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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2011

Buffalo Trace Single Oak Project - The First Release

I [wrote about](#) the innovative Buffalo Trace Single Oak Project earlier this year when they announced it. Now I've had the chance to taste through the first release, and I thought I'd give you my impressions.

First, the tasting process is really fascinating. Each release has a number of constants and a number of variables. For the first release, the variables were grain coarseness (fine, average or coarse), what part of the tree the barrel was made from (top or bottom) and mashbill (wheat or rye). Everything else was constant. This gave the taster the opportunity to measure these factors alone.

I came away with this with a few impressions. The bottom cut barrels were almost always more intensely flavored than the top cut. This wasn't always a good thing. In some of the rye recipe bourbons, bottom cut barrels seemed to produce more vegetal flavors, while top cuts were more balanced and elegant.

Grain coarseness is not something I could really pin down as having a distinct impact, though I liked the average grain bourbons better than both the fine and coarse grain.

Interestingly, this whole project is probably less likely to produce a single "perfect bourbon" (as was originally touted) than to give Buffalo Trace an extremely specific idea of what elements produce what flavors, allowing them to fine tune their vating and know more specifically how to produce desired flavor profiles.

The whole tasting process is fascinating, and I intend to taste through the whole 192 bottle series (splitting it with a group). Should you? In most cases, I would say no.

These are not the Buffalo Trace Antique Collection. None of the bottles I tasted in the first series was great. They mostly ranged from good to pretty good, but I can't say I would recommend running out and buying any of them. If you can even get them individually (many stores are selling them only by the case) and you want to get a glimpse of the project without investing in 12 bottles, I would recommend getting a pair of bottles with one variable. For instance, barrels 99 and 100 from the first release are both wheaters with average grains, but one is a top tree barrel and one is a bottom. Taste these two and you will get some sense of the impact of the part of the tree the barrel comes from. You could make similar match ups based on any of the variables which will give you some of the experience.

Would I recommend getting the whole set to anyone? Only the most serious whiskey geeks who have whiskey geek friends to share with. There is no way I would be doing this if I wasn't splitting it. It's just too much not-great bourbon. But if you are a serious geek and have some geek-friends, well you will have a unique educational experience.

I'll be tasting through the second release soon, and I'll post my reactions.

Posted by sku at 6:00 PM



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Sku eats, drinks and is merry in the Koreatown neighborhood of Los Angeles and beyond.

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Pages

[List of American Whiskeys](#)

[The Complete List of](#)

[American Whiskey](#)

[Distilleries...](#)

[Whiskey Links](#)

Whiskey FAQ

[American Single Malts](#)

[American Whiskey](#)

[Distilleries and Brands](#)

[Bourbon](#)

[Canadian Whisky](#)

[Independent Bottlers](#)

[Irish Whiskey](#)

[Japanese Whisky](#)

[Rye](#)

[Scotch](#)

[Tennessee Whiskey](#)

[Trader Joe's Scotch](#)

[Reading Whiskey Labels](#)

[Whisky or Whiskey?](#)

Blog Archive

▼ 2011 (123)

▼ October (6)

[Buffalo Trace Single Oak Project - The First Relea...](#)

[No Fry Zone: \(fōnuts\)](#)

[The Big Mac Daddy - Macallan 30](#)

[Compass Box's](#)

[Newest: Great King Street Artist's ...](#)

[RIP: BonBonBar - But Still a Chance to Get One La...](#)

[Fair Warning: Eating Carefully at the LA County F...](#)

► September (13)

► August (14)

► July (12)

► June (14)

► May (13)

► April (12)

► March (14)

► February (12)

► January (13)

► 2010 (170)

► 2009 (168)

► 2008 (165)

► 2007 (103)

Labels



[Absinthe](#) (5)
[American Breakfast](#) (17)
[American Malt](#) (8)
[Apple Brandy](#) (2)
[April Fools](#) (2)
[Argentinian](#) (2)
[Armagnac](#) (2)
[Armenian](#) (1)
[Ask Mr. Pyrite](#) (2)
[Bars](#) (4)
[BBQ](#) (5)
[Beer](#) (1)
[Blogs](#) (18)
[Bourbon](#) (77)
[Brandy](#) (17)
[Brazilian](#) (1)
[Breakfast](#) (2)
[Budget Booze](#) (6)
[Burgers](#) (8)
[Butter](#) (5)
[Caiun](#) (5)
[Cambodian](#) (1)
[Camel Milk](#) (1)
[Canadian Whiskey](#) (10)
[Chanukah](#) (2)
[Cheese](#) (30)
[Chicago](#) (1)
[Chinese](#) (33)
[Chocolate](#) (32)
[Cocktails](#) (24)
[Coffee](#) (19)
[Cognac](#) (11)
[Colombian](#) (3)
[Commentary](#) (43)
[Cookies](#) (7)
[Corn Whiskey](#) (5)
[Corporations](#) (10)
[Costa Rican](#) (1)
[Cuban](#) (2)
[Cupcakes](#) (6)
[Deli](#) (4)
[Dim Sum](#) (8)
[Diners](#) (1)
[Disneyland](#) (6)
[Distillery List](#) (5)
[DIY](#) (17)
[Doughnuts](#) (12)
[Drinks](#) (286)
[Dumbass](#) (1)
[Eats](#) (316)
[Ecuadoran](#) (1)
[Ethiopian](#) (6)
[Farmers Market](#) (8)
[Favorites](#) (16)
[Fiction](#) (24)
[Film](#) (2)
[French](#) (11)
[French Dips](#) (1)
[Fried Chicken](#) (4)
[Frog Schnitzel](#) (1)
[Gifts](#) (10)
[Gin](#) (3)
[Guilty Pleasures](#) (1)
[Haitian](#) (2)
[Hawaii](#) (21)
[Hazlenuts](#) (1)
[Hollywood Farmers Market](#) (13)
[Hot dogs](#) (11)
[Housekeeping](#) (1)
[I-5 Eats](#) (1)
[Ice Cream](#) (22)
[Indian](#) (5)
[Indonesian](#) (2)
[Irish Whiskey](#) (12)
[Italian](#) (14)
[Japanese](#) (13)
[Japanese Whiskey](#) (9)
[Jewish](#) (3)
[Kids](#) (14)
[Korean](#) (29)
[LA County Fair](#) (5)
[Labels](#) (3)
[Las Vegas](#) (9)
[Latte Art](#) (1)
[Liquor Stores](#) (10)
[Mexican](#) (24)
[Mezcal](#) (3)
[Middle Eastern](#) (7)

[Milk](#) (1)
[Moroccan](#) (1)
[Music](#) (1)
[New York](#) (5)
[NorCal](#) (4)
[Oaxacan](#) (4)
[pee](#) (1)
[Peruvian](#) (2)
[Pizza](#) (6)
[Plate Lunch](#) (1)
[Policies](#) (1)
[Pork](#) (46)
[Pretentious Naval Gazing](#) (2)
[Produce](#) (9)
[Reads](#) (36)
[Really Cold Stuff](#) (1)
[Reptiles](#) (1)
[RIP](#) (11)
[Rum](#) (3)
[Russian](#) (2)
[Rye](#) (44)
[Salvadoran](#) (7)
[Scotch](#) (88)
[Shave Ice](#) (5)
[Singaporean](#) (1)
[SMW Extravaganza](#) (1)
[Sonoma](#) (2)
[South Asian](#) (1)
[Spanish](#) (1)
[Spelling](#) (3)
[Steak](#) (4)
[Sweets](#) (131)
[Tahoe](#) (5)
[Tastings](#) (11)
[Television](#) (4)
[Tennessee Whiskey](#) (12)
[Tequila](#) (1)
[Texas](#) (3)
[Thai](#) (11)
[Vietnamese](#) (7)
[Vodka](#) (1)
[Wheat Whiskey](#) (3)
[Whiskey](#) (252)
[Whisky Live](#) (8)