

**"In the Barn" with Firestone & Robertson
Fort Worth, Texas**

The makers of TX Whiskey and TX Bourbon are both figuratively and literally "in the barn."

Uttered to reveal that the "win" is at hand, the imminent opening of "Whiskey Ranch" puts the gang of Firestone and Robertson very much "in the barn" after starting out in 2010. The new facility is set amongst the greens of a legendary golf course where Ben Hogan and Byron Nelson perfected their games. In keeping with the theme, F&R's first offering, TX Whiskey, was a hole-in-one. That's not just a local talking either: The blend took double gold in the San Francisco World Spirits Competition in 2013 shortly after it debuted. The amber blend is light and smooth with caramel and pear that peek through sweet vanilla.

As the blend grew in popularity, their bourbon aged for nearly five years in the pre-prohibition warehouse that the company initially called home. Darker than the blend, the bourbon shows spice and dark fruit with a warm finish. In full Texas style, the TX Straight Bourbon was released at high noon in December 2016 to a line stretching more than a quarter mile. While all hoped for one of the 1000 bottles made available, 800 folks left dry. Whiskey Ranch ensures that such a thing will not happen again.

The heart of Whiskey Ranch is the barn, literally. Barn doors at each end of the stillhouse offer both breeze and a great view of the skyline of Fort Worth, but that's not what attracts attention. The prize of the barn is a continuous Vendome still that reaches 45 feet into the air along with an adjacent doubler. The column still measures 36 inches in diameter making it the biggest whiskey still on this side of the Mississippi River. The dull metallic cooker, five fermenters and beer well stand in stark contrast to the copper giant and its squat companion. While production capacities are difficult to know, the full production capacity of Whiskey Ranch appears to exceed that of Angel's Envy and Woodford Reserve, and is about 1/3 that of Makers Mark.

Proprietors Leonard Firestone and Troy Robertson, along with head distiller Rob Arnold, helped put the capacity of Whiskey Ranch into perspective. While their initial facility can produce 500-1500 barrels/year, the new site will produce upwards of 10,000-30,000 barrels/year with ranges defined by the number of shifts working. These barrels will sleep in a newly constructed, 20,000 barrel rickhouse (the first of five such planned).

While this news is cause for celebration for we Texans, it may be little more than a tease for many of you all due to regional distribution of these treasures. Currently, TX Whiskey and TX Straight Bourbon are in about a dozen states. I asked Leonard Firestone and Troy Robertson their plans for broadening distribution, "We have a large fan following across the country, and daily we receive calls, emails and social media messages with requests from consumers to bring TX to their market. We are committed to expanding our footprint, and over the past year we have expanded from 3 states to 15 states today. The response in these new states has been fantastic, and we will continue to expand to meet the growing desire."

In addition to the barn, Whiskey Ranch offers a welcoming visitors center with space for special events and even a hidden tasting room with cabinets containing rare bottles of amber treasure. And yes, while a barn is very Texas, the etymology of the word is appropriate. The word "barn" derives from the old

English words for *barley* and *house*, *bere* and *aern*, respectively. Perhaps a single malt is in our collective future?

Art thumbnails:

