

# Sample the spirits of Texas

## Local distillers offer unique takes on old favorites

Story By ANDREA AGARDY | Photography by GABE HERRERA

**T**exans are renowned for their enthusiasm, but now, a group of entrepreneurs are bolstering the Lone Star State's reputation for a different kind of spirit. Already a destination for wine aficionados, the Hill Country is also home to distilleries that welcome guests to take a tour and wet their whistles.

### GARRISON BROTHERS DISTILLERY

Dan Garrison, founder and CEO of Garrison Brothers Distillery, believes there's power in a good drink. "Good bourbon creates enduring, lasting friendships. Good bourbon can increase your faith in mankind and God, and good bourbon creates legendary stories," he says. "That's our philosophy."

Garrison Brothers created the first legally produced bourbon in Texas, and clearing the legislative hurdles to make that happen was only the first mountain to climb. Garrison also had to convince people that Texas bourbon was even possible. "Everyone thought you could only make bourbon in Kentucky," he says. "The biggest obstacle was convincing people to taste it. I knew I had something special, but it took a long time to break down that wall."

Texas itself is part of what makes Garrison Brothers' products unique. "Texas has an amazing effect on bourbon," Garrison says. "When you age a barrel in Kentucky, for eight months out of the year there's not going to be any aging happening. But in



Hye is home to the Garrison Brothers Distillery.

Texas, it's 100 degrees 10 months out of the year, so that bourbon gets thicker. It expands when the heat hits it, and that causes it to soak deeper into the staves, extracting more of the sugars. It's a thicker, more syrupy bourbon than anything that's on the market today."

As more people tried it, the brand's fan base began to grow, and the awards started piling up. Now, when the company announces a new release, bourbon fans come out en masse. "That's my favorite part of our business," Garrison says of his bourbon's loyal following. "Two days before a release, trucks and cars start lining up at our gate, coming in from all over the place. It's such a cool community. They all know each other, and they all love each other."

### HYE RUM

Just a few miles from Garrison Brothers is another distillery offering a high-quality spin on a liquor cabinet staple. HYE Rum distiller James Davidson brings his craftsman approach to a spirit most people associate with more tropical locales. "A lot of islanders come into my distillery and say, 'This is the only rum in America I like,'" he says. "And then I feel like I have a victory!"

A dinner party conversation about rum piqued Davidson's interest in the drink. Up to that point, he drank almost exclusively scotch. "I just felt like the rum that was available — especially rum made in Texas — wasn't what I personally would want to see," he says. "I was raised with this mentality that if you don't like how something is done, go do it yourself."



Garrison Brothers' bourbons have a large, devoted following.