WILLETT DISTILLERY

Family roots. A distilling revival. A new chapter.



Origins & people

The family’s Kentucky whiskey roots reach back to John David Willett after the Civil War. Thompson Willett established the Bardstown distillery on the family farm in 1936. Its first barrel entered Warehouse A on March 17, 1937. Family heritage, construction and first production are separate milestones. [1,2]

Even and Martha Kulsveen purchased the property in 1984. The Kentucky Bourbon Distillers chapter sustained a whiskey business through blending and bottling while the stills were dormant. Production returned in 2012; Britt and Drew helped shape the renewed operation. The producer still identifies the business as family owned and operated. [2,3,4,21]

Growth without leaving Bardstown

Willett filled its first Springfield barrel on June 18, 2026. The company described an additional production campus, with Bardstown operations continuing and a future Springfield visitor experience still to come. Master distiller Drew Kulsveen connected that growth to the family legacy. [23]

History & places

From farm to a wider footprint



1936 / 1937 Construction on the family farm, followed by the first barrel in Warehouse A. [1,2]

1960s / 1984 Thompson develops Johnny Drum; later, Even and Martha acquire the estate. [2,13]

2012 / 2015 / 2020 Distilling returns. KDA Proof and Heritage membership follow. [3,4]

2019 The Bar at Willett opens. [22]

2021 / 2022 / 2025 Wolves introduces its first Rye Project; Kiamichi launches with the Followill family; a ten-year Wolves collaboration follows. [18,19,20]

2026 Springfield begins production in June. September brings a Pot Still Reserve Cask Strength announcement. In October, IWSC names Old Bardstown Bottled in Bond 4 Year its Bourbon Trophy winner. [23,24,25]

The estate and the next site

Bardstown remains the historic home at 1869 Loretto Road. Warehouse A anchors its early production story; The Bar adds dining and whiskey hospitality. Tour and dining reservations have separate paths on Willett’s official visit page. [2,5]

Springfield is a separate Washington County production campus. The June announcement’s future visitor plans are not a promise of current public access. Illustrations are symbolic scenes. [23]

Whiskey & stories

Grain, blending and release identity



Willett publishes multiple grain recipes. Its current four-year rye page also gives a 90/10 combination of two rye recipes: grain percentages and blend percentages describe different things. [7]

Pot Still Reserve and Willett Wheat currently share a 65% corn, 20% wheat, 15% barley recipe, but differ in bottling proof. The 2026 cask-strength addition varies by batch. [6,9,25]

Even Kulsveen drew the Rowan’s Creek label to honor the estate’s creek. Kiamichi takes its name from a different river associated with Followill family reunions. Both carry place and family memory. [11,18]

Linked research sources

1. Willett establishment
2. Historical producer packet
3. KDA Proof membership, 2015
4. KDA Heritage membership, 2020
5. Official visitor information
6. Pot Still Reserve
7. Family Estate four-year rye
8. Family Estate four-year bourbon
9. Willett Wheat
10. Noah’s Mill
11. Rowan’s Creek
12. Pure Kentucky
13. Johnny Drum Private Stock
14. Old Bardstown Estate Bottled
15. Kentucky Vintage
16. Old Bardstown Bottled in Bond
17. Old Bardstown 90 Proof
18. Kiamichi launch, 2022
19. Wolves Rye Project, 2021
20. Wolves ten-year rye, 2025
21. Current family ownership
22. Bar opening timeline
23. Springfield announcement, 2026
24. IWSC Bourbon Trophy, 2026
25. Pot Still Cask Strength, 2026