

Experience the South by People Who Know it Best

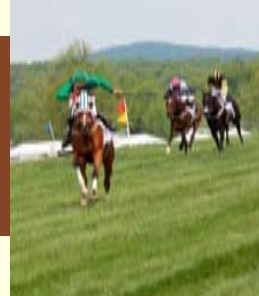


# Wines down South



## GOURMET KENTUCKY DINING & BOURBON IN THE BLUEGRASS STATE

By Doc Lawrence



LOUISVILLE, KY—This progressive and very livable city has maintained its Southern roots which essentially mean the food is excellent and the people are friendly. Perhaps that's oversimplifying this charming town that is an acknowledged leader in the arts and sports new restaurants that regularly earn acclaim. While wine is plentiful and the availability on par with cities like Atlanta and Miami, there's no mistaking the dominance of Bourbon here. It has a hallowed place with denizens and is part of the core culture with other Kentucky icons: Bill Monroe and Bluegrass music, George Clooney, the Kentucky Derby, Diane Sawyer and the greatest of them all, Muhammad Ali.

I came to Kentucky for a journey along its Civil War trails. The state was the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. But, Louisville has a magnetism that just keeps you hanging around for more knowledge and fun.

The first evening began with my sneaking into the Bourbon class taught by Bourbon Hall of Fame inductee Michael Veach at the Filson Bourbon Academy. Here, students were local lawyers, college professors and physicians gathering to learn all about this Kentucky concoction that has a storied history and holds a prestigious place alongside thoroughbred horse racing.

After class it was time for dinner at Vincenzo's, one of America's most celebrated Italian restaurants and a fine dining fixture in Louisville. In this town beside the Ohio River, it's de rigueur to begin the dining ritual with one of several Bourbon cocktails. My choice was an Old Fashioned, a drink concocted in Louisville and arguably the world's first cocktail. It's delicious, a perfect aperitif. The stage was set for the first course, Rosette di salmone affumicato paired with an Italian Pinot Grigio followed by the main course of rack of lamb prepared tableside, accompanied with generous pours of Oregon Pinot Noir.



Bourbon Hall of Fame member Michael Veach teaches classes about Kentucky's legendary elixir at Louisville's Filson.

Louisville's Oak Room is a mainstay of the historic luxury hotel, the Seelbach. F. Scott Fitzgerald used the hotel as a backdrop in *The Great Gatsby* and personalities as



Doc's lamb is prepared tableside at Louisville's acclaimed Vincenzo's Italian Restaurant.



The Oak Room Chef de Cuisine Bobby Benjamin prepared a gourmet dinner for the ages. Joining him in a toast is Louisville tourism executive Susan Dallas (on left) and top Kentucky Bourbon expert, the legendary Joy Perrine.

diverse as Al Capone and Elvis Presley frequented the hotel and the heralded restaurant. On a lovely early fall evening I joined Louisville's amazing tourism executive Susan Dallas and world renowned Bourbon expert Joy Perrine. Enjoyment manifested as a five-course meal perfectly paired with wines from over five countries.

Outside of New York City or San Francisco, few hotels in America have restaurants comparable to dining at such this elevated level. More than just another ceremony, this was an evening where all the elements of authentic gourmet experience blended effortlessly. The Oak Room staff knows cocktails and wines.

Had a Seelbach Cocktail lately? It's delicious qualities come from a near perfect blending of Bourbon and Champagne. Joy Perrine, an internationally recognized authority on cocktails, is a familiar face in Louisville's Bourbon culture. Resisting the yuppie

designation of being called a mixologist, she told me that she's "a bartender. I've always been a bartender – born a bartender, die a bartender." She introduced me to the Seelbach cocktail and I am grateful.

Chef du Cuisine Bobby Benjamin joined Sommelier Julie DeFriend and pastry chef Margaret Lawrence to produce the perfect evening. Somewhere is a comparable dining experience. Likely, it is in Paris.

My learning circle was completed the following day at Wild Turkey Distillery where the globally respected Jimmy Russell is the Master Distiller. Mr. Russell's reputation attracts the highest responsibility. He headed the project to restore George Washington's rye whiskey distillery at Mount Vernon and guide it back into commercial production.

An afternoon with Jimmy Russell is a glimpse of the way our Founding Fathers liked to spend time together. Whiskey, particularly Kentucky Bourbon, stimulates creativity.

Louisville is rightfully called the "Bourbon Capital of the World." It is one of the country's fast rising gourmet dining stars where everything is poured and served with a warm smile.



The great Jimmy Russell, Master Distiller for Wild Turkey, pours tastes of several Bourbon creations during an joyous educational session with Doc Lawrence at the world famous Kentucky distillery.

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THE TRAVEL AND TOURISM MAGAZINE

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