like, people love that. There's a story that's attached to it, but it's not real. I mean,

they'll tell you on the tour, like, that's probably a myth. You know, this wasn't actually true, but it's romanticized to a point.

CS: Right. Yeah. And I think they can get away with that, because it's been around for a while, but I think that is a weakness for Four Roses. And part of the reason why people have been drawn to Wild Turkey and to Buffalo Trace is because the leadership, or the public face of those brands, has been stronger. And, so there's sort of the mythology, but then there also has to be a little bit of a present day story. I continue to think that in addition to having history, you also have to have a personality. And, you know, ideally, that's a person who actually knows and has some influence over what the whiskey is actually like, which is why somebody like Pat at Wilderness Trail has become such a rock star, because he genuinely is a master distiller in the old sense. I mean, he's the person who's there every day, he's making decisions. And, you know, he didn't inherit the job from a father. You know, it's not, and, and his company is, I don't know how much of it is owned by him, but it's still his company. So that piece of it, the sort of the creative aspects of the control, the ownership, and decision making, are all interesting factors that I think in terms of present day, a brand needs to kind of present that. Like, who's making decisions, who owns who, who's in charge of the finances? Who's in charge of the product? And, you know, if a company can't answer those questions, with a pretty good answer, you know, people turn off.

JB: Well, those were kind of the basic questions. I know we covered a lot but this has been wonderful. Is there any sort of topic, you know, under the broad umbrella of heritage that you wanted to add to or just speak on?

CS: Well I do think the mechanism of production is really important. I mean, obviously, easy for me to say, we're a pot still distillery, we make bourbon in a way that really is more like the way people made bourbon a long time ago. And that's a big gamble, because it's much more expensive. And the question is just like, are people going to invest in that as genuinely tasting different, you know, I mean, do people try our product and say, 'wow, that really tastes different than a column still bourbon.' I mean I think it does, but, you know, everybody's different. And everybody invested in different aspects. It's a way to make something appealing to a consumer, very simply, I mean, Jack Daniels, not oak, but charcoal. You know, they're just kind of like blasting it with charred wood. And that's been working for them for 150 years. So you know, to what extent will people's palates ever drive the market versus the sort of product in terms of how it's made, or how old it is or what the label says? I, you know, for me, it's the sort of Woody Allen problem, which is, do you consider the flavor of the thing to be the determinant of whether you appreciate it? Or do you factor in all the backstory and all the age and who produced it and the story of why it was produced. And most people are not art for art's sake, when it comes to bourbon.

JB: There was one thing I forgot to mention, but what are your thoughts on reforming the three-tiered system? I know there's been conversation about that recently, especially during COVID. That was a big topic. But what are your thoughts on that?

CS: Well, I mean, certainly, this is happening in a lot of industries, where there have been distributors and brokers and middlemen, and all things that the internet was kind of putting to

bed. And then COVID, sort of may have put the final nail and the problem with distilling. There's so much legality around alcohol, you can't just wish it away, even if it would save consumers a lot of headache. And, you know, there's a lot of instances where we ship bottles to California, then it shipped back to New York, because of the three-tier system and the way that online purchasing has sort of sprung up as a fourth tier where you have things like drizzly and casters, these online marketplaces that have added a fourth layer, just to be able to get bottles to people. Rare bottles in particular, but also bottles in general. I mean, it doesn't make sense for a \$40 bottle to spend \$20 shipping. But for an \$80 bottle it does. And I haven't really seen \$80 bottles of American whiskey that anybody really needed to buy until the last 10 years. So you know, there didn't always exist an online demand for American whiskey. But there certainly is now. I pretty fervently believe we have a lot of distributors, and I would not necessarily speak ill of them, but they would be the first to tell you that they exist in sort of government mandated inefficiency. And if we were to get rid of it, I think if we were to allow direct shipping to distilleries, it would solve a lot of interesting problems. Because those like crazy high stakes allocated bottles would go direct from the distilleries. And liquor stores would get back to the business of commodity whiskey that the big distilleries really focus on and is better suited to existing in a physical location and boutique shops will have access to boutique stuff. I don't think it would change that much. But it would certainly remove some of the hysteria around the allocations and make it more accessible to people who want to buy stuff, which, you know, in a national landscape is very difficult when there's 50 customers in 50 states, they all have to get routed through different middlemen.

JB: It would almost be like whenever Kanye West drops his merch and there's Yeezys coming out, I could see all the crazy people you know, waiting until four o'clock on the dot buy their allocated bourbon online direct.

CS: Seal box is a great example where he's basically set that up. DC has funny laws because it's DC and they're too small to have traditional distributors. So I can ship to a consumer in DC legally and DC retailers can ship anywhere in the country legally most places. So, Blake who set up seal box as a retail business in DC does a lot of single barrels and they will drop in that fashion. You know they'll totally sell out so that's become a little bit the evolution of the secondary fascination thing is just these kind of like online drops where you'll have this moment of like five minutes later, viciously clicking.

JB: A bit different demographic for the people that are doing that than waiting for the Yeezy drop but maybe not.

CS: It's a lot of younger people, let's put it that way. So yeah, that can be a somewhat more diverse demographic than traditionally, Bourbon people over the age of 50 are pretty predictably, demographically similar, but yeah, but under 40, you get some variety.

JB: Yeah. It may make it easier for younger generations to get bourbon. They're not trying to fight the guy on the street.

CS: Yeah. I think that that is the hope. And I certainly want to be aligned with the younger generation, the older generation for 1000 reasons, but I do think, you know, ultimately, the

economy should be fair. And what has happened in bourbon is getting further and further away from fair every day. And the government has to solve it at a certain point.

IV. Limestone Branch Distillery

JB: I've been providing the definition of heritage storytelling that I've been using. Sounds kind of academic, but maybe just to get the ball rolling. So heritage storytelling is built on the brand's past, embodied in its values and with a specific tone, whether it's family heritage, recipe heritage, ethnic heritage or other, there's always a story when it comes to bourbon. So with that in mind, how important would you say heritage storytelling is to the marketing of the brand.

CJ: So for Limestone, very, very important. So a little background. While the distillery was not open until 2010, our master distiller comes from two of the most influential families in the bourbon industry. And so he has a ton of background in this, as well as everyone in his family. And he's been around the bourbon business his whole life. And the people that were most important to him and his family that he had a connection with, that inspired him to open the distillery in 2010. Actually, we're very enthralled in very important people in bourbon until prohibition, and then even afterward, and so it's a really big part of the limestone branch story. Have you ever been there before?

JB: I have not. I've driven past it. I am 23. So there was a weird time where I turned 21 and then COVID hit. So I haven't been able to make the trip.

CJ: Yeah, so the history is really important. And I took a couple notes. So I made sure that I had answers to your questions and we might get to this specifically, but even when you walk in there, like we have a whole wall of history on, like our timeline. And it's not only that, but it's like old artifacts that kind of tell the stories. So you can like concretely see it. So it's a very critical part of limestone branch and who we are.

JB: Yeah, we can just go right into that. What are some of the tools or how the story is structured on a tour or just like, what are the different ways that you like push that story out?

CJ: So all the tours include history, because it's kind of cool to see. Something that we have that's unique is we do have this history wall with a call it like an artifact wall. I'm sure that's not what they call it. But it is like a very mini museum of the history of the bourbon industry, specifically as it relates to our master distiller and his family. And then the brands we have today, currently that we produce there. But we have cases of old bottles from the 1800s that are in there, and they're not wrapped because they're all wheel bottles. We have old jugs back from when bourbon was first, around like massive, really heavy ceramic jugs to show like, this is actually how people used to get bourbon instead of in these nice pretty bottles we have today. We have old notebooks that have the recipes of our brands written in them that have been passed down through our master distillers family, old advertisements and things to show people to kind of help authenticate, like the story that we're telling, like these brands have been around for a while. This is our master distillers family. And here is the proof of that. And I think anything that you can do visually really helps people get excited and also understand what you're talking about. Because if I sat here and I read through the history to you, you would probably be boring, right? But to see

the fun and exciting artifacts really helps bring it to life and paint the picture for people, which is really unique. So we do that mainly through our visitor experience. So that's a big part of the tours, but we also use it from a marketing perspective. Our master distiller tells stories, I say stories, they are stories, but they're real stories. He tells the story of his family and how he got to where he is today. And we use that in content on our website, marketing content, educational videos, so master distillers as I'm sure you know, go around and do a lot of educational stuff with industry members oftentimes and we use it for that it can also be used to tell consumers who we are because it is a big part of who we are. And it's cool to understand that from his point of view firsthand instead of me trying to tell you about that. So we use it in marketing materials and we use it educationally and at the distillery are the main ways that that's communicated.

JB: Yeah. So then for those sort of, like niche marketing campaigns, I'm thinking like, maybe like a small batch release, or like, like newer products, then how does the history like tie back into that, like, maybe in the label or something like that?

CJ: Yeah, so I obviously can only speak for our distillery, but when we develop any, let's say, we have a new products, we have a new product coming out later this year, for example. And we actually look at all of our historical products and all the vintage artifacts and items for inspiration to design the new stuff that we have. So aesthetically, it actually has a little bit of an influence on what we're doing today. As well as this new product that's coming out actually has, it's using a recipe that was used many, many years ago by our master distillers family, actually, and one of the artifacts we had with the distillery. So he was able to get that from the notebook, and use it and obviously, modernize things slightly for today's you know, technology and like how we distill is a little bit different than what they did in the 1800s. But we use that same recipe to make what we have today, so inspires the actual product, both aesthetically and the way that it tastes. Which is good. He uses things like a yeast that's identical to what they used back in the day and is really influenced by his heritage and it kind of affects almost everything that we do at limestone, which might be a little unique than other distilleries.

JB: So how do you hope or how do you see that heritage storytelling as the marketing strategy, maybe signals authenticity to your customers? How do you hope that relates to your customers?

CJ: Yeah. So we have multiple brands that come out of Limestone. We don't necessarily make a whiskey that explicitly is like Limestone Branches. So we have these brands that have the heritage also that come from the distillery and the history and the heritage story, and who Limestone and our master distiller are. It helps, in my opinion, and hopefully this answers your question correctly, but it helps build the trust, because you are showing, like, 'hey, we have been experts in this for many, many years, we know what we're doing.' And not only that, it's a passion of ours, but we really care about it. And so it helps build trust and authenticity with the individual or consumer who's looking to buy the product. And if they trust us, that's a good thing. So we want to kind of use that to build a really good trustful relationship with them.

JB: Totally. That's just the thing that I found the most interesting is like, compared to other consumer products, where you're trying to find your values in what the CEO wants, a lot of the bourbon companies seem to pull it from that history. And if you look at like Uncle nearest, where they found that story in The New York Times. And that was kind of like a gold nugget,

because it was this older story that they found and brought back and we're sort of running out of maybe the bloodlines of the bourbon people. And so trying to think about how new craft distilleries or new distilleries will use heritage or if they will use heritage. Do you have any sort of like thoughts on that, like I don't know, like looking at maybe a brand that doesn't have history? Or I know that most of your brands do have history, but having that sort of element?

CJ: Yep. Yeah, it's a tough question for us because from a Limestone perspective, they do. So even the brands we have that are new brands that we made up, not made up, but like that we created that were not around 150 years ago, like some of our other brands. We named them after influential people. So it fits with Limestone, and they were inspired by the people that inspired our master distiller so it's a little different I think I'm sure not every distillery is going to be like that. And we're kind of in a unique situation where, look, I'm in marketing, right? So I know that not everything is always 1,000% true story, right? And that is what marketing is and there are really big brands that had a little nugget of story and it has evolved and that's okay. But being a craft smaller distillery, I always have felt it's important that we don't do something like that. And that we latch on to, as it was because it makes it more authentic. And it helps build that trust. And so we haven't necessarily done that. So many distilleries coming up, and everybody wants to latch on to something. I understand why it's important. And we see it too. I mean, our master distiller is not the only master distiller that comes from this family. So there are other people out there and other distilleries that have a very similar story. You just kind of have to find how it relates to you. And I think it's probably going to get harder, longer term. I don't think it'll ever go away because I feel like consumers always build emotional connections with things. I mean, I see it now, I get emails from consumers sometimes. And they send me old photos of their grandpa drinking our bourbon back in the day, or they saw our commercials on TV and they show us a picture of their grandpa, they literally like put it up and said, 'oh my gosh, my grandpa used to drink this. How fun.' And so I think creating that emotional connection and like relating it to something that's been around for a long time is super important. But the more distilleries that come on, and there's only so many things you can do. Right? So I just feel like they're gonna have to figure out a unique way to differentiate themselves. And long term down the road, it might not be this, which is kind of tough, because it's super cool. But I think people are always gonna care about it. I think it'll always be a part of the conversation, which is important, but it may not be newer distilleries might not be able to latch on to that in as big of a way as we're able to now, in today's market. That's helpful. Yeah. It's a tough question.

JB: Yeah. No, it makes sense, though. And what about bourbon and like Kentucky, and the way that the trail is set up and everything? What about history do you think lends itself so well to bourbon? Like you said, these new companies come up with the new brands, and even though it's a new brand, you're still trying to find, you know, that history to tie to it.

CJ: Everybody does have some sort of tie usually, like we always say, you don't necessarily get into this business, just because you want to make money, right, because it's really expensive, and it's really hard to get into. And so most people will have some sort of emotional connection or tie with the history of bourbon or Kentucky, but I just think it's been such an important part of Kentucky as a state and kind of who it is. And as a state and an economy. They've done a really good job of like, explaining the entire process of like, why it matters, even with the barrels, for example, like, this is super important, just as important to the history, and who we are as a state

as the bourbon itself is, and they really make it an experience. I think it's not made up like that is what Kentucky is like most bourbon is made in Kentucky. And that's kind of cool when you learn that there's way more barrels of bourbon in Kentucky than human beings. That's kind of fun to learn. And when you go there, all the distilleries, and I mean the cities, I've actually been down in quite a while. But like Louisville in the cities. I've been to ISC a couple times. They make you feel like, hey, look what we do. And like they're very proud of it. And they're proud of the history and they're kind of proud to like be stewards of pushing it forward and bringing it where it is today. And I think it just makes it really enjoyable and helps people build a connection with Kentucky and bourbon. I mean, I have a lot of friends who like they don't even drink bourbon and they love going down there because not even our distillery to any distillery because it's just a very cool experience. And they like to learn about like, Oh, what was it like, and how do you do this? And, you know, why is that relevant to me, and everybody always, like falls in love with it when they're down there.

JB: Yeah. So switching gears a little bit the other part of this research that I've been interested in that I want to get the marketing perspective, because it is kind of like an abstract thing. I don't expect you to have exact answers, but just like your opinions, the secondary market, the illicit market, I'm sure that you have products that are being sold on that market. Do you guys think about it at all? Does it play any sort of role in like conversations?

CJ: Yeah, so honestly, I can't really speak to it. It is definitely interesting and intriguing and it will be something to watch. But we don't have any experience with it. So I wouldn't feel comfortable answering it for you.

JB: Yeah, no, that's okay. The way that bourbon gets to the customer was what was interesting to me, you know, the three tiered system and allocation. But then it seems like within the past probably like three years, this new element of that three tiered system with the secondary market has popped up. And it does affect probably like Pappy the most and like, like big, big companies. And so what how my mind was working with it, it's just how that's going to affect the brand image. And maybe you can speak to this from like a marketing perspective. But when a product goes from being this like elusive thing that you can get at the distillery or you used to be able to get on the shelf and now it's become this product that like, people are getting just because they want to have a \$10,000 bottle of Pappy now like, how does that sort of change the story? I guess?

CJ: Yeah, um, that's a good question. We don't have any brands that are there yet. So I don't have any personal experience with it. But I mean, I would think like, obviously, it's going to change, right, the way that we talk about the product and market product. So I think, for example, how our marketing strategy that we develop is going to be drastically different on a brand that like, has 98% awareness versus a brand that nobody's ever heard of yet before, whether it's new, or even if we're bringing something back, the awareness is so low, our marketing strategy can like vary drastically on what's effective. On newer brands, where we would be spending a lot of time probably educating people on who we are, and making sure that is like front and center. As a brand becomes super popular, and people are falling over themselves to buy it no matter where they can find it and pay whatever, that's obviously that's gonna change a little bit, I think how we communicate to consumers in our messaging. But we don't have a brand that's quite to that level

yet, at Limestone. So I don't have any personal experience with that. But I'm sure that changes the way that they talk about the product and their pricing strategies and things like that. I would imagine that I am not sure. It's just crazy to me. I don't know, the secondary market is strange. It's a strange place. And the fact that people are willing to pay that much money for bourbon is beyond me. But then like, there are a lot of things I love in life, but I don't really think there's anything I would spend like \$20,000 on. My brother in law who loves Scotch now, I don't think he's ever spent that kind of money, but he is the kind of person who will go and like wait in line or go travel to like get this one bottle and he like really loves to collect that kind of stuff. So it's very interesting when to me when people love it.

JB: Yeah, yeah. Well, because it doesn't seem like an investment piece since it is a consumable product. My mom likes to buy shoes. My dad likes to buy bourbon, they just don't they confer over it. They use each other thing that they go. Just like whatever's personal. You know, I guess it's an investment if it makes you happy, right? So from a we won't go down the secondary path, but from a consumer standpoint, how have you seen the demographic of people who are consuming bourbon change at all?

CJ: We have started to see it shift and with the brands I work on specifically, we're seeing more and more women engage with content, buy the product to talk about the product than ever before. It's still pretty male dominate. Not dominated that's a backwards but like it's a pretty male heavy consumer base, which is just by nature of dark spirits and overall kind of the trends that we've seen. But more and more women are doing that, we are starting to see that they're that bourbon is, you know, we used to have a very concentrated area where we were seeing most of our guests from or like most of our product purchased. And now we're kind of starting to see that spread out all over the place, which I think is great. So it's definitely shifting. And in general, we've seen in the industry, which I'm sure you've probably heard from many people that you've interviewed is, we're starting to see a shift in the amount of money that people are willing to spend, especially coming out of a pandemic and things like that people are often more seeing this, fewer but better type of type of attitude from consumers. So they're willing to spend more on something they really like, instead of buying a bunch of something that's, that's just okay, so we're seeing a shift into higher end products, which is not just us, that's like an industry overall. And so there's a little bit willingness, more willingness for people to spend. But obviously, that translates from a demographic perspective into people who have a little bit more disposable income.

JB: Are those kind of people searching for a product that they think genuinely think tastes good? If it was white labeled, they wouldn't care if it tastes good, or is that a lower factor?

CJ: So it's a little bit of both. It has to taste good, no matter how good it looks. If it tastes bad, at the end of the day, people won't return. However, the bourbon industry is getting extremely saturated. So you can go to a grocery store and see, even at a grocery store, how many bourbons are on a shelf. I mean, there are aisles and aisles filled with bourbon. And you have like two seconds to capture someone's attention, if they don't know what they're looking for, an enticing packaging or story. Or an authentic background, or something that sets you apart is super critical. And getting the consumer to notice who you are at first, and then from there, then you they need to know that it tastes good, right? So once they taste it, and it's always a part like how the

product tastes, and the quality of the product is always a part of what we communicate regardless. Even if you aren't our consumer, we talk about like, 'Hey, this is what it tastes like.' So you know ahead of time, but also once you taste it, you need to enjoy it if you're going to go back and buy it again. So they're both really, really important. But the way that the product looks aesthetically and the story and the branding overall is super important, just like any other industry, because there's 500 things on the shelf, you're going to pick the prettiest one and read it. And if you don't like what it says, put it back and pick something else. So

JB: I'm a sucker for good packaging. I hate to admit it. But yeah, well, those are just kind of the general things that I had for you. Is there anything that you wanted to like touch on? Anything you made notes on that I didn't ask about?

CJ: I don't think I told you, I'm the brand manager for Limestone Branch and all of the brands that we produce there. And then that is like all encompassing of the entire marketing strategy. So developing the actual strategy, which is like the short term planning, the long term planning, product development or innovation plan, content, marketing, partnerships, all kinds of stuff. So involved in the entire process, which I don't think that I mentioned prior when I introduced myself, but yeah, I think we covered all the notes that I had, if you didn't have any other questions.

JB: I think I have one more one more slight question. But since you are throughout the whole process, what do you think makes a good story obviously from like the true perspective, but even if it is true, you are still showcasing it in a certain way. Right? Like putting it online, the timeline. What do you think makes a good story when it comes to bourbon?

CJ: I think from a consumers perspective, it's something that they can easily understand. Coming from somebody who knew nothing about bourbon before I got this job and then you see all this stuff, and there's all the science that goes into it. I mean, we actually had Brad from ISC come in and present to our team, like literally half of the day, all the things about a barrel, and that was just one part of the process. And then we went into the distilleries tour. So I learn all of these different things. About the grains and all of the things, and it's very overwhelming. And there's so much to tell. And it's all super important. But I think from a consumer perspective, what makes a good story is something that is simple and easy to understand that they can like, 'Oh, yes, I get it,' because we only have your attention for literally less than 30 seconds. So it's something that is tangible to like, they can kind of, in this case, taste it. So like when we talk about, this is a recipe that was used 150 years ago, for example, that's just an example. But like, this recipe has been used for 150 years. This is what it tastes like. And then they can actually like taste it and see it and the history kind of like comes to life for them. So I think that's what makes a good story.

V. Old Dominick Distillery

JB: I've been providing how I'm talking about it in my research. Heritage storytelling is built on the brand's past, embodied in its values and with a specific tone, whether it's family heritage, recipe heritage, ethnic heritage or other there's always a story when it comes to Bourbon. So with

that being said, from a marketing perspective, how would you say how important is heritage storytelling to the marketing at Old Dominick?

ZW: We are available in about 12 states right now so I think storytelling is important outside of the city limits, but we really focus more on the product itself outside of Memphis. And then in the city of Memphis, we focus a lot on our family heritage, only because like you saw on our website, we've been here in Memphis for over 15 years. But out in the market, or in other states, talking a little bit about history can sometimes validate consumers. 'Oh, it's around since 1866.' But what I'm seeing personally, in the field is that the consumers, they care about history, but they want a little bit more than that, you know, they want a wild they want anything that says Follow the bond, say one cool finishes on products, or they want the single barrel version or a high proof. And so I think it's kind of twofold here in the city. Our family heritage, which has a lot to do with our distillery experience and who we are but in the field itself, because we are such a saturated market have to have a little, bit in my opinion, you have to have a little bit something else, just besides your family heritage, you know, you have to have a some sort of product that is going to people are going to latch on to you.

JB: What aspects of your heritage story do you hope resonate with customers? And what about it do you hope signalizes authenticity about the brand?

ZW: I think what we want people to know, as it relates to our family history is the word family itself. So we are still under the same family management as we were in 1866. You know, we still carry that same last name. Our current president is the great great grandson to our founder, Dominico McNally. And so Chris, he's here at the distillery, he's on the bottling line. And so I think, if you asked him, he would probably say the same thing is that we want to share a piece of our family with each consumer, we want to be relatable, we want to be hospitable, inviting, and so that's kind of part of that heritage that we want each consumer to latch on to. While we do hope to be a big, you know, Brown Forman or a big brand one day, at the same time we also want to keep that level of family owned and operated sort of thing. I would think also, that's important to Dominico itself is just you know, we had 150 years in Memphis. And so Dominico really latches on to the city of Memphis, and as a huge advocate for the city of Memphis. And so we want to kind of share a little bit of Memphis in our products as well as our family.

JB: What are some strategies or tools that you use to push out that story? So I'm thinking like, tours or like storytelling on the website, that kind of stuff.

ZW: So tours are huge for us. So we have tours here at the distillery. We have about 30 minutes or so of just storytelling in the tour itself. And then if you've ever been to our distillery or seen pictures of our distillery, you will notice that at our bar we have a life size portrait of our founder himself, and he's holding a glass of whiskey, so that's kind of like our selfie spot. And so that embodies just kind of this overall vibe, where it's like our founders here, here he is, you know, take a picture with him. And so I would say storytelling as our distillery experience itself, is most important. And then in the field, we do a lot of like targeted ads, and it's, you know, if our founder had a glass of bourbon it would be this. And so we pull in, you know, I think another one says, like if Dominico McNally was drinking, it would be this kind of bourbon. But also, that brings me to another point is, we have a line of products right now it's called Healing station.

And the back of that label will explain what healing station was. And it was an old Dominic warehouse that dates back to 1886 where our founder would keep all of his barrels into a bottle them under the Old Dominick label. So there's one part of our history that kind of pays homage to the past, it pays homage to Dominico McNally himself. But this year, we're going to release our old Dominico products, because they've all been aging at our distillery since 2017, and so that'll be the first product that was distilled, aged, bottled here in Memphis, and we think it's really honestly, the first whiskey to ever be distilled in Memphis. So that's going to be a new story to tell is that not only is his old, the Old Dominick brand back, but the Old Dominick brand is distilling for the first time, and it's distilling the first whiskey, and its made this by a female master distiller. So we have, we have a lot of story to tell. And we have a lot of products too. So it kind of having a big story is great, and it's bad. We have a we have a lot of different ways that we've got to try to tell it.

JB: Yeah, so how does that process go? Whenever the distiller comes up with a new recipe, or you have new products coming out, sort of like diving back into the history and like pulling out something that you're going to attach to that brand? Or how does that process go with sort of, yeah, I guess, coming up with how you're going to frame the story for the new product,

ZW: So we have a healing line of products. And those were sourced from well, their contract distilled at MGP. And so our President knew he was like once the Old Dominick brand launches in 2017, we're going to have to launch with Aged products, they started distilling at MGP in 2013, so that when we launched in 2017, we had a brown, you know, a whiskey that we could sell. So if we go back to our founder, he didn't distill his own liquid he sourced and sold too. So this healing station line is really paying homage to what he did. But our new Dominick is all about, like I said earlier, the new version of the present day modern iteration of an older brand, or revitalized brand. And so we have an innovative master distiller who's made a lot of history herself, the first female head distiller in Tennessee, she's master distiller but she's also president of the Tennessee distillers guild. And so this was she came to us from Wild Turkey in Kentucky, but so she is kind of the new face of this new version of what all Dominick is going to be right so and with that, we are kind of saying that we are a revitalized whiskey brand with a craft distillery. And so at that craft distillery, we produce whiskeys, vodkas and gins.

JB: So as the leader for the marketing strategy and brand creation, how fun is it or what's your favorite part about that marriage between history and bourbon?

ZW: So that's the word—marriage. That's one of the marketing terms that we use a lot, because it's literally, we're saying it's like, okay, this is where Alex is marrying history and innovation. And so we want to honor our history by continuing to grow the Old Dominick brand. You know, we don't know if Dominico ever had the desire to distill his own products. But we wanted to honor him by growing his brand. Further, I think that's what Chris Canali wanted to do. And so he didn't want to just bring back and whiskey brand, he wanted to bring it back in a bigger way, bring it back and distillery version. And so I think there's a tight rope between focusing on your past, but also focusing on where you're going. And I think we've got to understand what the consumer wants. And so what we're seeing right now is, the consumer loves hearing that we have a female master distiller, the consumer loves hearing that we're going to have a single barrel, or it's going to be a bottle bond, or the fact that it was distilled here, too, even though a lot

of brands still source product from MGP and other distilleries. Consumers still look for that one product that was, you know, 100%, distilled, aged and bottled at that one location. And so we kind of had to focus on what was going to grab that consumers attention whether it's more history, or whether it's more current and future and find a blend of both. And I think we're just gonna have to keep learning and keep listening. And figure out that formula every year.

JB: Yeah, yeah, that's great. But do you think history will always be a part of that conversation?

ZW: It will always be a part of us just because we have such a long history and it's still going, it's still going. So Dominico Canali? Yes, he sold whiskey. But his business was DCC. And so D. Canali and CO is still operating today. You know, they are our parent company. And so they are still around today, DCC has 150 years of history. And so history will always play a role in our story. History will always be kind of like this underlying thing. We're always going to tell our history, however, we have to be sure that we're mixing in present day facts and, you know, future teasers, and just things that, where the industry is leaving, we've got to figure out how to adapt some of those into that history, too.

JB: So looking outside of just Old Dominick, how or why do you think that history and bourbon go so well together?

ZW: I think we have this great bourbon boom to thank for that. think consumers want to have that sort of validation. They want to know the story behind it, but they also want an elevated version of it. I just think we have a lot of bigger brands to thank for this bourbon boom, you know, they've paved the way to get the consumer demand back for bourbon and whiskey. And so craft brands like us who just started, you know, we started in 2017, even though we had this huge history, we can thank all those who've gone before us for getting that demand for bourbon back as much as it is right now.

JB: That's great. I know we've scheduled for an hour but you've answered my questions very eloquently.

ZW: I don't know who else could really talk about this our master distiller probably could, Alex, she's on vacation today or she's traveling in Kansas City and so she wouldn't have time to but I think she would say the same thing. You know, I think her goal here is to really find that perfect balance between history, you know, she wants to honor the Canali families with all the products that she does. She wants to distill a little bit of their family culture or their family heritage into these products. But at the same time, you know, Dominico didn't distill his own whiskey, he didn't distill his own vodka, didn't distill his own gin. So it's definitely her vodka and her gin and her whiskey that she's doing at our distillery, present day. But I think bottom line is she always wants to kind of honor the 150 years of Canali family history that have gone before her that have given her this opportunity to be the master distiller here at Old Dominick.

JB: Yeah, no, that's, that's great. That's wonderful. I mean, I have talked to some master distillers. But it's nice to have a mix of both, because I think there's different perspectives, especially like, from a branding perspective, from like, the actual, you know, whiskey making process.

ZW: I think you asked a question like, you know, in the market, let's say outside of Memphis, because we have a story to tell, but we also have a product to sell. And so I think we always have to keep in mind is what is going to grab that consumer first, is it learning they've been around for 150 years? Or is it learning that this was the first whiskey to ever be distilled in Memphis? Or is it that it's a female master distiller? So I think we've got to put a product out there that they're going to want to try, and then introduce them into that story so that we can hopefully, you know, grip them and keep them a little bit longer and tell them that story.

JB: Do you think as the demographic of bourbon drinkers sort of shifts, you know, women are finally hopping onto the bourbon train starting to dominate the space, well not completely, but more prominent, do you think that that messaging will change? And you said you could pick out different aspects of the story? Do you think that aspects will change as the demographic changes?

ZW: I think it's always important to have that history as an underlying, consistent brand pillar, I guess, if you will. But I definitely from a marketing standpoint, and you're right, whiskeys becoming more approachable. I think females are, I wouldn't say slowly, but I think more and more females are coming on board. And they love the fact that our master distiller is female, because she's relatable. She's creating products that not only fit her taste profile, but will fit seasoned bourbon consumers taste profile, and those who are new, she wants to create a more approachable product and that's why our healing line, it kind of has in the same for the Old Dominick whiskies that we're about to roll out here, we'll have a higher rye bourbon, we'll have an approachable lower proof wheat whiskey, and then we'll have a Tennessee whiskey that's kind of in between. And so we have offerings to all of those palates, and all of those stages of whiskey drinkers, and I think the products you offer, and the story you tell, we need to keep putting products out there that are gonna fit that demand. And so that's another reason why we have a lot of wheated whiskies for those people who are newer to whiskey, and so they want a more approachable product. And as their palette changes similar to mine, you know, they'll graduate onto our 100 proof and then maybe our single barrels.

JB: Awesome. Well, yeah, those are kind of the main questions that I had. If there was anything else that you wanted to touch on. Or maybe something I didn't ask that you would hope that I asked.

ZW: We're trying everyday to find that perfect balance between 150 years ago and now. So I don't think that we have a perfect answer to that. Just because we have such an extensive history. And we have a really kind of master distiller with a lot of history making herself and so I think every day, we tried to find the perfect balance between our history and our products. But then I think we weigh that by figuring out what the consumer wants, so that's how that's what we need to deliver.

VI. Old Rip Van Winkle

JB: So I would like to set the scene on heritage storytelling, just so we're on the same page on what that means. Heritage storytelling is built on the brand's past, embodied in its values and with a specific tone, whether it is family heritage, recipe, heritage, ethnic heritage or other there

is always a story when it comes to bourbon. So kind of vague, but also kind of specific. So more so than just like, random history, the family heritage, and I think the recipe heritage, both are things that Pappy has. So just like with that main definition, do you have just sort of, like immediate thoughts or anything on how that ties into you?

PV: Um, that I mean, that pretty much sums up what we do. We've been at this for 127 years as a family. So history and heritage obviously mean something. That's all kind of well documented. So at this point, we're trying to build and maintain the legacy moving forward. So we've got our past and now we're really trying to protect that in the process of building our future. But yeah, I mean, we've been using more or less the same recipe for 100 plus years. Not a lot changed with the barrels, other than the size of them. For the last couple 100 years, they've gotten, like 48 gallon to 51 gallon to now 53 gallon was the standard. So those haven't changed much the char level hasn't changed much. It's, you know, that's all pretty consistent from one brand to the next, at least with the folks who have been doing it for a long time. There are people that tinker with that a little bit, but there's a reason we've been using the barrels we've been using at the char level we've been using for hundreds of years in the industry. So yeah, history, heritage legacy. They're all kind of intertwined. From our standpoint, anyway. There's a lot of made up history out there. fortunate to be in a situation where I get to tell a real story. Not something created by a marketing department.

JB: How important would you say that heritage story is in the marketing of your brand, so just sort of like the aspects of, you know, looking at actual product and like the taste and the, obviously, the product and the marketing of the story.

PV: It's huge, especially in today's market, and industry climate, people want a story attached to a brand, it's not enough to have just a brand with a cool package, or, you know, whatever the case may be. People really appreciate and almost need a story attached to it. It's unfortunate that there are companies that get away with, you know, some sort of made up narrative based on you know, they pick a name out of a history book that really doesn't have anything to do with the actual product. And they, they take it and weave this tale that really, you know, that may or may not have any basis in reality. But so, you know, for my father and myself, it's, it's nice to be able to tell the story of real people a real connection to brand and the whiskey and the lifestyle and everything that goes along with it.

JB: Yeah, so whenever you talk about the made up stories, I mean, I can just think of like, Four Roses you know, their tale that they have about how they got the four roses name and like the boutonniere that they gave and they're pretty upfront if you like, go on a tour and they say like, this probably not true, but they still feel the need to have this sort of, you know, romantic thing in the beginning. Why do you think in bourbon and I would say bourbon more so than other spirits is there a need to have history be sort of that anchor? Like what do you think lends itself to that?

PV: I think because it's kind of personal. People's tastes are all different. So having some sort of personal connection to a brand is important to people. You can go to a liquor store these days. And you look at the bourbon section and there are hundreds of brands at 50 plus dollars a bottle with some catchy name. And they sell because people want to find the next best thing. You know, there's kind of a point of pride and finding the next big thing whether it's bourbon or

music. You know, like being the first in your friend group to discover a product or a band or whatever, you know it, it gets personal so I don't know I think that personal feeling of connection with a brand is important to people. I again, I think that our story just kind of resonates with people. Pappy was just a kid. We haven't been able to confirm whether or not he actually graduated from college, but he left a little college in Danville, Kentucky at 18 or 19 and moved to Louisville and got a job as a whiskey salesman because he needed a job and he found somebody who was hiring. So he got a job and just kind of fell in love with the industry and he and a fellow salesman bought controlling interest in the company. He didn't have any money when he started. But he saved and worked his way up and his business partner came from a far more well to do family so I think he probably carried the financial load initially, but they bought controlling interest in the company and a couple years later bought controlling interest in the distillery that was making the whiskey, they stock got a license to produce medicinal whiskey during Prohibition. So they were able to survive that 13-14 year chapter of our history and hit the ground running in 1933. Took on another investor in the form of my great, great uncle. Maybe. Let's see my dad's so great uncle. Yeah. I actually just visited all their grave sites today, oddly enough, but yeah, so you know, it's been a family affair, and I think people appreciate that. There aren't many fourth generation family businesses left. You know, most don't make it past the second generation much less than third. And so I think people appreciate that component of our story as well. So you say story, you know, its history, that it's our family's story.

JB: Yeah, so now that, obviously, your brand is at a place where it sort of speaks for itself, and you don't necessarily have to do a whole lot of that marketing, what role does that story now play? How has that promotion kind of changed?

PV: At this point, for me it's maintaining the history and the legacy moving forward. Making sure that's protected. Obviously, none of it means anything if the products no good. So a large part of my job is to oversee the quality and that comes through tasting of barrels and whatnot. But, yeah, I don't have to be out on the road selling anymore. That's how I started my career. A traveling salesman, essentially. Those days are long gone, it sells itself. I wouldn't call it promotion so much as just consumer contact type events, whether it's trade shows or obviously with COVID any and all of that has kind of come to a grinding halt. But prior to COVID a lot of trade shows and food and wine festivals. Occasional bourbon dinner here and there. Charity events just want to stay involved in the bourbon community and remind people that yes, this brand has experienced tremendous success and it's hard to find. But the Van Winkles are still out there. We still care about the consumer. You know, we try to find creative ways to interact with consumers, they may be on a small scale. Because we simply don't have the whiskey to support large scale interactions. Anything we pour at a tasting event is something we don't have to ship to a bar restaurant or liquor store, or to the wholesaler who would then sell to the bar restaurant or liquor store. So we just want to kind of remind people that we're still out there, and we care about the consumer. And we tried to find creative ways to get involved with them. I did a couple of events back in January, here locally in Louisville, and one of them was 20 or 30 people and the other was maybe 100 people, but everybody had a great time. Everybody that I interacted with said, 'Oh, thank you so much for doing this. You know, it means a lot that you're still getting out into the, into the bourbon community.'

JB: Yeah and that ties next into my next point. The secondary market has really taken off in the past few years. For some reason, over COVID everyone decided they want to start buying bourbon. And obviously, that's I mean, you guys have seen bottles jacked up a significant amount. How would you say those sort of consumer facing events that you guys have been doing, obviously bad timing, because of COVID, but how important is it to sort of maintain your brand image of you your legacy and not have people get super tied into the 'Pappy is an impossible to find bourbon and I have to pay \$20,000?'

PV: Yeah, it's tricky, because there are some people who are of the belief that the only avenue to get it is the secondary market. Which is frustrating because the vast majority of retailers sell at or near suggested retail prices, but they sell out, you know, within days, or even hours or minutes of receiving stock. But they're selling via waiting lists, lotteries, customer loyalty programs, so those bottles don't ever see a store shelf. So the consumers who aren't plugged in to that network aren't seeing those prices reflected in the marketplace. They're seeing the handful of greedy retailers who are charging an arm and a leg for product. And that's all they're seeing. So they think that their best bet is to either pay those greedy retailers what they're asking for, at the secondary market, which you know, for one, it's illegal and two it's risky, because you don't know if you're getting what you're paying for. We've seen a number of examples of refills. Haven't seen an outright counterfeit yet. But I can't imagine we're too far off from that considering what some of these bottles are going for on the secondary market, and we're not getting any help from the Craig's lists and Facebook's of the world to police, their own websites for illegal activity. And those secondary market prices are what are driving. That's what's driving some retailers to charge what they're charging as opposed to what we suggest, which is you know, it'll make them plenty of money. Those secondary market prices are what is driving these retailers to validate charging, what they're charging, you know, why would I sell a bottle for x, and then the guy that I sell it to is going to charge five times x, when I can get the five times x, etc. So yeah, that whole situation is unfortunate. And we're doing things to try and combat it, kind of behind the scenes, but we're not getting help from the, the organizations and the agencies that could affect the most change the most quickly. So that's frustrating. But in the meantime, we're trying to just remind people that, 'hey, here's who we are, here's what we stand for. And what you're seeing price wise in the marketplace is, is not what we're aligned with.' So we've actually, we just in the last six months, I went without a Facebook account forever, didn't really utilize it. But we're on Instagram now for the last few months, just instead of letting writers and bloggers and internet trolls tell our story for us. We're trying to get out in front of it and tell our story ourselves. Because it is important for people to know exactly who we are and what we stand for. both historically and moving forward.

JB: I've talked to some people about reforming the allocation system and how a couple states are trying to toy around with that. What are your thoughts on that? And do you think that that would benefit anything you think it would change a secondary market? You know, making it a little more direct to consumer rather than having to go through the three tier?

PV: Yeah, so logistically, the direct to consumer model would be difficult. You know, we're used to taking cases and putting them on a pallet, wrapping them up and sticking them on a semi. shipping out a bottle or three bottles or whatever, logistically would be a nightmare, but it would allow us to control the price. So we would make more money and the consumer would pay less

because you could kind of split the difference between what we sell for to the wholesaler and the retail market. So we could make more money and the consumer could pay less and not have to be concerned with whether or not they're getting an authentic bottle or not. So that would be nice. The Wine and Spirits Wholesalers of America lobby is one of the strongest lobbies in the country. Because the amount of money that they make is astronomical, the wholesalers. And there aren't many of the big spirits producers that would be willing to get behind the direct to consumer model because they rely heavily on the wholesaler salesforce. So the producer can have you know, 1-2-3-4-5 whatever, sales people in a state covering the entire state, but the wholesale team is 20,30, 40, 50, 100 people deep selling those products as well. So there's not a lot of incentive for the suppliers to get behind the direct consumer model. Whereas wineries you know, we operate, in theory more like a boutique winery than we do a bourbon distillery. We would like to operate even more like a boutique winery in terms of the DTC model, it would just be a logistical situation that we'd have to work out, but COVID has shown that more people are interested in not going out and buying in the traditional consumer fashion, they're more interested in, you know, picking up the phone or getting on online and ordering up their groceries or whatever it is, having it delivered or picking, you know, ordering it online or picking it up at store or whatever. So some states have made direct consumer options available, we're just not set up for it. And there are only I think, maybe eight or nine states that that allow for it and Kentucky did make it an option, but they're only like seven or eight, maybe nine states with reciprocal laws that would allow us to, to ship direct to consumer, so it's not it doesn't make sense yet to go down that path.

JB: Yeah, that makes sense. So something else that I was interested in was just the fact that bourbon is such a historical product, you know, the Kentucky Bourbon Trail when you think of Kentucky, the history there. And if you do the Bourbon Trail, and you go on the tours, history is such a big part of it, you know, I would say probably 60% of a tour, maybe more is dedicated to the background and the history sort of setting the stage. I think going on tours, you have more appreciation for the product. And as that sort of changing, like you said, post COVID, people aren't wanting to get out there sort of wanting that like quick fix. How much of a role do you think demand is gonna drive a consumer wanting product? Or do you think that sort of not setting the scene, but the actual brand story will impact that at all? Or do you think it'll just be on the product? Like, how the product tastes?

PV: Yeah, I think we're still seeing a tremendous drive from consumers to get in and see the distillery and I think more so now than ever, people want to, they want to get the hell out of the house. And I think COVID has changed people's shopping patterns and expectations, that people still want to get out and do stuff. And I think more and more, the way we do stuff may be forever impacted, but people are still banging down the door to get in to see the distillery you know, we're partners with Buffalo Trace and their tours have been massively impacted, numbers wise, because of COVID. They have a limit to the number of people they can take on any one tour, and then construction. They've got a \$1.2 billion capital investment plan, including a bunch of new warehouses. Yeah, so they're building a bunch of new warehouses. They're expanding the distilling operation so the number of tours it used to be, you could just show up. I mean, you could bring a tour bus full of people, people and just show up and now it's a person limit and the tours are all by reservation only. So I think as things kind of ease we'll get back to record numbers of people coming to the distillery. Relatively speaking, we're such a young country. But

bourbon has been with us since day one. I mean, as soon as the first Europeans came over, they were distilling, because that's what they did. Wherever they had come from, whether it was distilling or making beer, whatever, is the best way to turn a huge amount of grain into a small, portable, saleable commodity. And that's really what drove whiskey making in general was taking fields full of grain and instead of having to have 500 carts worth of grain, you could distill it down into a few barrels. And it was worth more at the end of the day, so I mean, the history of whiskey in this country, really, is the history of this country. If you look at any history book, and dive deep enough, there's whiskey involved in some way, shape or form. Yeah, it's a big part of who we are and what we do. Which is, you know, it's fun to be a part of such a historical industry. There have always been plumbers. And since the dawn of electricity, there have been electricians and botanists, and farmers, and you know to be such an integral part of American history is pretty cool.

JB: How would you say the average or typical bourbon consumer has changed? Have you seen that shift?

PV: A lot more educated, not necessarily book educated but educated about the spirit in general. Knowledgeable about bourbon, I should say. Younger. A lot more women are drinking bourbon. When I started in this business 20 years ago, and went to trade shows it was 90-95% men. And more recently it's maybe 60-40. A lot more women are drinking bourbon. And I think that has a lot to do with the knowledge around whiskey in general, has changed. It's no longer your grandfather's spirit. You know. We as an industry have fought really hard in the last 20 years or so, to shift people's thinking about bourbon. In the 60s and 70s, and 80s Scotch really got a foothold in this country. I refer to it as the Gordon Gekko effect. You may be too young to know Gordon Gekko was. He was the character that Michael Douglas played in the movie Wall Street. And in the 80s, every man on the planet wanted to be Gordon Gekko. He was rich, handsome, drove a fancy sports car, and he drank scotch. So everybody wanted to be Gordon Gekko. And so people drank Scotch so we've had years worth of struggle to kind of come back from Scotch as the only quality whiskey. Bourbon is just this you know frontier crap that you know you yank the cork out of the bottle with your teeth and rye whiskey more recently we've kind of been fighting back against that. You know, gunslinger saloon reputation, it's taken a while, but we finally got people on the right side of the education conversation in terms of bourbon, there are quality bourbons, you're not going to sacrifice quality by having bourbon instead of scotch. And really I think my father kind of pioneered that movement back in the mid 90s, when he released the 20 year old pappy Van Winkle. There really weren't any ultra premium bourbons on the market. There were older bourbons on the market, but they were mostly selling overseas. You know, cheap. garbage that distillers were just trying to unload because they found old barrels in their warehouse. But my dad, he had older barrels that he thought were really good. And he decided to pay homage to his grandfather and created the pappy label. Obviously I'm biased but I think he pioneered the ultra premium category there are some who would disagree with that but I think deep down most people in our industry and surrounding our industry would recognize and if pressed cop to the fact that he really was the creator of the category and frankly the reason there are 200 instead of 20 different expressions on electric store shelves these days.

JB: As the consumer gets younger and the beverage category in general has really shifted especially in the past couple years a lot of those the ready to drink products and celebrity

endorsed products all that kind of stuff. How do you think the bourbon persona may change as you know, say like Gen Z in like five years when they can drink do you think history will be as important then or do you think sort of the branding of bourbon may change?

PV: Unfortunately, I think it's going to be more about marketing and branding labeling, then history. I know I sound like an old fuddy duddy like so much of the generations I'm 44 so the generations behind me care less and less about history and what it means to where we've gotten today and I that makes me sad because I wouldn't say I'm a history buff but I'm a history appreciator. You know you can't get to today without yesterday. You can't appreciate what you have today without yesterday, you can't fix what's fucked up today without understanding what happened yesterday. So I'm really trying to live in the now or appreciate the now of what's going on in our industry because I am afraid. I look at the liquor store shelves and see all this stuff that's just a made up story. And just really bad whiskey and a fancy bottle selling for crazy prices. Some of it's really good. Don't get me wrong. Some of the newer stuff that's out is really good. I can think of a few products that I've had as of late that are killer. But you see a lot of marketing and branding happening. And that's I think that's the route we're headed.

JB: Yeah, it's interesting, because I can even see, you know, I've talked to like a few craft distilleries, even if they've just started, say, in like 2010. So they have their own product, you know, they're not outsourcing at this point anymore. But even on their website, they still have like a maybe a newer distillery, but they bought some old factory, and they still hang their hat on that. So even though it's not a historical company, necessarily, they're still trying to find that history. What's the company called, um, Piedmont. He's attached himself to sort of legacy, you know, Bobby Jones, he's hanging his hat on that. So even though it's not, you know, Bobby Jones bourbon, he's now hanging it on that. So I think it's interesting and you know, 20 years from now, maybe the distilleries that are popping up now or five years from now, if they'll still do that.

PV: There's gonna be a lot of used distilling equipment available in 10 years, there are going to be a lot of people that don't make it. Just because a lot of them are buying whiskey from MGP up in Indiana, just to have something to put in their bottle while they're waiting for their new stock to come of age. And MGP makes some pretty decent whiskey. It's not all great, but they make some pretty good stuff. But when these startups go to put their product in their bottle, their flavor profile is going to change overnight. And it may not be as good as the MGP. And there are a lot of stupid people on this planet. But when it comes to changing up, you know, if you're a diehard Brand X drinker, and all of a sudden the flavor, flavor profile changes drastically. You're going to know and if it doesn't change, to your delight, you're probably not going to buy that product anymore. I mean, some of the best examples of that are even the really cheap whiskey like, you know, handles of old crow. My grandmother drank old crow, which used to be a tremendous brand and they just kind of became you know, bottom shelf value brand, whatever, but they made like minute little shifts in the flavor profile years ago and people were sending that stuff back wholesale like you know, 10s of 1000s of gallons of being returned because of just the tiniest little shift in flavor profile. When Jack Daniels dropped their proof, a little bit. People went crazy because it changed the flavor profile just a tiny bit. But it was enough for the people that are big fans of, you know, what they were accustomed to? Yeah, it changed astronomically. So there's going to be a big shift with all these. There are so many. You look at a liquor store shelf right now and so many. So much of what is out there is bulk whiskey, it is roughly the

same. This distillate, just slightly different ages and proofs with different packaging. Again, while these distilleries are waiting for their distillate to come of age, and once it does, there's going to be a seismic shift. It'll be interesting. Yeah. Because there aren't many places willing to sell bulk whiskey anymore, you used to be able to just go buy barrels on the open market. And that's how my family stayed in business for during the mid 70s to mid 80s. Just filling in the gaps. Most of what we were selling came from our old distillery, Stitzel Weller, but my grandfather and father filled in the gaps with stuff that they just found on the open market. And you know, there are a few other companies that now are rolling along on their own that did the same thing. And you know, during that time period buying bulk whiskey from a few distilleries that had, whether it was Heaven Hill, or Barton's, or wherever, but those of us that were doing that, at that time period, got on the right side of things from a production standpoint. And either, you know, there are some like the family who owns Willett. They're now making their own whiskey. After decades of buying bulk whiskey, sourcing whiskey and their master distiller is a buddy of mine, he's, I mean, he's making some really, really good juice. But they were able to get a jump on it. You know, 20 years ago, not two years ago, right. So it's a different world, a different landscape.

VII. Piedmont Distillers

JB: First off, just Could you tell me a little bit about your background, and then how and why you came to found Piedmont.

JM: I am a passionate Brand Builder. And I started in the agency world in New York. And then was recruited South by one of the clients of the agency. And when I came down here, I came across the wonderful elixir otherwise known as moonshine. And being the carpetbagger Yankee that I am, I said, Why isn't anybody actually selling this legally because it's delicious. And I started doing research on it. And then the company I was with was getting involved in, quote, merger activities. And I was a business unit head. So I had risen through the company to become a business unit head of a large number of brands. And I did not like the organization that we were merging with. And despite the fact that some of my colleagues foolishly believed that we bought them, they had actually bought us. And then they were moving all of their offices and facilities to our platform in North Carolina. So there was this weird perception that we actually bought them but they actually bought us and it being an executive at a fortune 500 company, there's never a better time to go chase a passion when there's a change in control because all of your long term incentive programs vest like that. So the stuff that I had been dangled in front of me for you know, my three and five year future all vested under the change in ownership and the change in control, which provided me five years worth of income, and the ability to go out and follow my entrepreneurial passion or desires at that time. And so I left corporate America and I started Piedmont distillers and that was about 18 years ago.

JB: Awesome and I read and did some digging on the various different brands under Piedmont and your stories that you link to, how did you attach yourself to those heritage stories if you will, or putting sort of that branding under your various products?

JM: So I'm not clear on the question.

JB: So for like Bobby Jones his story with your whiskey. How did that come to be? And why did you decide to have that be the story for that product?

JM: So we've enjoyed a great amount of success on our midnight Moon moonshine brand. And that is a partnership with the Johnson family and rest in peace with Jr himself who I spent a number of years building that brand with. We partnered with them in 2007. So we are on, what 12, 13, 14 years 15 years with Jr's family and the Bobby Jones Family. Bobby being born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, his grandchildren had spread throughout the south east. And one of his grandchildren knew an associate of mine, not within the company, but a mutual acquaintance, they were expressing a desire to find a spirits partner, specifically a bourbon partner. And that acquaintance of mine said to them, you should speak to Piedmont Distillers, they're based in North Carolina and they make exceptional products and they have a legacy of working with family relationships. And I believe that the Jones family might have made a reach out to the people at Brown Forman and Jack Daniels, and basically didn't receive a positive reply and potentially no reply at all, being the behemoth that it is, as a company. So I connected with Dr. Bob Jones, and I shared with him our capabilities and our philosophy and how we approach the business and it was love at first sight now. He was just engaged and intrigued and impressed and felt that there was a good connection. So we started working together. And that was many years ago, because it takes a long time, obviously to not only develop a brand, but importantly when it's a collection of single barrel whiskies, running the gamut from a bourbon to a Tennessee whiskey slash Tennessee bourbon and a dry, you have to develop some grain bill, and then lay it down and wait. And it's a long time. So they basically reached out to us through a mutual acquaintance. And I having a passion for the game of golf. romantically remember when I was single and was playing it before Piedmont, marriage and kids, which took all of that away— I recognize that—my philosophy is every brand has to have a compelling backstory. It should have depth and texture it should come from a very aspirational place. And when you think about Jr Johnson and his prohibition and bootlegging days and his incredible impact on the foundations of past car and the early days, and it's growth. And him just being a you know, I would consider him the goat of bootlegging and moonshining. So when Tom Wolf referred to him as you know, last American hero, it's a certain stature and importance in history that it has such an interesting life and backstory that and very aspirational. That's like a compelling story and on the moonshine front and when you look at the Bobby Jones history, I would argue that he is equally important to the history of golf in America, as Jr was within the bootlegging in the early days of NASCAR. And importantly, there was an open space within the spirits segment specifically and even more finite, the whiskey space for a lifestyle brand that reflected the values and aspirations of that very passionate community of golfers. The only other spirit brands that I'm aware of that tried to take a legacy approach, meaning associating a brand with a personality or a legend within the sport was Fuzzy Zellers vodka which, oddly enough, I was with Jr. Down in Augusta, Georgia, one time on a trip and we swung by the ABC store. And fuzzy Zeller was in. Juniors like, Who is that? Yeah, that's fuzzy Zeller. And he said who is that Joe? It's a famous golfer, and he goes, What's he selling? I said, I think he's selling vodka. Let's go over and talk to him. So next thing you know it was 30 minutes later we're sitting there like as if they were childhood friends, because Jr had that ability to connect with just about anybody. And so back to the story is the golf space, in that community there's such a passion for and a reverence for tradition, history. And in today's environment, as we turn on the news, and hear why America sucks, and why

we're all racist, and you're horrible people. That community really looks at America as a land of opportunity. And while not perfect, you know, it's, it's, it's trying. And this is like the greatest country on Earth. And we should honor our traditions, and we should value things like character respect, sportsmanship, integrity, you know, you know, some fundamental values that shouldn't be aspirational to everybody are of particular relevance to the golf community, because of the nature of the sport. And Bobby embody those values. So It seemed like a very natural fit, particularly since Mr. Jones was known for his social nature, he was very, very big on relationships, he would write personal notes to people, he would always follow tradition and custom. And ultimately, because of the values that he embodied, and how he kind of exuded those led to the Bob Jones award, and you go, you know, if there's ever going to be a brand, that's a lifestyle brand, that's going to enter into a certain space with a certain lifestyle audience. If it doesn't work with a Bobby Jones, who loved three fingers of great whiskey, I don't really know what would be successful within that space. So I hit it off with them. And I said, Yes, I would like to give this a try. So we spent years developing it. And despite COVID, we're making excellent progress on establishing the brand and beyond seeding it within the golf community, now we're starting to grow it and what we would call traditional off premise retail and we're having difficulty keeping up with the demand. And you know, you're kind of limited because you only laid down so many barrels when you were doing this years ago, and then you have to keep laying down more and more barrels. So not only if you're going to hit your growth forecasts, and or not know if you're going to exceed them, you have to make that decision with little to no information. So, you know, roll the dice and things couldn't really be going any better at this point.

JB: That's wonderful. Thank you for that background. Um, you've kind of touched on this, but why do you think the spirits industry out of any sort of branding industry lends itself so well to historical heritage legacy brand story, more so than say, you know, like a Walmart or I'm trying to think of a different industry, but you go on any sort of bourbon website or whiskey website, spirits website has the our story, you know, telling our story, you go on the tour, it's 50% of the tour, the backstory you see brands that like Four Roses, where their heritage story is, like, possibly not even true. Why do you think the industry lends itself so well to that?

JM: It's a great question. And it is fact that in the spirit space, people really, because it's something that you enjoy on a personal level, and then your desire is of stuff that is quality. So when you hear the Jim Beams and Jack Daniels and Booker's and all of these whiskey brands that come from a founder, it gives it a sense of, you know, I've put my name on it, you know, a stamp of quality, I stand behind this product. And then when you start peeling the layers back it's often rooted in, you know, so and so was there during pre prohibition, and as the Americans migrated from the Northeast or in the Whiskey Rebellion, and they moved down south to Tennessee, and Kentucky and North Carolina, and they took their ancient whiskey distilling practices and took it out there to escape the government intrusion. And then you hear the story about how they were farmers. And then they started their distillery, and there's that entrepreneurial spirit. So men love history, number one, two, they love American history, if they're truly prideful of their country, then there's that entrepreneurial spirit, and there's that stamp of quality of I stand behind my brand. And then over time, I think those stories become more important because this brand has stood the test of time. You know, a lot of today's modern brands, with the exception of like a Tito's which is named after him specifically, there are a ton

of celebrity endorsed brands that are doing well. But it's atypical, that they're actually named after the individual, they tend to the ones that I believe they're successful, should have some personal anchor to the individual if it's truly a partnership. So I think that there's that sense of quality. Authenticity is a word that can mean a lot of things. But it seems like it came from a real person from a real place in time, that it wasn't just contrived, you refer to the Four Roses story. So that naming after an individual, I think, was a dynamic that started early because of the entrepreneurial spirit, and I believe in my product so much, I put my name behind it. And then today, those brands are big brands, popular brands, have stood the test of time. So therefore, they are very authentic in totality. And therefore at the end of the day when you do any branding, you know, one of the most important visors is it's a brand I trust. And I believe that the whole backstory enables people to connect to it, and then trusted that would probably be my answer, but it is pretty amazing because I hadn't sat there and like, profiled it, but when you asked the question, I was like, Well, you know, a lot of the whiskey brands all use names and I'm like, Ezra Brooks, Uncle Nearest, Jack Daniel's, like it just goes on and on and it doesn't actually stop. And I was like somebody should come up with a whiskey that's not named after a person and then you go well, they do but they start naming it after places like Woodford Reserve serve and, you know, sort of it's like either a person or place. But again, it's grounded in a real place authentic, not contrived, you know, not Absolut Vodka. You know, like, doesn't, you know, I know what it means—absolute—but it doesn't have that necessary authenticity to it. The realness.

JB: So the reason why I really was interested in this topic was just the whole system, the three tiered system, allocation, the methods, just sort of like the dichotomy between marketing to consumers, but then also, this system of getting the product to consumers is different than a lot of sort of consumer facing products. And so that's where the secondary market comes in for me, and the fact that brands can sort of indirectly impact this, this is what I was looking into. You see these stories, and it's like, how much of these stories that people are telling about these brands is true? What is the correlation between those and like the secondary market and this new wave of bourbon consumers that's coming up that may not care about, you know, that, someone's got their name on this bottle, whether it's Jack Daniels or not, but that it's a \$10,000 bottle, and you can make a quick sale, it's I feel like it's sort of switched in this space from really caring about the heritage in the actual product and moving towards just like wanting to make this big connection. I want to hear your thoughts on the secondary market as a whole and how distilleries can impact that.

JM: So my personal opinion is that one of the things that most interested me in the spirits industry was that the storytelling was so important. There is such an interest in storytelling, and there's a strong emotional connection with their brands, that, when I was exposed to moonshine, having moved down from the northeast, I, as a marketer, was watching, you know, my own intrigue. I was like, Oh, my God, somebody just pulled it out and opened up the jar. And I'm like, Okay, there's that. Yep. I'm familiar with this concept of moonshine. But my first experience was, I remember it as if it was yesterday, which says that there was all of this latent perceptions about moonshine, and who made it where was it made? Am I going to go blind? Is it going to be disgusting? So you're watching this, someone takes a pull, and then hands it down, and the next person takes a pull, and then they hand it to me, this is clearly pre COVID. So, you know, I took a sip and though wow, that's delicious. And immediately I'm like, and pass it along. And the point that I'm getting to is that the exclusivity, the illicit nature, the emotion around that are

powerful drivers. So you get over to the secondary market and you look at like the Pappy Van Winkles of the world. I've had Pappy and you know, it's okay, but I don't find it to be the best. The reason why it is so enthusiastically desired is because you have all of these bourbon collectors 1000s and 1000s of them. And they want to puff their chest out and say, Well, I got the Blanton's XY and Z. And I have all the letters on the little carousel for the plans. So I've achieved success. I was able to find them and I've made my little circular display and then you know, Pappy you can't get it. So there is something of Human Nature about the chase. I want what I can't have. And then if I can actually get it and my peers can't. I've won. Pappy could be a million case brand right now. But they limit it to like 15,000 cases a year. Just to keep that Mystique I believe. Buffalo Trace, Mark Brown, and those guys over there, they could dial up the number of Buffalo Trace that's coming out of there. Jack Daniels decided to do exactly that. They scaled it just blew it out here. They're doing seven, 8 million cases a year. I don't know what Buffalo Trace is doing. In terms of case volume. I know it's growing. So they're not restricting it like Pappy, but they're limiting it so that, you know, I was just down at a store, you know, nine months ago or whatever, I was down in Wilmington, North Carolina. And you know, there was the big line out front. And I'm like, flipping COVID, you know, all those little dots on the sidewalk and stuff. So I see everybody waiting in line. It's Friday afternoon, not surprising that people are trying to hit the ABC store and the door swings open and there was a guy right behind me. And he goes, Jeff, any Blanton's left, or any Buffalo left, and he goes no, Johnny, it's gone. All right and he peels off. And then I watched like one other person leave. So I come to find out that Friday was the day that they were getting their bourbons in and people were standing in line. Some of it was for COVID. But some of it was to see if they could grab some of that allocation from the week. So by limiting how available it is, the desire for it grows almost disproportionately. Even though you can get Blanton's or you can get buffalo Buffalo Trace, it's not always just sitting on the shelf like Jack Daniels is sitting there and Woodford is you know. So I think that it's the art of the chase on some degree. It's that exclusivity and I guess when the when the chase is done, you pour the drink and you enjoy it that much more because you had to work for it.

JB: If they choose to drink it, I've seen a lot of people you know, that go through all that and then they have this massive collection and it's not drank.

JM: But you know, people have 200 bottles in there all over their billiards table. I enjoy a great whiskey, I absolutely do and I enjoy the nuances between the different bourbons and clearly the different types are hugely different. But, you know, to sit there and like, nose it for five and 10 minutes and then put it in and watch the whole, like when people are doing their true tastings and the process of how they're doing it, it doesn't it doesn't strike me as that. It's a certain mindset, I enjoy the whiskey, I enjoy relaxing and enjoying the flavor notes, the aroma notes, the finish and all of those things, but I don't geek on it and sit there and like, you know, do the whole, you know, this whole thing that they're breathing in and out and like so almost like they're working so hard and enjoying it that it seems to me like you're defeating the purpose of enjoying the nuance of it, but you know, that's what they do. I mean, they're holding their nose and they're doing their thing and they're huffing and they're puffing. And you go, Well, no wonder you're not really drinking these bourbons, you're just going through this whole experience of trying really hard to be an expert. Right? Instead of just really enjoying fantastic whiskeys and you know, so there's a lot go on in that category. There's very people, people are very passionate and if you

really step back from it, and you look at the history of the spirits in the US and how they trended you know, browns bourbons, were just going right down the toilet in the 70s and 80s. And everybody was moving over to the flavorless odorless, tasteless, you know, vodkas rums. That vodka craze was an explosion, because as more and more people wanted to enjoy consuming alcohol, the vast majority did not want to taste the alcohol at all, they mix them with orange juice, they mix them with lemonade, so that the alcohol wouldn't be would be disguised by the mix. And then, you know, obviously, the whole explosion of flavored vodkas, which thankfully peaked and has gone its way, because the world didn't really need like Fruit Loops vodka, like we just didn't need, we were good without it. So then, you know, the grunge movement came in in the 90s and stuff and like they had to be anti establishment anti mass. And then there was this movement back toward, you know, stuff that's genuine and real and authentic. And, you know, you get the, you know, there's character and substance in the whiskey. So there was a lot to buy into there in terms of the heritage and the craftsmanship and the nuance of the grain bills and the aging and the charring and the Rick houses. You know, if you want to get into something there's no other spirit that you can geek one like you can with whiskey because it's got so many layers, you know. Which warehouse did you get your bottle from? Really? Are we really like, you know, I mean, was it the east side? Or the south side? You know, like, was it 14 or 12. I've done so much tasting testing and stuff, you'll probably be surprised to hear this maybe not at all, for all the years with all the bourbons and everything that I've had and tasted, I would put Evan Williams green label, while they were still making it, into the mix at 9.99 a bottle for a 750ml. And I'll be damned if every one of these whiskey enthusiast blindly didn't pick it in their top three if they had six to choose from. And more often than not, it was number two, almost all the time. What a great value proposition but here they are selling it for 9.99, not 39.99. You go, is Pappy really that good? Well, your mind and your entire begging has bought into the whole thing. So when you sip it, you're gonna like it whether it's a good whiskey or not. I have never done the blind taste test with others. Clearly, they're exceptionally mellow and smooth because they're old. But there is a line of thinking that is whiskey, it's gets beyond a certain age that it actually starts to develop flavor notes and off notes that are working against, there is almost like a peak of, you know, between seven and 12. And seven and 14 is really the sweet spot. And once you get beyond 12, 14, it gets too acidic.

JB: Yeah, the tannins, it gets too acidic. I do find that sometimes the more expensive they get, they are just so hot and it's like, I mean, I guess it's if you want to spend \$500 for a bottle of bourbon, or more power to you, but that is not for me.

JM: The psychology of all that is that the higher your wines, whiskies, the more expensive it is, the better it is, right? So price is an indicator of value and we're so enculturated and indoctrinated with that in our culture, then you kind of subliminally just connect the dots that the higher the price, the better it is. And then the deeper psychology is, well I'm successful and I can afford to do that. So I'm going to go buy that bottle because I can and not everybody can. So, you know, there's a whole self-esteem thing that's happening behind the curtains there. So a lot of this stuff is, you know, that's why I always love marketing is because I always love getting into people's head. What I saw with the moonshine, during my own personal experience, and then as I would watch others that were new to it over the years, I was like, anything that has that much emotion around it is a powerful space to be playing. And because people are engaged, they're leaning in, you know, they're asking what's that gonna be like? What's it tastes like? Where's it come from?

The whiskey? What's the grain bill? How was it aged? What char was it? There's an opportunity to really get into it and enjoy it. And then there's a lot of emotion. It's not, 'Hey, so what's the processing speed on this laptop versus that laptop?' You know, that's all about performance. And there's not a lot about connection to the to the item. It's a widget, you know? So that's ultimately why I went into the spirits businesses, because there's a lot of about the brand that drive the business, pricing, availability, backstory, But where is it when you discover it? Is it at the boutique Whiskey Bar? Or is it Kirklands?

VIII. Uncle Nearest

JB: I am just gonna go ahead and provide the definition of heritage storytelling. It does sound academic, but just so it is kind of clear because it can be kind of vague in general. So heritage storytelling is built on the brand's past, embodied in its values, and with a specific tone, whether it's family heritage, recipe heritage, ethnic heritage or other there's always a story when it comes to Bourbon. What are your immediate thoughts in tying that with Uncle nearest and just how the definition speaks to you?

LC: There are so many ways that I think Uncle Nearest ties into that, the most obvious would be the heritage and legacy of Nearest Green himself. I think that is so important to the industry for many reasons. Number one, he was the first African American master distiller and his story was well known in Lynchburg, but outside of that area, his story was pretty much unknown for the last 160 years. I think that there is so much value in bringing that story to light for his family and his legacy, and just for the rest of the world, also to understand what a major part he played in Tennessee whiskey in particular, but also in the overall narrative of whiskey in the United States. So that one is huge. We also have his great great granddaughter, Victoria Butler, who is our master blender. So continuing that feminine family heritage and family legacy. You know, she's a fifth generation and has just been phenomenal. She just got her fourth master blender of the Year Award about a week ago. She didn't come from a whiskey background. She was in law enforcement for a long time and then came to work with Fawn to run the Nearest Green foundation, which Fawn started to provide scholarships for Green's descendants. And Fawn had her blend a batch of whiskey because she really wanted to make sure that the family stayed involved. The whiskey won so many awards that they brought her on as the master blender. So you know, being able to continue that legacy, I think is a really important part of the heritage and when it comes to marketing definitely comes into play because people love having that familial connection to the brand and to the person that we honor. Also, just the fact that it's such a major thing that the distiller is the first offering of an African American. So the racial heritage there is really valuable and also everything that the brand is doing to support other BIPOC and female owned brands as well. So lots of different ties.

JB: The thing that really drew me to this sort of research was just that out of all like consumer facing products, bourbon really does lend itself to having history be that sort of marketing where people hang their hat on, which was interesting to me, you know, you go on any bourbon website, and you see history or our story. And typically, you can plug in XYZ name started this company all this time years ago, and your company has really sort of put itself apart as being like you said, the first African American representing a company, how important was it to lay that base and put that brand story first, before the product and sort of what was that role?

LC: In terms of the story and honoring an African American that was always the focus, and we were also owned and founded by an African American. That wasn't something that we focused on in terms of our marketing in the beginning at all, because Fawn really wanted to make sure that people valued the whiskey for it being delicious, and have the story be focused on Nearest. She now gets so much publicity, and people love to talk to her and interview her. But she's always been very focused on making sure that the story isn't about her. It's about him. The story has always been the most important part to us. When Fawn started this project, she was not in the whiskey business at all. She's a New York Times bestselling author and an entrepreneur, and she heard the story, or not heard, read the story in The New York Times and she came to Lynchburg because she wanted to find out more about the story, uncover what was there and then potentially write a book or produce a movie. As she got to know the family and got to know Jack's family, and got to know the Nearest family, she spent more time with them. One day, she asked the Nearest family, how do you think he would be best remembered, and they said, 'well, he made whiskey, we want to see his name on a bottle of whiskey'. And, you know, they really felt like the reason the legacies of Jack Daniels and Johnnie Walker and Jim Beam and all these people have continued for so long and not been forgotten is because you see their name on a label all the time. And so they really wanted that for Nearest as well. So the story was always the focal point, she didn't start off to make a whiskey at all, it just kind of seemed to be the best way to remember Nearest because that was his legacy. I would say that is absolutely the number one thing. And then also Fawn doesn't do anything unless it's excellent. So really wanted to make sure that going along with that story. If we were going to do something to honor his legacy, the liquid had to be amazing. You know, there was there was no other way around it. So as much as this story has always been the focal point. It was very, very important to make sure that we had a product that lived up to his name as well.

JB: So what are some ways that you market the story, whether it's like tours, or obviously on the website, but what how do you make sure that that story, aside from the product being good, but how do you embed that into consumers minds?

LC: Well, we you know, the largest investment that we make is in our people. We have a four-year-old liquor company and we have a pretty large team. We have brand ambassadors or market managers in every major market. I think we have like 35 people now around the country. Their job is really to go out and tell the story. There's a lot of in person or you know, for the last couple years it's been virtual, but getting back to in person defense, sharing the story. We definitely have tours. Our master blender and Fawn both went out into the market and spent a couple months going around the country and they are getting ready to do the same thing again this year to meet people and say thank you share the story in person hold events and Victoria will do the same thing. Where our brand steward team fallen in Victoria ,touring and meeting people, we also have the Jeffrey Wright video, it's about a 10 minute long video where he tells the whole story that we have on the website, and just online in various places, for people who might not be able to make it to an event in person to be able to understand that story. And then, you know, it also comes across in various programmatic and digital, and so forth, that we do for certain months. Like, we focus on storytelling more around, Black History Month, Women's History Month, Bourbon Heritage Month, those types of events, we also are very lucky that we get a huge amount of earned media. So that is another major place to share the story because we're able to

reach a lot of people through different publications that may not be whiskey drinkers, but you might just happen to run across an article or a podcast that seems interesting, and learn about the story that way. So kind of try and hit it from all angles.

JB: We kind of touched on this before, but the typical story tends to come from these older white men, the demographic of people are old white men, and it's great Uncle Nearest is women owned, person of color owned, how have you seen the demographic of people maybe coming in? Or the people who have begun enjoying bourbon? Have you seen that demographic change at all?

LC: Absolutely. So I've only been with Uncle nearest for a little over a year, but I've been in the spirits industry for a very long time and I worked for Campari. About 10-12 years ago, I ran a program for them, called Women in whiskies. And it was really interesting, because at that time, you know, we had a large whiskey portfolio, international whiskies, but also Wild Turkey and Russell's reserve. And, you know, the thought process at that time was that women didn't really know how to drink whiskey, or they were scared or uncomfortable. But the marketing people recognize that women made the majority of the buying purchases, so they wanted to tap into that potential, and find a way to create a program to market specifically to women and see if there was any possibility to increase that consumer demand. At the time I was a bartender, and I loved whiskey and started working with the program. It was so interesting, there would be so many women who had come into the program, you know, at an event that we would host and say 'oh, I don't really like whiskey.' 'Like, okay, like, what don't you like about it? There are so many different kinds of whiskies. Tell me what you like, what do you usually drink' and we would go through and we'd find a whiskey they liked. But we had 10 brands at this, at that time. So they'd often find many they'd like, and they're like, 'Wow, I had no idea nobody's ever marketed to me, I always thought that it was something that was just for men.' And that was 10 or 12 years ago. Now, I see such a major difference, like our target consumer, we don't, we don't target any one consumer, because we really want to be a whiskey for everyone. But when you look at the data that we collect, through our programmatic ads, and so forth, we definitely over index, female and people of color. We still have a very large white male consumer audience, which we definitely want to keep that as well. But the amount of women, the amount of younger people, and the amount of people of color, for us, especially African Americans, is much higher. So I think the difference over the last 10 to 12 years is huge. Considering that back when I started, there were very few women that felt comfortable outside of maybe Kentucky and Tennessee, very few women that were drinking whiskey regularly. Especially straight maybe in a cocktail.

JB: Do you think that the heritage story that goes along with the brand has anything to do with that? Just maybe people identify like we said, typically the story is this white guy who started this company, and then that follows the demographic typically of the drinkers but do you think having that identifiable heritage story behind it, or do you think that plays a role at all in it?

LC: I think that it plays a role in women and people of color that like whiskey choosing our whiskey over somebody else's? I'm not sure that aspect is what's converting non whiskey drinkers to whiskey drinkers, if that makes sense. But I do think oftentimes, once people hear about Fawn, and they're like, oh, this amazing female-owned company, or they hear the story of Nearest people that relate to either of those figures definitely want to try the whiskey. And

luckily, the whiskey is delicious. So they often continue drinking it because they want to support the company, because of everything that we're doing, but I don't know. I don't think that would convert someone who's not typically a whiskey drinker over to, to whiskey drinking in general, because some people just don't like it.

JB: Fair enough. So over the past what I've noticed, at least even, you know, since COVID, it seems like that demographic has changed even more, you know, people for who knows what reason have just started drinking bourbon, getting more into the research behind bourbon and everything. And despite the fact that you guys are a younger company, you do still hang your hat on that heritage. How do you think or do you think that bourbon marketing may change in the next, you know, five years where it might not have some sort of historical thing tied to it, and these new, like smaller companies will pop up? Do you think that the history that routes itself to Bourbon would change at all in the future?

LC: That's a good question. I'm not sure. I think one issue that I see within the American whiskey industry is, there is a bit of oversaturation going on. And I think that it's getting to the point that it's challenging for new brands to find the point of differentiation. We were very lucky, because we have an authentic, amazing story, but not everybody has those. So I think that for new brands coming in there, they're going to have to either get very creative in terms of how they market, which most often won't be a heritage story, because, you know, it's just hard to, it's hard to come up with those, like those brands already exists. We had a story that hadn't been told, but I don't think that there are very many of those lying around, I think that you will start to see brands like du Nord and different brands that may not have the historical component of heritage, but are, you know, African American owned or female owned and tapping into kind of the more modern heritage story, but it's hard to go back in time and find these uncovered gems, like we have.

JB: It's gonna be interesting, especially with the ready to drink products, and just the younger generations. It'll be crazy to see when Gen Z is able to enjoy bourbon, rather than just drinking alcohol, how they'll be advertised to, you know, 10 years or so.

LC: I mean, I have an almost 17 year old. So I think about that as well. But I think that there will have to be something because that generation is so focused on authenticity, and sustainability and finding ways to create change and diversity, that there will have to be some kind of story, I just don't know that it will be heritage, because, at least in the whisky space, I feel like most of those opportunities have already been taken.

JB: Being such a young brand and having that, awesome treasure story, where Fawn saw this article in The New York Times, how as a marketing strategy, say 20 years from now, when maybe that part of it is lost, the sort of uncovering and being the newness of it, how are you going to continue to market the history or continue the legacy would you say down the line?

LC: You know, what I always think about when I think towards our future, and I can't speak for Fawn, so I won't, but when I think about it, I just see everything that we're doing now as an incredible platform. And I look at the future in terms of our ability to use Nearest's story and the legacy that he created to be able to lift others up that haven't had the chance before, because of

all kinds of different things to really have that light shone on them. So I think we'll always focus on who Nearest was and what his story is and the contributions that he made. But really try to take that forward, to highlight his family and how they got involved in the industry. And then others, we have the Uncle Nearest Venture Fund, which is a \$50 million fund, specifically to invest in BIPOC, and female owned brands. We have the Nearest and Jack advancement initiative to really help propel Black Americans through some of the bureaucracy and lack of opportunity in this industry, and try and get them into more positions of leadership, there are a lot of things that we're already doing, to really act as a platform to propel others. And I think that, that will just continue as we as we continue to grow. And that will be its own legacy as well.

JB: I don't know how much experience of the secondary market that you have. But what's your opinion on that? Do you think that it's changing the space at all? Yeah, just kind of what are your thoughts?

LC: Yeah I mean we're young enough that we don't have a ton of that. But because we do have a couple products that are distillery exclusives at this point. I'm definitely starting to see more of that and I think that it's interesting. I think that it's interesting because there are these products that that you can buy for a normal price. And I think that there's a lot of speculation around it, right. Like we recently released our first liquid because we were sourced and are now transitioning to our own bottles, and we have a product called Master blend. And it was the master blend, batch 005 was the first product that we released, that was all our own juice. And so like something like that, you know, people lined up at three in the morning to buy, just so they can hold on to it, which I totally understand. Like, it's a piece of history. And in those types of situations. I think that it makes sense. And it's really interesting, because, you know, in 20 years, you can say like, I have one of the first bottles of Uncle Nearest that they ever produced totally by themselves. And I think that that's really cool. When it's just, oh yeah, there's this bottle that really should cost 50 bucks, but I'm going to spend \$7,000 on it. It's a little bit silly. That's not where I choose to spend my money. But yeah, I definitely think that it has changed the industry a lot. I mean, I remember when people just bought these lovely whiskies to enjoy at you know, the more expensive, such as \$70 bottles, and they were great, and you can actually drink them now. It's gotten to the point where you can't even open them because it might be worth so much money someday. And so I think a lot of the enjoyment is the loss. I think a lot of the opportunity has been lost. There's so many whiskies that I love that I can't afford to drink anymore. And you can't share that experience with someone else. Unless you were very lucky and made those purchases a long time ago. Or you happen to have someone who you know has a bottle that's open, but if the bottle is not open, it's probably not ever gonna get open, which seems like a lot to me. Which I just, you know, I get it. There are people who like to collect all kinds of things and, and I appreciate that component of it. But for me personally, I would rather go back to when we could drink Good stuff and not worry about it being impossible to find later.

IX. Wilderness Trail

JB: Heritage storytelling is built on the brand's past, embodied in its values and has a specific tone, whether it's family heritage, recipe, heritage, ethnic heritage or other there's always a story when it comes to Bourbon. So when I was looking at your website, I found the Daniel Boone

story, blazing the wilderness trail, if you just sort of wanted to explain based on that definition, kind of like what that means to you and the Wilderness Trail brand?

ET: Well, the name of the distillery is based on Daniel Boone bringing settlers into the area. But what we really tout is the backstory of the distillery owners, the co-owners of Shane and Pat. Now Shane, he does trace more lineage in the distilling industry. Well, he is third generation. He's worked in the industry and then his son oversees our bottling department now, his 24-year-old son so he would be fourth generation. But what we mainly tout is the scientific background story of Shane and Pat, because they came into the distilling industry based on another company they started that provides a lot of lab analysis and also sells a lot of distillers yeast and now brewers yeast. So any aisle at any liquor store you've ever walked down, they've worked with them either to help them make a better have a better fermentation have a better bourbon, or to sell them the yeast to make the bourbon.

JB: That's cool. I love the research side of bourbon and everything that can come from it because a lot of people who see it as just brown liquor, that's high octane. But there's, there's so much more to that. So that's awesome. How important would you say that sort of like heritage story or historical story is to the marketing side of your brand?

EB: Well I think it's very important for any distillery to attract attention, especially a newer distillery like Wilderness Trail to have a good backstory, makes all the difference. And in the focus people put on your product, how much they believe in what you're making, your devotion to what you're making. So I think, you know, when we tell people about how Shane and Pat came to start Wilderness Trails after six years of advising everybody else, how to make a better bourbon, they finally had the money to open wilderness trail and put that knowledge fees for themselves.

JB: What aspects of your story, do you hope resonate the most with consumers? And then which aspect do you think has the greatest impact on consumers?

ET: I think the proof is in the tasting. Of course, being there at the distillery for the most part, I don't have the perspective that other people do that are tasting our products in the 36 states that we're distributing to now. But I have heard people that have been in the industry a long time say they've never seen anybody hit the market like Wilderness Trail has. They're kind of like the darlings of the market right now. First craft distillery to become a member of the Kentucky Bourbon Trail. The craft distilleries, they're making 10 barrels or less. And then Shane and Pat decided we're going to go big time and make 215 barrels a day, they're getting ready to expand again. But the 215 Barrels takes them to the 14th largest bourbon distillery in the country. So in the time since they started in 2012, they've expanded rapidly, and I think that they have decided they can do so because of the market reaction to the product. Keeping up with the demand is the big challenge right now, because we're still kind of on that threshold of where we began to make a whole lot more product.

JB: What specific types of marketing campaigns or maybe it's the way that you put labels on the bottles? What sort of marketing strategies do you find to be the most successful with your products?

ET: I think it's the face to face, it's when the brand ambassadors have a tasting event, or when one of the owners, Shane or Pat is at a tasting event, and they have more of a personal relationship with him, then they become lifelong fans. So I think that face to face involvement is very important. I mean, we can run the ads, we can do print ads, or television advertising, things like that. But I think you get the buy in when you have the face to face.

JB: And so within, like distillery tours, I know COVID sort of messed that up the past couple years, but whenever people are able to come to your distillery, what sort of strategies are you using to sort of plug your heritage story or plug, you know, the owners backgrounds with their scientific knowledge, what is it in the touring? Is it what sort of methods are using to plug that?

ET: Well, yeah, it is in the tour, it is stressed how they develop the firm solutions company first and then put that knowledge to work and how that company is still receiving all this lab analysis. We kind of mentioned firm solutions as our sugar daddy, but now that the Wilderness trail has grown so much, they're more on equal footing, as far as financially, which business is the most profitable but I think that that is something we stress throughout the tour. People remark often that our tour stresses more the scientific behind it other than just what defines bourbon. And then the Kentucky Bourbon Trail did just release the numbers for tours for 2021 and of course, 2020 was way off, but the numbers for 2021 were pretty comparable to the ones from 2019, which was record setting. I think it's 1.5 million tours for the all the craft Trail and the Bourbon Trail for 21. And then it was the record 1.7 million in 2019. But the trail was closed very little in 2020. They did close down for six weeks. And then when you look at those numbers, one of the big or distilleries like Jim Beam, they did not they were not open until recently. So to have still have those stats, and think that one of your big ones you have been was not even open counting numbers during most of 2021. In that, you know, still had pretty good traction.

JB: How important has heritage become in the past few years? Whenever you do have these fans who don't have the like scientific background or know everything about bourbon coming to your distillery or trying out new bourbons?

E: Well, I think we're at that happy medium that we're still trying to be as transparent as possible with people, you get into some of the bigger companies, maybe you don't learn, like we always shared our mash bill, we always shared all of our processes. I think that was more secretive around other places, but we wanted people to know exactly how we do things. So I think that emphasizing all the details that we can showcase to people about how we try to make a good bourbon. That just kind of wins them over. We've still got some quaintness going on. We've had a few growing pains as far as the facilities on the grounds. But I think people enjoy telling us, 'Hey, I knew you when you were located downtown, making the one barrel a day.' We've been in our current location for five years steadily moved out there five years ago to make 12 barrels a day. Oh, and there's a historic home on the property from 1859 has nothing to do with Shane or Pat's family are anything but it was just there. And that's what we built the distillery around. And I think we always used to do our tours, tastings and gift shop in the old home until we got a visitor center a couple of years down the road. And I think people enjoy just saying, 'oh, I knew you when all you had was vodka and rum and when everything started in the house,' they just enjoy going down that path with you. Going to a place that's been around for 50 years, they don't, they can't say 'oh, I knew you when you were just holding on.'

JB: There's a few smaller craft distilleries in Missouri. And those are so fun to go to. It's just a more personable experience to level and you feel more connected. Whenever you go see that product on the shelf, you feel like it's more familial.

ET: We always want to people remark when they give you feedback from tours to that they enjoy the hospitality. I think as you get bigger, it's harder to be as flexible as we try to be with everybody, like somebody walks in, and it's just a couple or something. We try to accommodate them, put them on a tour, whereas the rest is like, you got to do this online. They're more strict with the rules about how you actually get to see what they're doing how you actually get to tour.

JB: The second part of my interest that I've uncovered while doing this research, was my fascination with the secondary bourbon market. What is your personal opinion of the secondary market? I know the allocation of bourbon is so crazy and the three-tiered system, and you said that your product is in 36 states. So maybe you see this in the states that don't necessarily get Wilderness Trail products, or maybe you don't.

ET: I don't have a lot of knowledge of the secondary market other than what I hear other people remark about how much it increases the price. And I think that's unfair to the consumer, that you could buy a bottle for \$60 at the distillery if you're lucky to be there on release day. And then it's going to triple in price. There's one isn't it called overpricebourbon.com? They take a lot of pictures of the overpriced bourbon.

JB: Well, I'm specifically referring to maybe it's like a Facebook group, or like a Reddit thread where you've got these bourbon collectors who don't enjoy the history and the actual product itself, but they're more looking to make a quick buck.

ET: I always think the best collectors are the ones that don't drink. People that come in when we've had first releases and stuff, they were this nice collectible box. And so a lot of people are never going to open that. I brought my first bottle of Wilderness Trail home, and everybody signed it. We all participated in the bottling of it. Are we collectors or drinkers? I said, Oh, I guess we're drinkers. But I think that the people that make the best collectors are the ones that are never going to touch what's on the shelf. And what fun is that?

JB: Has there been any sort of conversation where the illegal market or like the secondary market has inserted itself into the marketing conversation? Like 'we need to think about that when we're marketing XYZ?' I know you don't really have any control over pricing necessarily once it especially once it leaves the distillery then it's kind of up to allocation and other factors.

ET: We want people to enjoy it instead of trying to pay so much for it that it is too valuable to drink or enjoy or those sorts of things. I think it's ridiculous. We have a wheated bourbon and few people make a wheated bourbon. One of the people that do are Pappy and my understanding is if you're walking through the barrel house, and it's not good enough to be Pappy, it's Weller. I will take the \$40 bottle of Weller every time.

JB: Do you think that culture that a big sector of bourbon collectors are entering. Do you think that that impacts any of the heritage and roots of like bourbon distilling and where bourbon came from? And so especially in Kentucky, the history of bourbon, do you think that these secondary markets or these illegal markets are tainting that at all? Or do you think that it's strong enough to overcome that?

ET: I don't have a big enough feel for what's going on with a secondary market. I've never tried to flip any bottles or anything like that. And I don't pay that much attention to it. You know, like you said, it's illegal. I don't know what happens to these people when they're caught. I think there's a lot of a lot of room for reform in in the industry things like, why shouldn't it be okay to ship a bottle to somebody? Was it you know, all these laws that we try to overcome the reciprocal shipping has gotten better? And I think if California comes on with that, and then maybe Florida, New York, that'll be a whole new ballgame as far as shipping. But, I mean, I don't really have a big feel for the secondary market. I may not be the best spokesperson to speak with about that.

JB: I was just wondering what your thoughts were on how that may sort of change the landscape of how people view bourbon and like, especially in Kentucky, the history is so rich there and Bourbon Trail. I'm curious, especially just like as a bourbon fan, how that might change where people are going to Kentucky maybe not for that history and not having that, I don't know the word to describe it, but just wanting to go there to learn and to visit the distilleries, hit some craft distilleries, but rather going like to try to get a bourbon that they can then resell for X amount of money and how that may change the story.

ET: I guess, whatever your reason is, I mean, surely they got into it for some other purpose. And then they found that it could be a moneymaker for him. As you know, we're a capitalist society. Maybe money they made off of one bottle sale, they're going to go out and pay for what they really intend to drink with the profit or something. So I guess it's everything that raises the boats up, I think is probably good. I mean, I don't really frown on it, if they're doing that. We're just glad they're coming to Kentucky and they may have a moment of reckoning where they think, oh, you know, why am I doing this?

JB: Well, those are sort of the basic questions that I have. I know we hit some random topics, but do you have anything that you want to add? I think our heritage story conversation was good. So anything else that you wanted to add? Or maybe I didn't ask something?

E: I mean, there's several things that really set Wilderness Trail apart and, you know, one of the biggest things is just Shane and Pat. Making all the wheels turn there, it's not a big corporation like so many of them are. Like I said, they're their 14th largest and it's not publicly traded. There's none of that going on. It's Shane and Pat that just built this up out of nothing and had all the success. So I think that's pretty fascinating. They don't have a 50 year history, they just had a lot of knowledge that they put to use to make a good product and that's been well received.

X. The Glenturret

JB: So why did you want to take another dive back into the history and try to uncover some more information? Was it just the new ownership? Or was there any sort of spark for that?

LA: Yeah, it's something the distillery has always been really proud of. But definitely, without the new ownership, we probably wouldn't have had the freedom and the time that it takes us, as you know, to look through historical documents. It takes a long time takes a lot of patience. And there's also a real skill to reading all text because a lot of it is quite hard to make out. When you do make out the words and letters, it's in a lot of that kind of your language. So you've got to almost do a bit of translation as well. And you might spend a whole day looking through documents to find that actually there's nothing of particular interest but because they mentioned the area that we're in perhaps that's the facility sits in at the foot of Glentada, where we get our water source from. You would spend all that time and then there's also so many different sources. Silvio owns vineyards and France in particular is incredibly old, hundreds of years old at Slyke. I think it's like 15th century, really old chateau, and he had worked with a Swiss historian, who actually was able to research everything very methodically, even going back to getting the stone stated within the building. And he was able to paint a really, really detailed picture for Silvio of, of the history offer. And it's something that Silvio was really adamant about that he wanted to make sure that he did it and found out as much information as he could. And he took that passion and he basically put that back into the seal of this distillery and said we have to find out as much as we can. And we were absolutely thrilled because before when we were part of a bigger company, and we were just basically the home for a bigger whiskey. It's such a small brand, so there wasn't the drive to really push to find out more about it. But know that we have that more independent ownership, there's a lot more in it. And it gives us so much to talk about gives us inspiration for new whiskies that we can bring out, we can look at historical links, and, of course, the casks as well they've been laying in warehouses for many years. So we can pool stories of what's happened in that time, all those sort of things. So definitely the new ownership was the driver for it.

JB: What have you noticed since having more of a historical meaning to the brand and like uncovering this, how has this changed? Maybe your marketing at all? How have you embedded these new heritage aspects into the brand?

LA: Definitely. So we've basically refreshed everything to do with the Glenturret. So you'll see if you research online, you'll see that the bottle has changed, the branding has changed. The fact that we actually have a whisky maker now on site, who's very well respected and looking actually the profile of how we actually build the whiskies that we do know, all of the heritage that we have nnow, really helps us build a much more meaningful, more powerful story, because it's all things that actually happened. And it's really, really important heritage, not just for the disability, but for Scotland as well, because there's a lot of fun, pivotal points in there. For example, we're right on the Highland lowland line. So there's a lot of interesting history and that really helped to shape scotch whisky as the kind of amazing thing that it is today and the way that it's respected. And the understanding of when you look back at all texts that we've discovered, or newspaper articles on one of the proprietors of the disability actually was a quite an old age and he was quite knowledgeable on whiskey and the benefits of what we call pop

style distillation and maturing and casks. And it's amazing when you read it, we think, gosh, this is you know, over 100 years ago, yet he's speaking about things that we know, are so beneficial to the spirit. And so in a time where Scotch whiskies had several phases of challenging times, and during that whole time it's just been kind of steadily going forward. And it really, it sparks interest with people, because people just love stories, they find that so engaging, and the fact that you know, there's other fantastic spirits out there in spirits category. But there's something almost magical about the fact that you can't just make spirit in a day you have to wait. And it's all that time and the interesting way in which it reacts with the woods, and you know, you can you can create two identical casts from one tree, but they will behave very differently, you know, you can get still different characteristics. And that is just mind boggling. It is it is a natural product that we don't add any artificial things to and that that is and the stories behind the heritage and history of how the spirit has evolved through time is just very interesting.

JB: That was really what sparked me wanting to go into this research was just out of all consumer products. Bourbon is a big one that you look at any sort of brand and the story is what's the driver, you know, you look on the website, it says our story, you go on a tour more time is spent on setting the tone and going through the history than it is actually tasting the product a lot of the time. And the thing that I've also been curious about just because like you said the nature of the product, it does take so long to mature before you know you put it in the barrel and then it's almost a gamble, you're hoping 10 years from now people still like the product and people now putting products into barrels, 10 years from now, however long until they're pulling it out. How do you think all the history with the brand would change at all for the new like generation coming up, do you think there's still going to be an emphasis of history? I just want to know your take on that.

LA: Yeah, I think there's always going to be a nod back to the past, because the past is what shapes the future in some shape or form. We're launching older whiskies and we're looking back into the past for inspiration. But also, importantly, we always look to the future as well with the brand. I suppose this is a really difficult job of the whiskey maker and the guys that are actually producing the whiskey because they're always planning for future and they're not just looking back, they're looking at stocks that have been sitting there for you know 50 plus years and you're kind of nurturing that making sure that that doesn't go under strain, that it's still the quality that you've got you acquire. But you could be 40, 50, 60 years into the future and thinking, Okay, what we're feeling today, it's really important that we do X, Y, and Z to influence the whiskies that we put out for tomorrow and the next day and the next year. And so, because we are such a such a small production, we are slowly upping our, distillery capacity. So we're on about 220-1000 liters every year, which is, again, a very small moment, when you look at your legacy. So we are very, very small. But I like to think that we're small, but we're meaningful, because we have all this interesting history and I think even though the culture of whiskey, the drinkers, the future drinkers of whiskey, I mean, all that landscapes changing, delighted to say that there's loads more female presence within whiskey than there has been in a lot of years. That's particularly working in whiskey but also consuming whiskey. You go to any kind of whiskey festivals as well, you will see a lot more even split as well. There still a ways to go with that. But I think you're starting to see more diverse audience for whiskey in general. I don't think we'll ever lose that impact of history. Because it's such an ingrained part of Scottish culture as well. And it's such a driver because people are interested in we've got that kind of almost like the

textbook tourists as well, they want to come and see a distillery because that's one of the key things. It's golf. It's distilleries, but they're also they're also really interested in that that history element. So I don't think we'll ever lose that. Personally, I don't think we will. I hope we don't.

JB: I know COVID has made this whole thing weird, but with tours and people coming to the distillery what would you say is the biggest driving force to get people there? Do you think it is to see the cool distillery Do you think it's to read about the heritage or do you think it's to taste the product or maybe a little bit of everything?

LA: Yeah, I think we always look at our consumers in different segments. So we've got a really diverse audience that do come and visit us. So for us now that we're part of Lalique we've almost got that luxury seeker. So they might be staying at Glen Eagles just up the road. So that's only 20 minutes away from us. So they might be going golfing and going you know having that that kind of luxury staycation or many break and holiday in the area. And then they're also looking for other places to go. We were awarded our first Michelin star for our restaurant at the distillery so this is kind of groundbreaking for us and for scotch whisky because to have a Michelin star restaurant which is amazing, amazing achievement. So, there are definitely that kind of luxury experience in terms of food and drink that people want to come and visit us. There are then the segment of people who are genuinely whisky enthusiasts. So they enjoy, you know, perhaps going to whiskey festivals. And you know, learning more about whiskey, whiskey education is important they like knowing as much as the they can hate the term whiskey geek. But you know, they want to know how many staves are in your wash back, you know, all your temperatures, all that really critical information they want to know all and they typically tend to go for maybe a little bit more of a bespoke experience or maybe a tour with something a bit more in depth or creating their own type of Glenturret single malt on a on a whiskey makers to or maybe something more kind of an extended tasting, there's then people that are looking for things to do so they're looking to tick that box and say I've been to Scotland I've been to a Scottish distillery. And we just so happened to be in a really lovely central location. So we're an hour away from Glasgow and Edinburgh. So we are great for that as well to come and see the beautiful Persia countryside and come and do things. So we can't even you know, have families and things that you know, are staying the beat the Kree file drawers is a big family orientated Hotel. So we work with hotels, local accommodation providers, we have a fantastic kind of local publications as well that we work with to try and bring interest. And we really are, we've got so many different things on site. So we've got we've got the shop, we've also got the LEAP boutique, which worked for the glassware, jewelry, perfumes, aftershaves, etc, we've got that in house. And that's the only one of its kind and Scotland, the all the rest of them are pretty much in and around London. And we've got the restaurant, the cafe and the salon area where you can have afternoon teas and things, then we've got all the tours. So it really is there's so much to do and see and then we've also got local people that will come as well that just like come in and around the area. So we're very lucky, we've got a lot of lovely walks around this neck of the woods. So we've got beautiful walks up and around what's called a NOC and you can start from the distillery and kind of work your way up past them the key fade or the tail. And that takes you up a really beautiful, big part of grief. And then you've got the loctite drop down as well, where you can walk around the lock, as well as absolutely stunning is where our water sources from. So it really is a mixed bag. We have seen a big transition, however, and obviously, as you said COVID has been devastating for hospitality. And this is where our online shop has been really crucial to us to still bring in

revenue, particularly as we we've only just kind of gone independent, and we've put a lot of refurbishment money into the distillery as well. So we refurbished a huge amount of spaces. And of course, then we weren't able to trade for a while and there were so many delays the refurbishment so and we've also kind of moved away. So we the kind of tourists that we used to get as well have changed quite a bit. So we used to have kind of a lot more volume. So it used to be what we would call like locks and glands or Highland Heritage Tours. And they're kind more elderly customer. And so we still have elderly customers, quite an age range. But I would see again, the net worth is has become higher and it's become more independent travelers and on their own steamer. I'm more private to your companies. And it's just the nature of how generally tourism is going towards more bespoke experiences and people are being much more careful about what they do, and sadly, those kind of bigger coach bus tours are kind of becoming a thing of the past, we're seeing less and less of them. And also with the move for us and for the move to more luxury market as well. So the scope of those are four or five different segments that we look at. And we basically target our marketing to suit these different audiences, depending on who we're talking to. Channel wise, so social media, you know, we'll get certain audiences on, you know, we might get a bit of a different skew on Twitter as we as we do in Facebook, etc. and printed out, you know, where those are going out and things and again, removing a lot of it onto digital, but we still have the kind of printed stuff. And then just word of mouth and, and things like that.

JB: So being such a historical company, what about the history do you hope signals authenticity to your customers, with the product or just with the brand overall?

LA: Authenticity is an interesting one. I think the fact that the traditional methods of production that we use here at the facility, I mean, we've actually almost gone back in time with Salt Lake. So far, our mash is a great example of this. So in the late 1800s, we had a little bit more mechanized equipment within the mash. But for the last kind of 30 plus years, we've actually been doing hand mashing. So the whole thing is done by hand speed, so only distillery left like that in Scotland. Now, having said that, we are looking to the future the distillery of how we can still harness that by hands and heart, we call it traditional kind of methods of whiskey making. And that's something that that is true to heart and does make us authentic, because we really haven't changed, our volumes haven't changed massively. So really, only in the last couple of years we've really kind of started to look into the future and make some bigger changes. But one of the things that we really need to be more mindful off is, of course, sustainability. And being more friendly, environmentally friendly. So one of the biggest decisions that we've made recently, which is major works, but also within the distillery is that we're making changes we're taking out become Maffetone, and we're putting in a new one. And it's still going to be very much operated by hand. But there's been some changes and updates to it to make it much more environmentally friendly, and much more in line with the sustainable future that we want to build for the disability. So it's against all Nordic to the heritage and we could have made the whole thing absolutely automated, but we haven't, because it's important to us to still have that, that feeling of being able to change things by hand if we want to. And that actually interesting leave in some people's mind will that actually brings back in human error and you know, it's a lot more process and work. But for us, it's really important to have that. So that's one of the biggest authenticity points for us is that everything we do is very conscious. And it's all about experience, and very much about people you know, this is not a plan that we just put on a few

computers and let everything just kind of do its do its own thing and check on it. You know, and again, it is very, very hands on so I would say that that for me is as fantastic as it gets people the police as well. I mean, we haven't moved in all these years. We are still using the same water source, you know, and still locally sourcing a lot of our barley you know, all these things are still things that we do today. And I think from for a lot of consumers that's really important to be able to traceability to know exactly where things that you're consuming that you're enjoying, that you're learning about, you know, half this fantastic tie into and Norden to the history and you're still carrying that forward, rather than saying, You know what, okay, that's what we've done in the past, we're gonna change it all. Yeah I would say that that sort of biggest importance in terms of authenticity,

JB: How does heritage storytelling specifically shape your tours and marketing and the distillery?

LA: I mean, new product development is one area that definitely drives as well. You'll see that across loads of different brands. So for example, they have a lot of that almost like Viking heritage and because of them being based in Orkney, and there's a lot of like, links to Norway in Orkney. So they have that beautiful kind of Valhalla series and stuff. And they, they draw on those fantastic stories. And then you have McKellan that have just released the 81 year, the rich whiskey, which is all about kind of celebrating all those amazing decades. I think the whiskeys from late 1940s are sometimes so meaningful, it's incredible. They have different tales of the people that were involved in making it. And it's the same for us as well. So if we're looking at a new product, we will definitely be looking at inspiration from the past, as well, as you know, we might do some kind of partnership stuff. So things like we partnered up with Jaguar recently. And we did a Jaguar edition and that was to celebrate 60 years of the E type Jag and, and we did kind of parallel on the history so we talked about the history of that particular brand. But also, the number of bottles was the same breed course players as the JAG you know, there's a few kind of link interesting Lincoln's and stuff. And so that also interests consumers that maybe like so I think, again, just looking at luxury brands in particular, because that's the world that we know, we know kind of live in people like that prestige and that that heritage as well with a certain brand. And it's something that if you also anchor that and have that heritage, you can work really well together and you can do very cool partnerships and whiskey bottlings as well. So that's another kind of angle from the heritage. It's not just the distilleries heritage, but you can draw on comparisons and timelines as well. You can you can look at a timeline of see, prestigious car brand or watch manufacturer, and you can see what was happening in your timeline. And you can pick out moments where it would kind of cross over and so yeah, there's so many different levels to that. But it definitely makes things easier if you have a lot of heritage to pull on.

Appendix IV: Weekly Field Notes

Week 1 (1/24-1/29):

This week was week 3 of my internship at Golin. I am on the Corporate team and work on the Discover and Novo Nordisk accounts. Specifically, I have been doing a lot of award/event vetting and media audits. One of my goals for this internship was to build a network within Golin and PR professionals in Chicago, so that when I (hopefully) move there I can continue to grow my career. So far, I have met with 4 EVP's within Golin, which has been awesome. We have talked about corporate narrative strategy and tips for building my career within the media relations field. I also learned that feedback is a big part of Golin, so I have been very intentional with my supervisor and team members to provide critiques on my work. Everything that I have learned so far has been new, but I have enjoyed diving into a PR-specific role.

I reached out to 28 distilleries via email this week to inquire about interviews for my project. By the end of the week I confirmed three interviews and sent follow-up interviews to the distilleries that didn't respond.

Week 2 (1/31-2/4):

This week at my internship was a lot of fun and I feel like I continue to learn more every week. As a media relations intern I spend a lot of time making media lists, completing media audits, and vetting reporters for pitches. This week I was able to pitch to reporters myself and take ownership of the media lists I create. I saw a survey about how millennials think that it is easier to find a house than it is to find love. I pitched a story idea to one of my team leads for Discover and she loved the idea. Next week I am going to make a media list for this topic and pitch reporters. I have also been able to schedule "coffee chats" with various EVP's and Directors within the company and do a Q&A/get to know you discussion. These have been very insightful and have confirmed that I want to do media relations for the long term. Right now I am trying to find my niche on what types of clients I like to work with, and working at an agency allows for that flexibility.

I was able to complete three interviews this week for my project. All three of them provided wonderful information and I am excited about what the finished product will look like for my research. The third interview I completed was with the founder of a craft distillery in New York. He brought unique knowledge to my topic and I was able to pull multiple nuggets of good insight that will eventually go into my final story. I have one interview on the books for next week and am waiting on four to confirm dates/times. So far, I am feeling really good about the direction my research is going.

Week 3: (2/7-2/11)

This week at my internship I focused on how to grow my career within media relations, and spent some time talking with people at Golin about how to be successful in that speciality. In order to grow some of these skills, my teams have been working with me to be more client facing and have confidence to pitch my ideas. I was able to pitch reporters and influencers this

week, which was a lot of fun. One of my pitches [landed a story](#) and it was cool to walk through all of the steps from researching to vetting to pitching and working with the reporter. This week was also the first time I was in a planning meeting with the client. I am working toward being able to actually have contact with the client so this was a good progressive step.

For my project this week, I was able to book two interviews that will happen over the next few weeks. I also spent some time looking through trade publications to get inspiration for what I will write as a final piece. Email responses for interviews are slowing down, so next week I am going to tap some of my connections to see if they can help me get contact information for people at distilleries.

Week 4: (2/14-2/18)

One of the reasons I was so attracted to Golin was because of its work with the polarization index and looking at industry research. This week I reached out to the person who works on this project and scheduled time for next week to see how I can help out. I have been working on a big project for one of my clients the past couple weeks and this week my team finally presented it. The presentation resulted in the client opening up more funds for us to work with, which I am very excited and proud about. I feel like I am starting to work into my own roles on both of my teams and completing work that is meaningful. I have also been trying to stay super informed with the news cycle and brainstorm ways the clients I work on can insert themselves into media conversation.

I interviewed two people this week and both were fantastic. One was with a company that has a long generational history and the other is a newer company with a heritage story. Both were unique but provided wonderful insight. Now that I have completed 5 interviews, I am starting to see some key themes continue to pop up, which is exciting considering the range of distilleries I have talked to thus far. I am beginning to piece together how I can tell a compelling industry story once the interviews are complete. Next week I have two interviews booked and am planning on reaching back out to previous inquiries to book my last few.

Week 5: (2/21-2/25)

This week we had mandatory DEI training for 8 hours, so things were very chaotic in trying to get things done. I am so happy and grateful to be at a company that prioritizes DEI and places training like this on people's calendar. Due to the Ukraine/Russia conflict that is currently happening, many clients have opted to go quiet on social media and therefore pitching was limited this week. It is interesting to be at a PR agency during such a crazy world event, especially from a media relations perspective. I have been able to see the behind-the-scenes on how decisions are made and how events like this impact campaigns and social media calendars.

This was a fabulous week from a research project perspective. I now have 10 interviews either completed or booked. The interviews I have done so far have been awesome and not only are the conversations informing my research question, but they are confirming that this is an industry I see myself working in in the future. The diversity of voices that I have interviewed so far and range of distilleries makes me really excited for the final product. I have been looking at various

trade publications to try and piece together what direction I want to go with a story format. I am eager to start coding the interviews over the next week.

Week 6: (2/28-3/4)

We are entering the 8th week of my internship at Golin and so far everything has been awesome. I met with someone on the internship committee and we discussed an opportunity to hop on a project that is different from what I have been doing so far. I am really enjoying the corporate side of PR, but would love to work on a more consumer facing account from a corporate perspective. She said that there are a few options of projects that would help scratch that itch for me, so I am excited to see what that will entail.

This week I landed an interview with the Whiskey Ambassador at a distillery that houses many large bourbon brands. He reached out to me via email and said that he heard about my research and wanted to chat. I am excited that the interviews/outreach I have done have led to a word-of-mouth inquiry! Our conversation was fruitful and a wonderful addition to the interviews I have completed thus far. I am now up to 12 interviews either completed or booked. I feel like I am at a really good place with my research to step back and see what all I have compiled and begin coding. I am hoping to be done coding in the next couple weeks so that I can start writing a first draft of my story and meet with my committee to check in.

Week 7: (3/7-3/11)

I began talking to my mentor at my internship about the possibility of staying on full time at Golin. I have loved my internship so far and can definitely see myself staying on and making the trek to Chicago. I am learning a ton of new PR skills and developing the critical thinking necessary for this line of work. At this point, I have written tons of POV's, recommendations, compiled many media lists and crafted pitches for reporters. I am now trying to set some goals for the second half of my internship and thinking about my long-term career path.

Jim and I met this week to discuss how my interviews have gone so far and make a plan for the rest of the semester. I am thrilled with how my interviews went and am excited to get started writing. My goal for next week is to finish coding and pull out quotes/themes from my interviews to build out a story.

Week 8: (3/14-3/18)

Last week I scored an interview with NerdWallet for one of Discover's spokespeople. The [placement](#) was syndicated 64 times and received 40M+ impressions. Everyone was super excited for me and I ended up getting a shout out in the all-connector meeting. The client was thrilled and I was happy to help boost our teams' KPIs!

I worked on finishing edits on my transcripts this week. There are so many pages worth of transcripts to go through and it is pretty tedious. That said, it has been interesting to go back through and re-listen to my interviews—I truly interviewed some great people. I am getting excited to start writing, I have been highlighted the key themes/quotes that I want to include in

my story and they are awesome. I think that my story and findings may be slightly different than my proposal, but that is something I will talk to Jim about next week. Even though it is slightly different, I think the story I want to tell will greatly benefit the industry—especially those who are just getting started and are unsure the story they want to tell.

Week 9: (3/21-3/25)

This week I spent time talking with the President of Global Corporate Communications. We discussed Golin's polarization index and how polarizing topics impact public relations. Our conversation reminded me of the research I did as a journalist in undergrad looking at transparency and audience trust. It was a fascinating conversation and a great networking opportunity. It was a very media list heavy week as new products are launching and inflation is causing quite the stir. While making media lists can be tedious, I know they are important and can greatly impact pitching efforts. I also had a chat with a connector on my team and I asked her questions about relationship building with reporters and the best tools for being effective in media relations. She gave me great advice and I am going to use it as I start pitching later this week.

I sent over the first draft of my professional analysis story to Jim on Sunday (3/27). I am very excited with all the quotes that I pulled and am anxious to get feedback. I am happy with the timeline that I am currently on and plan to schedule my defense for the week of April 18, a week before deadline!

Week 10: (3/28-4/1)

Next week is my formal review, so I spent this week checking in with my goals and filling out a self-evaluation. I also spent some time talking with current employees to gauge the hiring process and what I should be expecting over the next few weeks. I am excited to hear feedback from my review next week and begin full-time discussions. I also began having a set role in client calls this week—which has been awesome. I love being able to voice my opinion in these calls and really feel like I am part of the team.

I received some minor initial feedback from Jim and we scheduled a meeting for early next week to discuss further. I spent this weekend finalizing transcripts and working on organizing my final project. I am really excited with how my story turned out, although I think I may have to tweak some of my research questions to fit the bigger picture I am trying to tell. I have been discussing my research findings with people at Golin and everyone is fascinated with my work. Can't wait to get this thing done and try to get it published!

Week 11: (4/4-4/8)

This week at work has been crazy! I have become fully incorporated onto both of my teams and now am looking toward a potential full-time offer. I learned that one of my mentors at Golin is leaving next week, which is a huge bummer. She has been off-boarding her job roles to me over the past week which is both sad and exciting. Within the Discover team she plays a huge role in media relations and finding/pitching new story ideas. This is what I have loved most about Golin

so far and hope that I can begin to step into this role once she leaves. My formal review is on Thursday (4/7) so I am excited to hear feedback from my manager and begin talking about a full-time position.

I can't believe I am already sending off my project next week! I am so excited with how it turned out and anxious to hear feedback from the rest of my committee. It feels like this whole process went by so quickly.

Week 12: (4/11-4/15)

Two members of the media relations team on the Discover account announced they are leaving this week. Because of this, I am taking over a lot of the bigger projects that they were working on, which is exciting! I now play a larger role within the client calls and have the space to actively pitch new ideas. Following my review last week (which was overwhelmingly positive) I am waiting to hear from HR on what any next steps will be. I am super excited to see if there is potential for me to move into a full-time role soon and what accounts are open! It would be nice to know what I will be doing after graduation sooner rather than later.

This week I met with Jim to go over final edits and talk about the defense process. We are both really excited with how the research turned out and can't wait for the rest of the committee to take a look. I scheduled my defense for next Thursday!

Appendix V: Evaluation from Management Supervisor

Julia has been an incredible asset to her teams the past few months, completely leaning into all the internship has to offer between attending trainings, networking with leadership and folks on other teams/practice groups (on her own time), and of course, delivering stellar work while learning all she can about the industry, her clients and Golin's tools along the way. One thing that I'm specifically impressed by (as are her teams) is her contribution of interesting and timely trends that tie into business priorities. Julia sends articles and findings proactively and unprompted, which is incredibly valuable as we strive to deliver relevant news and idea to our clients. It's so appreciated. Here are a few comments from her teams that exemplify the ways in which Julia has been excelling during her internship:

- Always willing to help with client asks/responding to questions on categorizations of the decks. So great to work with. Genuinely cares about her team and clients. Has a great future ahead in PR if she wants to pursue.
- Julia is a ROCKSTAR teammate. She dives into projects with a great attitude, and quickly grasps instruction from her teammates. Even if she's unsure how to move forward, she takes a stab at it anyway – which is so appreciated by those reviewing her work, and really helps her grow so much faster.
- Julia saves her teams so much time by raising her hand to take on projects, and following them through with thorough execution. Beyond the fantastic media results she's secured, I've really appreciated her contributions to keep projects moving.
- Julia is a natural interacting with clients and senior team members. I've been impressed with her several times presenting trends, chatting with the clients and responding to difficult internal emails to provide her rationale and ask for more feedback from others.

- Julia is a super quick learner. She is able to adapt to any project I work with her on, whether it's a briefing document, media list, coverage note, award vet, etc. She actively listens to my tips/advice and understands to use the resources she has (from client or Golin) to help amplify her work to a high-quality standard. I'm impressed every time when I check in on her to see how she's doing on a certain ask, and she has either already completed it or is able to let me know when exactly I should be expecting it. She has been able to contribute amazing and creative ideas to our loans group calls by incorporating great trends to our weekly meetings. She completes her work efficiently and effectively – to the point where minimal edits are needed.
- She is able to create the foundation for many media and catalyst-related assignments, with little to no errors. All edits that I make are based off my knowledge and experience, not a lack of preparation or effort on her end. 😊 She was able to score a fantastic NerdWallet piece for our inflation outreach, which resulted in another great hit for Rob Cook at DHL, and a very happy Rob Weiss. She has been able to really collaborate with me in brainstorming sessions and speak her mind versus wait on me to initiate an idea. It's been awesome watching her grow.
- Would love for her to join the Discover team as an associate full-time once her internship is over. Know we historically haven't been able to do that, but fingers crossed. She would be an amazing longstanding add to the team

Appendix VI: Self-Evaluation

This semester I interned at Golin as a Public Relations Graduate intern on their Corporate team. I was on the Discover and Novo Nordisk (NNI) accounts. Golin is a global public relations agency with offices across the U.S. and globally. My team works out of the Chicago office, although I worked remotely in Columbia, MO. Golin operates in a “G4 Model” with four different roles you can play on a team. I am a “connector” on the Discover account, meaning I work on media relations and finding/pitching new stories. On the NNI team I play more of a “catalyst” role. A catalyst works more with client relations and keeping the team organized. I have found that I enjoy the connector work more than the catalyst side of the business.

This internship was my first PR experience after switching from a journalism undergrad and working primarily as a reporter. What this internship taught me was that public relations gives me everything that I loved about journalism, while omitting the negative. I have found that this is the career I was meant to be in and feel fulfilled every day. From the start of my internship at Golin, I felt that I was a true member of my teams. I juggle many tasks every day, sit in and participate in client calls, add thoughts to the agenda and even pitch new ideas. Once I got the hang of how an agency works, I felt very comfortable vocalizing my thoughts and asking questions.

One of the most impactful parts of the internship was surprisingly all the 1:1 coffee chats I scheduled. A goal of mine was to meet with someone new at least once per week for 30 minutes. These conversations were extremely insightful and honestly just a lot of fun. I met with everyone ranging from associate level to EVP to President of the Chicago and Dallas offices. I felt like I learned more about the company and what a career in PR can look like through these

conversations. It was a great way to network, especially virtually and it felt like I was able to get my name in the hat early on.

Both my critical thinking skills and ability to respond quickly improved throughout my time at Golin. While I was always balancing multiple projects at a time, the pace was exciting and forced me to stay on my toes. I missed the feeling of being in the news cycle every day as a journalist and this internship allows me to tap back into that. Due to being on two corporate accounts, I was never pitching consumer story ideas or analyzing the consumer journey, but instead was more focused thought leadership and executive visibility efforts. I learned that I enjoy this higher level thinking and viewing media relations efforts from a more holistic standpoint.

As I move forward, whether it is at Golin or elsewhere, I know that I will want to remain in media relations and specifically in corporate communications. By the end of my internship I was pitching stories that landed over 40M+ impressions, building relationships with reporters and sending thoughtful POV emails to clients. I am very grateful for the internship at Golin and hope to continue the fantastic experience I had thus far.

The combination of this research and my internship made me realize that I want to eventually find a role in corporate communication for a distillery or large company that owns many bourbon brands. I am so fascinated and passionate about the people and stories in this space and I hope to eventually be at the forefront of communicating a distillery's story. By beginning my career in an agency, I am learning the essential skills and laying the foundation to get me there.

APPENDIX VII: Research Project Proposal

HOW HERITAGE STORYTELLING AT DISTILLERIES CREATES A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE ON THE BOURBON MARKET

A Project presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

JULIA BOWER

Jim Flink, Committee Chair

Jamie Flink, Committee Member

Jon Stemmler, Committee Member

MAY 2021

Introduction

Enjoying a glass of bourbon can be an art. The warm liquid touches all your senses, from the rich smell to the golden-brown color and the smooth heat as it hits your taste buds. Some of the best memories can come from enjoying a rare glass of bourbon with friends. My dad has a collection of over 50 bottles of bourbon that sit in the sunroom at my parents' house. His friends enjoy chatting over shared pours of their most recent find and I have begun my own collection. We are not alone in this love for collecting and drinking America's native spirit: over the past two decades, the popularity of bourbon has skyrocketed. The \$8.6 billion industry has a following of novel, loyal and avid consumers that are willing to pay a pretty penny for a bottle. The "bourbon boom" as many have coined it, has led to new distilleries popping up around the country and brands trying to differentiate their product from the rest. During and at once following prohibition, people reached for whatever they could get their hands on—but we are no longer in such a drought. As the market has continued to evolve, the need for updated marketing strategies has become more important. Due to the rich history bourbon has in the United States, many distilleries turn to heritage storytelling as a marketing strategy. Heritage storytelling is built on the brand's past, embodied in its values, and with a specific tone (Aime, 2021). Whether it is family heritage, recipe heritage, ethnic heritage or other, there is always a story when it comes to bourbon. Heritage storytelling often is the driving force behind a distillery's mission and purpose—you can see evidence of this on brand websites, facility tours, and sometimes even on the bottle itself. What makes the bourbon marketplace unique and complex is the constraints in which bottles can be distributed. State liquor laws and the three-tiered system are measures the government has put in place to protect public safety and collect tax revenue. Distilleries (top tier) allocate their product to wholesalers (middle tier) who then distribute it to retailers for sale to

consumers. Distilleries are marketing to consumers to drive up demand, but allocation from the state and wholesale distributors determine who gets what bottle and how many. To make this even more complicated, there is an illegal secondary market that people turn to when they cannot find the bottle they are looking for on the shelf. Selling alcohol without a license is prohibited in the U.S., proving how desperate people are to trade and buy a rare bottle. The complicated relationship between marketing and consumer demand is what makes the bourbon market both unique and fascinating—not to mention the long-game nature of the industry. Bourbon ages anywhere from 2 to 25 years, which means marketing for the product takes many forms and it's hard to predict who the target consumer will be by then—or if people will even still care. This research sits at the intersection between bourbon heritage, marketing and consumer demand. Despite earlier studies that focus on the wine or craft spirit industry, there is none specifically focusing on bourbon and the role heritage storytelling plays in the marketplace. This gap in research has resulted in these questions:

RQ 1: How do distilleries believe they make an impact on consumer demand through heritage storytelling?

RQ 2: Do distilleries believe this marketing strategy makes a similar impact on the secondary market?

Professional Component

I have tailored the subject area of my research to align with my career goals which include working in a marketing agency, hopefully within the liquor industry. At this time, I do not have a spring internship placement, but I have applied to more than 20 companies nationally. The internships I have applied for range from advertising and marketing agencies such as FCB Global and Golin, to marketing positions at large distilleries such as Heaven Hill and Beam Suntory. The cities that I am looking at include Louisville, Dallas, Kansas City, and Chicago. I am hoping for a role that gives me a taste of either an advertising agency or working corporate/client side. While these are on the opposite end of the spectrum, I am excited to keep my options open. Despite which internship I move forward with, I intend to work 30 hours a week for a minimum of 14 weeks per the project parameters. I still have time in the semester to apply to more internships, which I will continue to do. In addition to the positions I have applied for, I currently work as a marketing assistant at Independent Stave Company. I have talked with them and they have said they would keep me on per the project parameters in the spring if I wish to do so. If I do decide to take on an internship with Independent Stave Company in the spring, I will ensure that my research stays separate from the work that I do for them.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In 2019, Kentucky distillers alone filled more than 1.7 million barrels of bourbon—nearly four times greater than the total in 1999 (Kentucky Distillers Association). What used to be considered an “old man’s drink” is now appealing to the 25 to 54-year-old range according to an article from Vine Pair (2020). Age is not the only bourbon demographic that has shifted; according to the same article, while white males make up 78% of bourbon drinkers in the U.S., consumption among non-white drinkers has increased across the board. The number of Black or African-Americans who drink bourbon was up 22% from 2013 to 2020, while the number of Asians who drink bourbon was up 36% (Kentucky Distillers Association). One of the biggest downsides to this rise in popularity is the availability of products to consumers. Liquor laws and the three-tiered system for distribution makes it hard for consumers to find bottles that once used to populate the liquor store shelves. In recent years, consumers have been turning to secondary markets—including online auction sites and private groups on social media channels-- to find rare bottles of bourbon that are hard to come by in typical brick-and-mortar stores. Selling alcohol without a license is prohibited in the U.S., making these transactions illegal. How is this illegal market changing the way distilleries are marketing to consumers? How do distilleries feel about this illegal buying and trading? In addition to investigating how heritage storytelling impacts consumer demand, this research will try to answer these questions.

Principles of Storytelling Theory

The interviews and structure of this research will be conducted through the lens of consumer storytelling theory—specifically heritage storytelling. Storytelling is the art of telling a brand’s story, by using emotions and images, to make consumers adhere to brand values or buy the product (Amălăncei, 2021). Rather than replacing the brand story, it supplements those ideas

by providing some depth and context to the consumer. According to Gerber (2013) storytelling “designates the brand story, but it is not confused with the story, yet it is based on it and involves communication objectives, a context and public target analysis, a strategy and evaluation tools”. The evaluation tools Gerber addresses will be an essential part of this research to show how the stories distilleries tell drive consumer demand. Using stories to tell a brand story is “one of the most powerful tools available to effective communicators” (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2017), which is why many companies use it for marketing their product. Brand-consumer storytelling and pleasure outcome builds on the idea that “people need help in finding what makes them happy, and this is where marketing comes in” (Bagozzi and Nataraajan, 2000). Storytelling is an essential tool in promoting products, especially in a well-saturated marketplace, such as the bourbon industry. The story of a brand helps differentiate and position the distillery, which is important due to the similar nature of the product being sold.

Telling historical stories to consumers can create brand engagement and loyalty (Dodd, 1995). Heritage storytelling is built on the brand’s past, embodied in its values, and with a specific tone (Aime, 2021). This nods to the concept of ‘heritage brands’, where with careful ‘brand stewardship’, a company’s heritage could ‘be harnessed and employed as a strategic resource’ making it a ‘key component of its brand identity and positioning’ and providing opportunities to communicate persuasive stories to potential customers (Urde et al., 2007). In the bourbon industry, heritage is the basis of every distillery. From the first distiller to prohibition to crafting unique mash blends, heritage is not just the roots of a bourbon brand, but also the limbs. This research will look at how the use of heritage storytelling as a marketing strategy at distilleries drives consumer demand for bourbon.

Heritage storytelling research in the alcohol industry

There have not been many academic studies conducted that focus specifically on heritage storytelling at bourbon distilleries, yet it is everywhere in the industry. If you take a tour of a distillery, you would hear stories of heritage and tradition throughout each step of the process. If you visit a distillery website, chances are they have an “Our Story” page that details how their brand came to be. The same is true for the wine industry; Strickland et al. (2013) found that family heritage is a legitimate marketing technique for “New World” wineries. A study from Frost, Laing, Strickland, Smith & Maguire looked at how wineries use heritage storytelling at the cellar-door to seek a competitive advantage in tourism (2020). The study found that heritage gave marketing value for the wineries and many of the participants said such storytelling techniques give “authenticity” to their brand. Another study from Williams, Atwal & Bryson (2020) investigated how craft spirits distilleries in Chicago use elements of storytelling narrative as a part of a storytelling marketing strategy. The study found seven categories of storytelling themes: craft, innovation, origins, myth, celebrity, provenance and collectability. The research I am proposing will be focusing on the “origins and myth” categories and specifically how that is translated through stories of history. Like the wine tourism study, Williams et al. (2020) found that storytelling consisted of functional and emotional benefits that promoted authenticity of the brands. The conclusion that both studies make is that storytelling leads to a more meaningful, valued customer experience. Bourbon is marketed as an experience just as much as it is a product, so it makes sense to assume that storytelling only enhances the customer experience.

Jones and Comfort (2019) conducted a study looking at storytelling in the beverage industry as a whole. Within the research, they looked at Suntory and Diageo, two of the largest brewing and distilling company groups. They found that in the stories companies were telling, while they discussed a variety of themes, they all have a very corporate stamp. This will be

something to note and look for in the heritage stories I look at during this research. Authenticity is a theme that appeared in nearly every article regarding storytelling in the alcohol industry. If a story holds truth, then it gives the brand authenticity, but if there seems to be a fallacy in the story that is being told, a brand can lose that trust. When looking at how heritage storytelling drives consumer demand, it will be important to identify how authentic the story being told is and what the distillery is doing to ensure that the story is being portrayed as so.

Most of the current relevant research is focused on sectors of the alcohol industry outside of bourbon, and the research that is done on bourbon focuses on general marketing strategies. My research will fill this needed gap in the bourbon distillery sector, looking at how storytelling with the purpose of establishing heritage drives consumer demand both directly and indirectly on the market.

Heritage and bourbon

“Bourbon is more American than apple pie, existed before baseball, and has built more roads, schools, and government infrastructure than any non-petroleum domestic product,” wrote Fred Minnick in *Bourbon: The rise, fall and rebirth of an American Whiskey*. Today, 60% of the average bottle of bourbon goes to tax; thus, bourbon builds schools, roads and government infrastructure (Minnick, 2016). Aside from being a drink to enjoy, the meaning of bourbon in American history sets the foundation for this research.

In September 1991, the Kentucky Bourbon Festival began. Sixteen years later, the U.S. Senate declared September 2007 “National Bourbon Heritage Month” signifying the importance of America’s Native Spirit (Minnick, 2020). The resolution stated, “Whereas the history of bourbon-making is interwoven with the history of the United States, from the first settlers of Kentucky in the 1700s, who began the bourbon-making process, to the 1,000 families and

farmers distilling bourbon in Kentucky by the 1800s...The Senate recognizes bourbon as ‘America’s Native Spirit’ and reinforces its heritage and tradition and its place in the history of the United states.” It was a resolution for only one year, 2007, but the celebration has not died. Every year since 1991, the Kentucky Bourbon Festival has brought bourbon fanatics from across the world to Bardstown, KY to sip, smell and celebrate America’s Native Spirit. Bourbon has been around since long before prohibition and its unofficial headquarters is in Kentucky—where corn, the base ingredient for bourbon, grows particularly well.

For most of the 19th century, marketing of bourbon was mostly done by word of mouth and through newspaper advertisements (Bourbon Veach). When E.H. Taylor, Jr entered the distilling business in 1870, distillers relied on customers recognizing their brand name on the barrel head at saloons and taverns. Taylor changed the game by customizing his barrel heads with intricate art work and brass hoops to stand out from the rest. He then pursued written endorsements from whiskey doctors and Civil War Generals (Bourbon Veach). Once glass bottle production was mechanized and bottling the spirit became economically feasible, embossing and label designs became a marketing tool for brands. As marketing product became more important, brands turned to sex, drunkenness and racism to catch the eye of consumers. During this time, women were featured in seductive poses on bar art, newspaper ads featured drunkards and alcoholics, and advertisements depicted Black people as either poor, rural hicks, or the servants to “Southern Gentlemen” (Bourbon Veach). Once Prohibition hit in 1920, the industry realized they needed some regulation on marketing their products, which led to “cleaner” advertisements. In 1996, the American liquor industry ended its voluntary ban on advertising liquor products on television and radio (Elliott, 1996). The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS), came to the decision after Seagram Company, the nation’s second-largest seller of distilled spirits

at the time, began defying the ban that had been in effect since 1936 for radio and 1948 for television. This decision likely created opportunity for brands to reach a broader, more diverse audience that they were unable to prior. Today, DISCUS, the Kentucky Distillers' Association (KDA) and other organizations still maintain regulations on bourbon advertising and marketing (Bourbon Veach). With a higher demand for product and more distilleries popping up all the time, brands are continuing to evolve their marketing strategies.

A new meaning of heritage

It is important to note that until recently, the heritage storytelling strategies embodied by the bourbon industry were very white man focused (Risen, 2019). The typical story that a distillery tells mentions how the original distiller (a white man) learned to distill bourbon and what makes that distillate different from competitors. Whether it was Jack Daniels, Jim Beam, Rev. Elijah Craig, or Henry McKenna, the “stories” are a variation of the same concept. Just as society has changed to evolve and become more inclusive, so has the bourbon industry. In April 2019, Samara Rivers founded the Black Bourbon Society. The Black Bourbon Society aims to “bridge the gap between the spirits industry and African American bourbon enthusiasts through social media platforms, brand-partnerships and exclusive excursions” (Black Bourbon Society). Uncle Nearest Premium Whiskey, founded in 2017, is the best-selling African American owned and founded spirit brand (Liu, 2021). The founder, Fawn Weaver, created her company in honor of Nearest Green, nicknamed ‘Uncle Nearest’ who taught Jack Daniel how to make whiskey. Uncle Nearest is an example of a distillery whose story is based on ethnic heritage—a sector that is predicted to grow in the future.

The Three-Tier System and Liquor Control

To really grasp the complexity of marketing within the industry, it is important to understand how the process goes from maturation in a barrel to on the shelf at your corner liquor store. When Prohibition was repealed in 1933, the federal government passed responsibility of regulating alcohol to states. Most states sought to increase public safety and collect tax revenue by introducing a three-tier system: alcohol production, distribution and retail (Barton, 2020). To make things even more complex, no entity may occupy more than one tier, meaning a brewery cannot own a bar and a distillery can't sell directly to a liquor store. The federal government awards licenses to producers (top tier), as well as distributors and wholesalers (middle tier). Retail licenses are awarded by the states (bottom tier). The producers consist of a few companies that own the majority of distilleries. A depiction of this ownership can be seen in Figure 1.

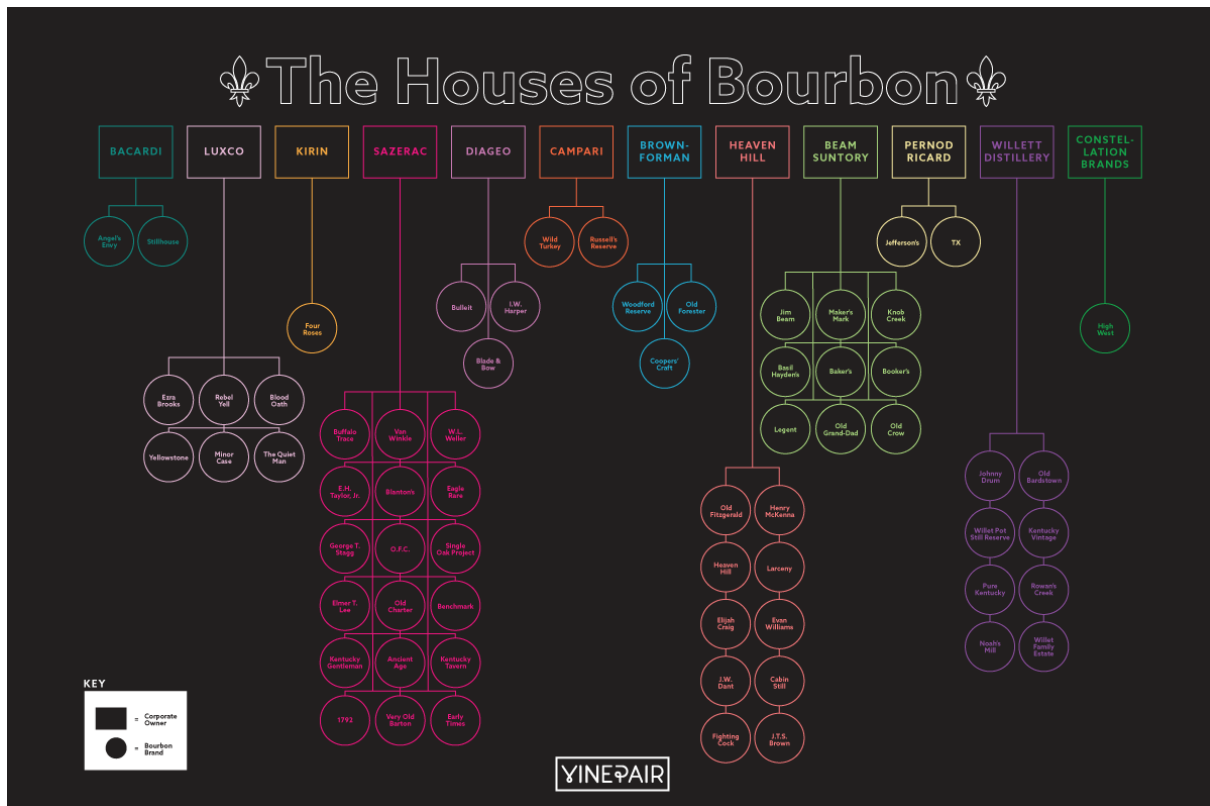


Figure 1

States also decide how they want to regulate distribution, local taxation, and sales of alcohol. Some states are more restrictive than others, stricter states, or “control states”, maintain a monopoly over distribution--there are 17 control states and jurisdictions in the U.S. These states include: Alabama, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, Wyoming (NABCA). Bourbons with limited supply, such as single barrel or small batch bottles, are allocated based on demand, per the distillery (Barton, 2020). For example, New York might get more bottles than Ohio. However, once the bottles are passed to the distributor, the distillery loses control and the distributor decides which stores and bars get bottles, and how many they receive. This allocation system is why certain bottles may be more accessible and cheaper in one state compared to another. The three-tiered system is fairly standard across the country, although some states make exceptions for small craft producers. Many states allow craft breweries to operate brewpubs and taprooms where they can sell their product without having to go through a distributor—this has increasingly been extended to craft distilleries as well (Barton, 2020).

It is important to note that there has been a recent push to allow direct-to-consumer shipping for alcohol producers in the US. Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of e-commerce, the liquor industry wanted a way to better meet increasing consumer demand. In April 2021, the Kentucky House of Representatives passed House Bill 415, allowing the use of third-party fulfillment centers to proficiently ship bottles; set a level playing field for state tax collection on distillery gift shop sales; and create guidelines for shipping alcohol samples to media, business and marketing partners, among other measures (Kentucky Distillers Association).

Consumer demand

According to an article from Vine Pair (2020), when the KDA founded the Kentucky Bourbon Trail in 1999, it launched with less than 10 distilleries—in 2020 bourbon tourists would visit 38 across the state thanks to the Trail. In 2018, 1.4 million tourists visited distilleries along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail. What has now been labeled as the “bourbon boom”, consumers who are buying bourbon have not only grown, but diversified as well. The number of Black or African-Americans who drink bourbon was up 22% from 2013 to 2020, while the number of Asians who drink bourbon was up 36% (Kentucky Distillers Association). While there is no research that specifically looks at the cause of this growth, Eric Gregory, president of the KDA, has four key factors he hypothesizes sparked this boom (Vine Pair, 2020). The first factor was the introduction of small-batch and single-barrel bourbons in the late ‘80s and ‘90s. This gave credibility to bourbon as being a high-quality spirit. Secondly, a global export market emerged in the mid- ‘90s. The signing of the NAFTA agreement and the EU agreement leveled the playing field with Scotch whiskey and other global whiskeys, pushing American bourbon as a global export. The third factor attributes the rise in cocktail culture at the turn of the century, which exploded with the resurgence of classic bourbon cocktails, such as the Old Fashioned. In the Vine Pair article (2020), Gregory refers to this time period as the “‘Mad Men’ effect”, giving a nod to the popular TV show. The last factor Gregory credits is the rise in bourbon tourism. The KDA looked toward their wine counterparts in California wine country to inspire the Kentucky Bourbon Trail. Gregory said this sparked popularity because “People, especially younger drinkers, crave authenticity. The ability to visit a distillery and put your finger in a mash tub, taste whiskey from the barrel, and see the spirit being bottled provides that experience.” This

research will explore a factor Gregory and other researchers do not mention, heritage storytelling, and its impact on consumer demand.

Black Market bourbon

As the demand for certain brands of bourbon has grown, supply and allocation has not been what it once was. That \$50 bottle of your favorite bourbon you bought at the gas station down the street? Now you can't find it—and if you do, it's \$200. To fulfill the rising demand, Facebook, Craigslist and eBay all became the home to the buying, selling and trading of bourbon bottles. The only problem? It's illegal—selling alcohol without a license is illegal in the U.S. The three-tiered system and state liquor laws are in place to provide some control over how product is distributed—this illicit secondary market goes around that. Rather than going through the hard work of “hunting” for a rare bourbon, people turn to online groups to do it for them. The bottles that are being sold on this market are going for outrageous prices, yet people are willing to pay it to get their hands on a rare bottle. To make this even crazier, there are websites such as “Bottle Blue Book” and “The Bourbon Brown Book” that track secondary sales and list the prices bottles are going for on the illicit market. If that sounds like stocks—it's because many of the buyers and sellers on these platforms treat their bottles like an asset. Lennon and Shohfi (2021) investigated the secondary market and assessed bourbon's potential as an alternative asset. The crazy thing—they found that secondary markets work quite well. According to their findings, “When studying bourbon's investment performance, we find that bourbon returns have low correlation with stocks, bonds, and commodities, provide solid inflation protection, and appear to enhance the risk-adjusted returns of traditional portfolios”.

The online platforms that house secondary sales began to catch on and many, such as eBay, began getting rid of any groups or sales they believed were illicit. According to one article

(Evans, 2020), in order to get around the website algorithms and watchdogs looking for illicit bourbon sales, groups change their name to things like “Brown Water Appreciation Society” or emoji’s instead. Heaven Hill Distillery wrote a blog post (2020) investigating how the secondary market is changing American whiskey. In this article, they also highlight the five types of secondary market buyers: drinkers, traders, funders, flippers and “flip-o-crites”, or flippers who criticize licensed vintage bottle sellers for buying low and selling high (Heaven Hill, 2020). This shows how truly diverse and large the consumer market for bourbon has come. While there is research that shows the secondary market can be successful in filling a consumer’s demand, there is no research correlating the impact distilleries play on influencing this market. Can the distillery impact the secondary market with strategic storytelling? Do they think they should have a role in this? My research will seek to answer these questions.

Research to Fill the Gaps

While there is research in the other sectors of the liquor industry about the effect of heritage storytelling on the consumer, there is very little with regard to the bourbon industry. Based on the review of literature, it can be assumed that the structure of distribution within the industry plays a role in how distilleries market to consumers. The three-tiered system and state liquor control laws have led to a prevalence of illegal secondary marketplaces for the sale of hard-to-get bottles of bourbon. With new entrants of distilleries to the market and rise of bourbon popularity amongst consumers, this research will help better distilleries better understand how to use their story to market to consumers and what effect this could have on the secondary market.

Based on my review of the literature, the following research questions have been identified that form the basis of this study:

RQ 1: How do distilleries believe they make an impact on consumer demand through heritage storytelling?

RQ 2: Do distilleries believe this marketing strategy makes a similar impact on the secondary market?

Methods

To answer the research questions, I will be using in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be from 30 minutes to an hour long with a pre-set list of questions in an interview guide that can be deviated from if necessary (refer to Appendix A). The interviewees will be marketing specialists and/or the master distillers at bourbon distilleries that have a strong presence in the market. Master distiller is a title used for a distilling expert or a key leader or owner at modern distilleries. This person will be beneficial to talk to, along with the marketing specialist, to gain insight on how they produce product based on consumer demand in the marketplace. In order to provide a space where interviewees feel comfortable discussing brand strategy and the illicit market, anonymity will be provided and identities will be shielded.

Holding interviews for 30 minutes to an hour long is based on earlier scholars' recommendations and experience (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). These time parameters are also determined by my personal assumption that any amount of time less than 30 minutes would not be sufficient to get through the interview guide and no maximum amount of time is set on the interviews so as to avoid restricting the discussion. For this research, the ideal distilleries would be those that prioritize their heritage story as part of their brand. This will be identified by pre-screening the website and social media channels for each distillery prior to reaching out.

The range set for this study would be 10-12 interviewees at a minimum of 6 different distilleries, with the possibility to interview both the master distiller and marketing specialist at

each distillery. This decision is informed by earlier research done on how many interviews are needed to find saturation in a qualitative research setting with a heterogeneous group of subjects (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). This range is subject to change based on data collected from the interviewees. Usually when three interviews have yielded no new results, saturation has been reached (Francis et al., 2010).

Appendix A is an interview guide. The questions are listed in an order that seems like a natural flow of thought from topic to topic, ranging from distillery specific, to the industry as a whole. However, the interview guide is merely meant as a roadmap for the discussion. The questions can be deviated from, or re-arranged as I see fit during the interview. The questions are not meant to be exhaustive but to be prompts that will motivate or inspire the interviewee throughout the discussion.

I plan to begin conducting interviews in the Spring of 2022. My strategy for securing interviewees will be as follows: I am planning to work independently to recruit interview subjects via company websites. I will reach out to potential interviewees via email and phone per website information. Interviewees will be selected based on their position at the distillery and distilleries will be selected based on a pre-screening analysis of the promoted brand story. I plan to conduct all interviews on Zoom and during the interview I will take notes and record the conversation audio for later review and transcription. Within a week of the interview, I will transcribe the recorded audio and write up a memo, noting my general impressions, takeaways and key themes that were said during the interview. I plan to use the transcription service Otter.ai to transcribe the interviews, and then manually correct them to ensure accuracy. In order to make sense of the interview transcriptions, I will code the conversations based on context. Then, categories will be assigned to common themes found in the transcriptions. Coding will act as the

link between the data collected by the researcher and the categories that they create—the codes work to characterize the pieces of data that make up the categories (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). Ideally, common themes will emerge after speaking with various marketing specialists and master distillers, which will act as the results of this study.

To prepare for interviews as well as to give depth to my research, I will retrieve secondary data on the distilleries from online press coverage, company websites and social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter). From this secondary research, I hope to uncover the heritage story each distillery promotes, as well as how they are promoting it on different platforms. This will prepare me to have more enriching conversation with my interviewees by presenting evidence of a heritage story they are telling.

Once my research has been conducted in the Spring of 2022, I plan to write an article detailing my findings and pitch it to spirit industry publications such as *The Spirits Business*, *Beverage Industry*, and *BevNet*.

Limitations

The biggest limitation in this study comes from lack of wide representation. The results of this study will be based on a limited number of distilleries, primarily of which are more notable in the market and located in Kentucky. Since most distilleries are located in Kentucky, there will be a lack of regional diversity and size in this sample. The potential interviewees selected for this study come from distilleries that hold bigger shares of the market and historically base their brand strategy on heritage storytelling. Because of this, there is also a lack of size and ownership diversity. In-depth interviews were selected as the methodology for this study in order to provide rich qualitative data and market-specific perspective, but the findings will not be representative of the industry as a whole.

Questions for Interview Subjects

An interview guide (Appendix A) has been created to offer the researcher flexibility when conducting the semi-structured interviews, while also ensuring that important topics are discussed during the conversation. This will allow the researcher to follow the natural progression of the conversation with regard to the study topic as the interview subjects provide their distinctive perspectives that expand on the outlined questions proposed below.

Appendix A

Interview Discussion Guide

15. **Building Rapport:** What is your title at the distillery and what role do you play in brand strategy? How long have you worked at this distillery? What is your favorite part of your job?

PROVIDE DEFINITION OF HERITAGE STORYTELLING: Heritage storytelling is built on the brand's past, embodied in its values, and with a specific tone (Aime, 2021). Whether it is family heritage, recipe heritage, ethnic heritage or other, there is always a story when it comes to bourbon.

16. How important is heritage storytelling to the marketing of your brand? **(RQ1)**

17. What aspects of your heritage story do you hope to resonate with consumers? **(RQ1)**

18. What aspects of heritage storytelling do you believe have the greatest impact on consumer demand? **(RQ1)**

19. What aspects of your brand's heritage story signal authenticity to consumers? **(RQ1)**

20. Do you have any data to support heritage-storytelling based marketing campaigns driving consumer demand? **(RQ1)**
21. What type of marketing campaigns do you find to be the most successful with your products? **(RQ1)**
 - a. Listen for: limited release, small batch, single barrel
22. How are you sharing your brand's heritage story with consumers? **(RQ1)**
 - a. Listen for: website, packaging, owned media, paid advertising, earned media
23. What is your personal opinion of the secondary bourbon market? **(RQ2)**
24. How, if at all, do you think distilleries can affect the secondary market? **(RQ2)**
25. What role do you think strategic brand storytelling plays in impacting demand on the secondary market? **(RQ2)**
 - a. Listen for: allocation, limited release, small batch, special edition
26. How do you believe the illegal market is changing the way distilleries market to consumers? Has this changed the way you market to consumers? **(RQ2)**
27. What role does the secondary market play in your marketing strategy? **(RQ2)**
28. As more distilleries enter the market, how do you think brands will differentiate their story from the rest? **(RQ1)**

Potential Interviewees

1. Kayla Walter, Marketing Coordinator at Heaven Hill Brands:

Assists in the management of marketing projects related to the execution of the brand's marketing plan. Manages the content development for social media, as well as tracking and reporting on all aspects of online activity. Liaises with internal departments and

external agencies to ensure full communication and success of marketing projects.

Contributes to creativity of product packaging, presentation, point-of-sale and promotional activities. (According to LinkedIn)

2. Lucia Creed, Director of Marketing at Uncle Nearest, Inc.:

Executive team member at Uncle Nearest, and a direct report of Jerkens, the director of marketing. Creed, a former bartender of eight years, joined Uncle Nearest in September 2020 and now oversees marketing related strategies at the company. "All the things, whether it's displays, magazine articles or billboards that is then under Lucia" (Liu, 2021).

3. Lauren Pruner, Brand Manager Bulleit Frontier Whiskey:

Professional in the beer and spirits industry. Motivated by crafting best in class digital and social strategies to share brand stories leading to growth and recruitment. Created award winning digital and social media marketing campaigns for top beer and spirits brands. Additional background in sports and large-scale partnerships. Passionate about VC space with emphasis on expanding opportunities for emerging spirits brands. (LinkedIn)

4. Chris Fletcher, Master Distiller at Jack Daniel Distillery:

Fletcher is no stranger to distilling. He's been raised with the smell of fermenting mash around him his entire life. Not only is he a native of Lynchburg, Tennessee he's also the grandson of the late Frank "Frog" Bobo who served as Master Distiller from 1966 until his retirement in 1989. In addition to his pedigree he also has the education and experience. He started working as a part-time tour guide in 2001 while attending college. In 2003, he graduated with a B.S. degree in Chemistry from Tennessee Technological University and

began work as a chemist with Brown-Forman in Research & Development for eight years. Following several years working in the bourbon industry, Fletcher came back home to the Jack Daniel Distillery in 2014 and was named Assistant Master Distiller. (Distillery Trail, 2020)

5. Brent Elliott, Master Distiller at Four Roses:

As the Distillery's Director of Quality, Brent's years of experience with Four Roses include everything from applying his Chemistry degree in production, managing barrel inventories, production planning, to selecting barrels for special Single Barrel bottlings and Limited-Edition products. Brent applies his on-the-job experience to his role of Master Distiller, ensuring that each Four Roses product has the fruity, smooth and mellow character, along with a hint of spice, that the brand has become known for around the world. Named Master Distiller/Blender of the Year at the 2020 Icons of Whisky America award ceremony, Brent Elliott is particularly proud of Small Batch Select, the distillery's newest permanent product-line extension since 2006, and the biggest addition to the storied history of the brand since he became master distiller. (Four Roses Bourbon)

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