

The 11 Best New Spirits of the Year, From Don Julio Ultima Reserva to Bob Dylan's Whiskey



Shout

It would be accurate to say that Peter Bignell runs a “green” distillery, but somehow that doesn’t quite capture it.

For more than a decade, Bignell’s company—[Belgrove Distillery](#) in Tasmania, Australia—has produced whiskey from rye he grows himself. This is unusual: Most operations have their grains shipped to them at a considerable carbon cost. What’s more, he powers his stills and tractors with a biofuel he makes out of used cooking oil from a fish-and-chips place next to his farm. All his water is from rain traps. He built his own still from scratch. He dug his peat bog out behind his brother’s house. For special releases, he sometimes burns dried sheep dung to smoke the whiskey, and he feeds the same sheep the mash left over from distillation (giving an unfortunate visual to the idea of “closed loop”).

Bignell’s small operation may be the most sustainable distillery in the world. “The only significant material I bring to the farm is waste cooking oil,” he says, “and the main product to leave is whiskey.”

When we think of climate change, we tend to envision coal power plants, government policy and fires in the Brazilian Amazon. We tend not to think about alcohol—one incontrovertible truth of the climate

crisis is that it's a serious bummer and is fairly disharmonious with happy hour. Nonetheless, the facts are the facts: According to a [Beverage Industry Environmental Roundtable](#) report, a 750mL bottle of spirits generates some six pounds of CO₂, placing each two-ounce cocktail's carbon footprint at a staggering half pound *each*.

In response, there is a movement sweeping the industry, not just of incremental improvements but of radical change at all levels.

[Rhodora](#), in Brooklyn, is a relaxed neighborhood wine bar designed from the ground up to produce zero waste. The closed-loop distributor [ecoSPIRITS](#), launching in the US later this year, has a goal of eliminating single-use glass bottles in the spirits and wine industry. In Southern California, [Misadventure & Co.](#) makes vodka out of old muffins and other baked goods that would otherwise be thrown away.

This fundamental shift is exemplified by Copal Tree Distillery, in Belize. All the sugarcane for its rum, [Copalli](#), is grown on-site, and only rainwater is used to ferment, distill and proof. The spent sugarcane is repurposed as fuel to heat the still, the exhaust gets treated to remove particulates and the ash fertilizes the fields. And because its founders understand that poverty also leads to environmental destruction, the distillery and its farm hire local residents, pay its workers three times the national average and donate thousands of dollars in educational grants for students in the area.

It's not that these companies try to be sustainable while achieving their goals; it's that sustainability *is* the goal. Copalli USA's CEO Mark Breene puts it plainly: "Concern for the community and the environment came long before the rum."

Photo : Ren Fuller

Best Bourbon, Scotch and Ultra-Aged Whisky

Bourbon: Heaven Hill, Heritage Collection 17-Year-Old Barrel Proof Kentucky Straight Bourbon

[Heaven Hill](#) is a storied Kentucky distillery known for the affordable bourbons Elijah Craig and Evan Williams. But it also excels at the high-end, and the inaugural release in the new Heritage Collection is the

latest proof. Each whiskey is produced from one of the distillery's six mashbills, and this one uses the tried-and-true bourbon recipe of 78 percent corn, 10 percent rye and 12 percent malted barley. The bourbon was aged for [a minimum of 17 years](#) and blended with liquid up to 20 years old. Normally, bourbons of this age can become overly oaky and tannic, but this bottling is fantastically balanced. Classic notes of vanilla, caramel, stone fruit and a whiff of char dance across the palate with every sip. This bottle will certainly be a collector's item, but the temptation to pour yourself a glass may be too much to resist.