

# SPIRITS

## Rye whiskey's rising tide

**R**ye whiskey's moment has arrived. The freewheeling category is seeing an impressive amount of innovation—and excellent bottlings to boot.

What's the appeal? While the whiskey still needs to be made with at least 51% rye grain to call itself rye, so much else is open to interpretation—and distilleries are taking full advantage of that flexibility. Some producers are softening that rye with corn, barley or wheat, while others zip the amount of rye up to 100% for maximum spicy effect.

In addition, an increasing amount of attention has been paid to where and how that rye is grown, as producers make the case that the grain is particularly expressive. It's the only American spirits category with terroir-specific designations: Empire (New York) rye, Minnesota and as of July 3, 2021, Indiana rye became part of the mix too.

Of course, rye doesn't need to be made in America; look to Canada for plenty of options. Scandinavian ryes provide some intrigue and are distinguished by rich flavors that

suggested toasted pumpernickel and campfire-adjacent s'mores.

Rye-makers also continue to play with cask finishes to add extra layers of flavor. While a pair of high-scoring bottles (Milam & Greene, High West's A Midwinter Night's Dram) show that Port barrels can be a particularly harmonious partner for rye, a surprising quartet of rum-

finished bottlings also illustrate how versatile the category can be. Of those four, the most notable is Barrell Seagrass, finished in barrels that previously held Martinique rum, which adds a bit of trademark funk and salinity to the cask-strength spirit.

Yet, perhaps the strongest signal of rye's unstoppable ascent: In November 2021, a legacy blended Scotch maker trumpeted the arrival of a "High Rye Blended Scotch." It boasts 60% rye as a key part of the blend, which is unusual for Scotch as it typically puts malted barley front and center. Seems like everyone wants a piece of rye whiskey right now.

—Kara Newman

An increasing amount of attention has been paid to where and how that rye is grown.

**98 Wild Turkey Rare Breed Barrel Proof Rye (USA; Wild Turkey, Lawrenceville, KY).** Mild almond and cinnamon aromas lead into cocoa and caramel on the surprisingly luscious, lip-smacking palate. Adding water coaxes out mulling spices, orange flesh and peel, finishing with a final dazzle of ginger and cinnamon.  
**abv:** 56.1% **Price:** \$60

**97 Milam & Greene Port Finished Rye Whiskey (USA; Milam & Greene, Blanco, TX).** For full review see page 28.  
**abv:** 47% **Price:** \$50

**97 Stauning Rye (Denmark; Park Street Imports, Miami, FL).** Complex and delicious, this deep-flavored rye opens with espresso, dark chocolate, and hints of campfire smoke and barrel char. The finish long, toasty and warming, spiced with

allspice, clove and caraway. It's a bit like a s'more made on slices of dark-toasted rye bread.  
**abv:** 48% **Price:** \$80

**96 A Midwinter Nights Dram, Act 9 (USA; High West Distillery, Park City, UT).** The ninth annual release of this blend of straight rye whiskies, this year finished in ruby and tawny Port barrels, is as excellent as ever. Toffee and espresso aromas include a faint spearmint whiff. Oak, toffee, and dried cherry lead the palate; a splash of water brings out an intriguing leathery note and hints of plum skin and dried cranberry tartness. The final exhale channels dark chocolate-covered dried cherries, finishing with echoes of menthol and clove.  
**abv:** 49.3% **Price:** \$100

**96 Woodford Reserve Rye (USA; Woodford Reserve Distillery, Versailles, KY).** This offers a classic rye profile. The rich vanilla fragrance leads to a relatively lean flavor profile, showing espresso,

charred oak, unsweetened chocolate and clove. The finish is satisfyingly long and drying. Sip with a cube of ice and maybe a curl of orange peel. **Best Buy.**

**abv:** 45.2%

**Price:** \$35

**95 New Riff Malted Rye (USA; New Riff Distilling, Newport, KY).** Concentrated toffee aromas mix with cocoa richness. Lively and luscious at the same time, the palate is redolent with juicy red fruit and toffee, finishing long and mouthwatering with orange peel, a fleeting toasted coconut note and a flurry of baking spice. This 100% malted rye is aged six years and bottled in bond.  
**abv:** 50% **Price:** \$60

**95 Redwood Empire Rocket Top Rye (USA; Redwood Empire Distilling, Graton, CA).** Look for a concentrated crème brûlée aroma but a lighter flavor profile, mixing caramel, toasted brown sugar and a plummy note. There's just enough toasty spice to keep it warming and lively, shot through with nutmeg, ginger and allspice. This is an 87% rye whiskey with small measures of barley and wheat, aged for five years and bottled in bond.  
**abv:** 50% **Price:** \$80

**94 Elijah Craig Kentucky Straight Rye (USA; Elijah Craig Distillery, Bardstown, KY).** The complex aromas suggest red fruit, vanilla and allspice. The first sips open with oak, leading to hints of dried cherry and cranberry midpalate. That fruit note extends into the elongated, mouthwatering finish, backed by cinnamon and cayenne heat. **Best Buy.**  
**abv:** 47% **Price:** \$30

**94 Old Overholt 11 Year Rye (USA; Beam Suntory, Frankfort/Clermont, KY).** Balance is the word here: The aroma balances oak and vanilla, while the palate balances cocoa powder and vanilla sweetness with lemon peel brightness, finishing with gentle cinnamon and cayenne piquancy. A versatile workhorse for cocktails, if you can bear to mix it. Limited edition in honor of the company's 210th anniversary.  
**abv:** 46.3% **Price:** \$75

**94 Rabbit Hole Boxergrail Rye (USA; Rabbit Hole Distillery, Louisville, KY).** The tempting aroma mixes vanilla bean and cinnamon. The drying palate opens with roasted grain and espresso, plus a mouthwatering salinity. Adding water transforms the flavor to roasted, nutty tones, mixing hazelnut and peanut with mocha and leading to an invigorating finish sprinkled with clove, cinnamon and black pepper.  
**abv:** 47.5% **Price:** \$50

**94 Whistlepig FarmStock Beyond Bonded Rye (USA; Whistlepig, Shoreham, VT).** This whiskey is made with 100% rye grain harvested from Whistlepig's Vermont farm, the grain-to-glass rye the producer has been working toward for years. Happily, it was worth the wait. Look for concen-

trated toffee and oak aromas. Toasted grain leads the expressive palate, framed by hints of roasted coffee beans, honeycomb and vanilla, leading into a drying finish accented with lemon peel zing and baking spice.  
**abv:** 50% **Price:** \$100

**93** **Catoctin Creek Ragnarok Rye Whiskey (USA; Catoctin Creek, Purcellville, VA).** For full review see page 28.  
**abv:** 46% **Price:** \$99

**93** **High Plains Rye (USA; JW Rutledge Distillery, Middletown, KY).** For full review see page 29.  
**abv:** 48.5% **Price:** \$55

**93** **Jefferson's Straight Rye Whiskey Finished in Cognac Casks (USA; Pernod Ricard, New York, NY).** The mild aroma shows a hint of dried apricot, which is echoed on the drying palate. Adding water layers on toasted brioche, with a gentle, drying fade shaded with lemon peel and gingery glow.  
**abv:** 47% **Price:** \$70

**93** **Journeyman Last Feather Rye Whiskey (USA; Journeyman Distillery, Three Oaks, MI).** For full review see page 29.  
**abv:** 45% **Price:** \$50

**93** **Journeyman Not a King Rye Whiskey (USA; Journeyman Distillery, Three Oaks, MI).** For full review see page 29.  
**abv:** 45% **Price:** \$50

**93** **Old Hamer Straight Rye (USA; West Fork Whiskey, Indianapolis, IN).** Vanilla and maple aromas mingle with an herbaceous, amaro-like hint. The brisk palate balances vanilla and Christmas spices, drying to a pleasingly bitter bite. The clove-allspice notes are similar to Angostura bitters, making this a natural to mix into Old Fashioneds. *Best Buy.*  
**abv:** 45% **Price:** \$28

**93** **Old Overholt Bottled-in-Bond Straight Rye Whiskey (USA; Beam Suntory, Frankfort, KY).** Look for mellow vanilla scented with a hint of red fruit. The palate is light and toasty, channeling oatmeal cookie, toasted bread, vanilla wafers. The finish is long and relatively fiery, adding a malty note and flicker of lemon peel. *Best Buy.*  
**abv:** 50% **Price:** \$25

**93** **Pinhook TizRyeTime (USA; Castle & Key, Woodford County, KY).** Oaky and rootsy aromas lead into a palate that is pure toffee, accented by allspice and clove. Adding water layers on a hint of milk chocolate, drying into a concentrated blast of allspice on the exhale. Aged five years.  
**abv:** 51.5% **Price:** \$70

**93** **Redemption Rye Barrel Proof Aged 10 Years (USA; Bardstown Barrel Selection, Bardstown, KY).** A rare example of a 10-year-old rye, this

whiskey mingles vanilla and dried fig aromas. Add plenty of water to this fiery powerhouse to bring out the dried fig and date notes promised in the aroma, alongside cocoa and vanilla. The finish is long but still hot, singeing the tongue with cinnamon heat. Distilled in Indiana, bottled in Kentucky.  
**abv:** 58.1% **Price:** \$100

**93** **Redemption Rye Rum Cask Finish (USA; Redemption Barrel Selections, Lawrenceburg, IN).** This bottling balances rum and rye, softness and leanness. Maple and orange peel on nose and palate lead into almond and coconut, drying to leather and nutmeg on the finish, plus fleeting mouthwatering salinity.  
**abv:** 47% **Price:** \$50

**93** **Reunion Straight Rye Whiskey Batch 29 (USA; Union Horse Distilling, Lenexa, KS).** Enticing maple and spice aromas lead the nose on this 100% rye. The first sips open with a lemony burst of acidity, then hints of vanilla, cherry and baking spice. Adding water pulls it together into a fruitcake-like whole of creamy caramel studded with candied fruit, backed by a hint of molasses. Cinnamon, allspice and black pepper show the exit.  
**abv:** 46.5% **Price:** \$45

**93** **Riverset Small Batch Rye (USA; B.R. Distilling, Memphis, TN).** For full review see page 29. *Best Buy.*  
**abv:** 48.5% **Price:** \$30

**93** **Tin Cup Rye (USA; Tincup Whiskey, Denver, CO).** New in January 2020, this “mountain whiskey” was distilled in Indiana, aged for three years, and proofed with Rocky Mountain water. The concentrated caramel aroma leads into a palate nicely balanced between oak and spice. Vanilla and cocoa slip into a long, drying finish enlivened by cinnamon and ginger sparks. *Best Buy.*  
**abv:** 45% **Price:** \$30

**93** **Widow Jane Oak & Apple Wood Aged Rye (USA; Widow Jane Distillery, Brooklyn, NY).** For full review see page 29.  
**abv:** 45.5% **Price:** \$45

**93** **Woody Creek Rye Whiskey (USA; Woody Creek Distillers, Basalt, CO).** For full review see page 29.  
**abv:** 45% **Price:** \$50

**92** **Kooper Family Barrel Reserve Rye (USA; Kooper Family Whiskey Co., Ledbetter, TX).** The inviting, molasses aroma smells like gingerbread fresh from the oven. The palate is lightly sweet and disarmingly fruity, mixing sarsaparilla, maple sugar and allspice with hints of blackberry, finishing with ginger, lemon and cayenne heat.  
**abv:** 58% **Price:** \$60

**92** **Lost Lantern Spirit Works California Straight Rye Whiskey Fall 2021 Cask #4 (USA; Lost**

**Lantern Whiskey, Weybridge, VT).** For full review see page 29.  
**abv:** 61% **Price:** \$80

**92** **Old Hickory Hermitage Reserve Rye (USA; Old Hickory Spirits, Silverton, OH).** For full review see page 29.  
**abv:** 48% **Price:** \$60

**92** **Rieger's Rye 2021 Bottled in Bond (USA; J. Rieger & Co., Kansas City, MO).** This nearly six-year-old rye is the first distilled, aged and bottled at the Kansas City distillery. Look for a deep amber hue and bold vanilla and caramel aromas. The bold palate resounds with plenty of oak and juicy red fruit, finishing long with hints of mocha and bouncy clove. The cherry leather note shouts for Manhattans.  
**abv:** 50% **Price:** \$50

**92** **Stellum Rye (USA; Barrell Craft Spirits, Louisville, KY).** Look for warm honey, almond and stone fruit aromas. Add plenty of water to this cask-strength whiskey: the reward is vanilla, caramel and roasted nut tones, leading into a tingly, clove-spiced finish.  
**abv:** 58.12% **Price:** \$55

**92** **Spirit of Hven Hvenus Rye (Sweden; Preiss Imports, Ramona, CA).** Mild almond and coconut aromas lead into a big, dark, brawny palate. Toasted grain and savory pumpnickel are balanced by warming anise, caraway and black pepper.  
**abv:** 45.6% **Price:** \$77

**91** **KO Distiller's Reserve Rye (USA; KO Distilling, Manassas, VA).** This 100% Virginia rye has a pleasing mix of toffee, oak and dried cherry aromas. The palate is wild with vanilla, barbecue rub spices and a mesquite-like twang. Adding water lets the whiskey land softly with creamy caramel studded with savory spice.  
**abv:** 50% **Price:** \$75

**91** **Old Hamer Cask Strength Rye (USA; West Fork Whiskey, Indianapolis, IN).** The concentrated caramel aroma, plus a hint of alcohol, makes the nose twitch. It's clear from the first sip this is an overproof rye: the big, bold, relatively hot palate shows orange peel, almond and cinnamon red hots. Adding water settles it into an easier groove: almond melds with ginger and cinnamon spice, with a bit of oak reflected on the brisk, drying finish. *Best Buy.*  
**abv:** 57.4% **Price:** \$40

**91** **Redemption Rye (USA; Bardstown Barrel Selection, Bardstown, KY).** This is a dry, lean style with plenty of heat and spice. Oak leads on nose and palate, though there's a hint of coconut fragrance and tinges of brown sugar and maple mid-palate. The fiery finish shows vanilla, allspice and clove. *Best Buy.*  
**abv:** 46% **Price:** \$27