01 / ORIGINS & PEOPLE

Neeley Family Distillery

Cypress. Copper. A family story carried forward.

A small Sparta distillery joins family memory to a contemporary whiskey range. Hidden Barn adds another layer: a brand whose series and batches celebrate differences in distilling source, selection and wood, rather than promising one identical profile. [21]

Legal business: 2015 [1]
Sparta opening: July 2017 [3]
Whiskey home: Northern Kentucky [3]
Stewardship: Roy and Royce Neeley [27]



An inheritance, and a new beginning

The family places its roots in eighteenth-century whiskey-making. Royce’s recorded interview distinguishes inherited stories from documented events. The 1740 heritage landmark, the 2015 legal venture and the 2017 Sparta opening are different dates, each answering a different question. [1,6]

The work is shared

Roy built the place; Royce leads the distilling. Rebekah Neeley contributes selection and blending, including a 94-proof wheated small batch. Hidden Barn’s July 2025 appointment of Molly Wellmann adds a master taster after founding blender Jackie Zykan’s transition to emeritus. [27,28,13]

Watercolors are symbolic interpretations, not exact buildings or documentary portraits.

02 / HISTORY & PLACES

From the hills to the tasting table



1988–2017 · A new address The family moves north in 1988. The legal business begins in 2015; Sparta opens in July 2017 and fills early bourbon barrels that August. [4,3]

2022 · One brand, two distilling sources Hidden Barn launches with Neeley’s Series One. Series Two follows with M.B. Roland whiskey, making the series number part of the production story. [7,8]

2024–2025 · Ownership and people change Royce acquires Hidden Barn in 2024. A seven-year French-oak release follows. Zykan steps away in June 2025; Wellmann joins the next month. [11,12,13]

2026 · A continuing reserve PaPaw’s Legacy Reserve honors Earl Sizemore, Royce’s grandfather. The ten-year wheated release is presented at 110 proof. [15]

Read the place by its role

Sparta is the working distillery and visitor home. Owsley and Owen counties belong to earlier family chapters. Pembroke is M.B. Roland’s separate location, relevant to Hidden Barn Series Two. Tours connect the present craft to family objects and stories. [25,26,4]

Family history, company formation and facility opening remain distinct. Watercolors are symbolic interpretations.

03 / WHISKEY, STORIES & SOURCES

Every batch keeps its own identity

Sweet mash and open cypress fermentation help define Neeley’s approach. Yet production is release-specific: Hidden Barn Series One explicitly documents double pot distillation, while other Neeley products describe a third distillation. [5,7]



Grain and wood create other branches. Banana Batch lists corn, oats, wheat and malt. An older Madeira batch records a seven-month finish and its own proof. Neither recipe nor finish name identifies every release. [20,24]

The PaPaw announcement describes a neutral holding tank, partial withdrawals and replenishment with selected whiskey. The plan preserves a share of jointly made stock. Time in the tank is not further maturation in oak. [14]

Research notes & linked sources

Research: October 16, 2026. Genealogy includes attributed lore. Double/triple distillation and proofs stay release-specific. The reported 2017 first Sparta barrels do not reconcile every later older-stock claim. Historical blending credits do not imply a current role. [6,2,12]

[1] Neeley history & products
[2] The working distillery
[3] 2017 KDA announcement
[4] 2019 agriculture profile
[5] B-Line distillery visit
[6] Royce oral-history interview
[7] 2022 Hidden Barn launch
[8] 2022 Series Two launch
[9] Official series records
[10] People & blending credits
[11] 2024 acquisition / oak
[12] 2025 Zykan transition
[13] 2025 Wellmann appointment
[14] 2026 PaPaw announcement
[15] PaPaw reserve product
[16] Absinthe Verte product
[17] Sweet Thumped Rye
[18] Perfect Harmony Madeira
[19] Slow Fade batch
[20] Banana Batch recipe
[21] Hidden Barn overview
[22] Cherry Picker tech sheet
[23] Organic wheated sheet
[24] Madeira Batch 2 sheet
[25] M.B. Roland story
[26] Tours & tastings
[27] Neeley producer overview
[28] 94-proof wheated sheet
[29] Rye technical sheet
[30] 2023 retailer context