01 / ORIGINS & PEOPLE

New Riff Distilling

Kentucky discipline. A brewer’s curiosity.

Founded in Newport in 2014, New Riff works from Kentucky’s sour mash, open fermentation, column still and doubler. Its experiments begin with that foundation, then vary grain, malt, age and cask. [1, 2]

Home: Newport, Kentucky.
Ownership: independent, one family.
Founder: Ken Lewis.
House whiskey debut: August 2018. [1, 14]



From the shelf to the still

Ken Lewis brought a retailer’s understanding of whiskey to a new distillery. His own account connects the sale of The Party Source to its employees with his move into production. Early sourced O.K.I. bourbon helped carry the waiting years; the mature New Riff house range followed in 2018. O.K.I. later became separately owned. [4, 8, 14, 17]

A brewer’s knowledge, Kentucky guidance

Brian Sprance’s brewing background met the distilling experience of mentor Larry Ebersold. Named master distiller in 2024, Sprance continues alongside president Mollie Lewis, CEO Hannah Lowen and COO Denny Gorman. Co-founder Jay Erisman helped shape the whiskey’s development. [3, 10, 13]

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

02 / HISTORY & PLACES

Patience, then possibility.



2014–2018 New Riff is founded; its first house bourbon and rye reach the market after maturation. [1, 14]

2019–2021 Balboa explores heirloom rye; Backsetter carries smoke through peat-malt backset; six-year malted rye joins the range. [10, 14–16]

2021–2023 More fermenters and a Silver Grove warehouse support growth. Silver Grove bourbon and the single malt debut add new expressions. [19–22]

2024–2025 Leadership passes to a new team. Eight-year core bourbon, Headliner and First Decade releases develop the older-stock story. [3, 11, 12, 24]

2026 The flagship earns World’s Best Bourbon; distribution reaches all fifty states. Single malt and Headliner continue evolving by edition. [26–30]

Read the place by its role

Newport: distillation, visitor home and warehouses C and D.
Beneath the distillery: a private well reaches a mineral-rich aquifer about 100 feet down.
Silver Grove: additional barrel storage and a community connection.
The Aquifer: tasting room inside the Newport visitor experience. [2, 19, 21, 31]

An edited chronology; the complete illustrated website retains all 20 milestones and their qualifications.

03 / WHISKEY, STORIES & SOURCES

One regimen. Many variations.

Core bourbon: 65% corn, 30% rye, 5% malted barley. **Core rye:** 95% rye, 5% malted rye. **Malted rye:** 100% malted rye. These are distinct recipes. [5–7]

The bonded flagships are 100 proof; single barrels retain individual proofs. Eight-year bourbon and limited ten-year releases show the value of setting stock aside. Annual single malts change their recipes and casks. [5, 12, 22, 23, 32]



The detail worth knowing: Backsetter’s smoke comes through peat-malt backset in the sour mash. Headliner’s creative blends support named community organizations. Current house production should not erase historical sourced O.K.I. or the special 2021 Indiana-distilled restaurant-relief bourbon. [8, 16, 18, 21, 30]

Research notes & linked sources

Researched October 18, 2026. Figures belong to named editions. Some older archive pages conflict on proof, age or composition; disputed panels are not generalized here. Warehouse forecasts remain distinct from verified opening dates. The complete profile records these qualifications. Watercolors are symbolic. [8, 14, 19, 24, 33, 34]

[1] Our story
[2] Our process
[3] Current team
[4] Ken Lewis interview
[5] Bonded bourbon
[6] Bonded rye
[7] Malted rye
[8] O.K.I. statement
[9] Retirement plan
[10] 2021 malted rye
[11] 2024 eight-year
[12] First Decade
[13] Sprance appointment
[14] Official library menu
[15] Balboa history
[16] Backsetter
[17] O.K.I. acquisition
[18] Restaurant relief
[19] Warehouse report
[20] Silver Grove 2024
[21] New Riff Works
[22] Single malt project
[23] Eight-year bourbon
[24] Headliner 2024
[25] Confluence
[26] 2026 award result
[27] Fifty states
[28] Single malt 2026
[29] 2026 malt release
[30] Headliner 2026
[31] The Aquifer
[32] Single-barrel bourbon
[33] 2023 malt archive
[34] 2024 malt archive