

THE THELEN RESERVE

AMERICAN WHISKEY

GRAIN, OAK & CHARACTER



One family of spirits. Several grain recipes and paths through oak.

BOURBON



AT LEAST 51% CORN
New charred oak

Corn leads the mash bill. Bourbon can be made across the United States.

RYE & WHEAT



AT LEAST 51% RYE OR WHEAT
New charred oak

Rye whiskey is rye-led. Wheat whiskey is wheat-led. Wheated bourbon still has a corn-led recipe.

MALT & RYE MALT



AT LEAST 51% OF THE NAMED MALT
New charred oak

Malt whiskey uses malted barley. Rye malt whiskey uses malted rye. American single malt has separate rules.

CORN WHISKEY



AT LEAST 80% CORN
Oak storage is optional

When stored, corn whiskey uses used oak or new uncharred oak. It can go to bottle without barrel aging.

AMERICAN SINGLE MALT



100% MALTED BARLEY
New or used oak, up to 700 liters

Mashed, distilled and aged in the U.S. All distillation takes place at one U.S. distillery. Many barrels can go into a release.

LIGHT & BLENDED



TWO DISTINCT DESIGNATIONS
Different production rules

Light whiskey is distilled above 160 and below 190 proof. Blended whiskey can include neutral spirits. “Light” describes distillation strength.

WHAT THE NUMBERS TELL YOU

160 PROOF	The distillation ceiling for bourbon, rye, wheat, malt, rye malt, corn and American single malt whiskey.
80 PROOF	The minimum bottling strength for whiskey is 40% ABV, equivalent to 80 U.S. proof.
2 YEARS	The minimum qualifying aging for the straight designations covered here.

READING AN AMERICAN WHISKEY LABEL



SINGLE BARREL OR BATCH
A batch can bring together multiple barrels of the same qualifying whiskey.

ABV AND PROOF
A 50% ABV whiskey is 100 U.S. proof. Check strength before comparing pours.

COLOR AND CLASSIFICATION
American single malt may contain disclosed caramel coloring, including straight American single malt.

TASTE WITH INTENTION



NOSE
Smell gently. Look for fruit, grain, spice or oak.



PALATE
Take a small sip. Notice sweetness, texture and balance.



FINISH
Follow the flavors that linger after the sip.



FINAL TAKE
Write down what you enjoyed and what you would revisit.

Compare two pours. Add a few drops of water and record what changes.

SELECTED REFERENCES

[1] U.S. standards of identity, 27 CFR § 5.143.
[2] TTB, American Single Malt Whisky standard of identity.
[3] Kelly et al., Beverages 9, 64 (2023).

THE THELEN RESERVE
Understand the craft. Explore the flavor.