

BARRELS

OF

FUN



Horsemen Mike McMahon and Jamie Hill
expand into bourbon

BY LENNY SHULMAN | PHOTOS BY MARK MAHAN



Mike McMahon and Jamie Hill at Castle & Key Distillery



The process of distilling and aging bourbon takes at least four years



Castle & Key began distilling last November



McMahon and Hill plan on expanding into rye

MIKE MCMAHON AND JAMIE HILL have always had a taste for horses and bourbon. Both hail from families with pedigrees in Thoroughbreds: Mike’s parents own McMahon of Saratoga Thoroughbreds while Hill’s were the co-owners of 1977 Triple Crown winner Seattle Slew. The younger generation formed McMahon & Hill Bloodstock in 2001 and less than a decade later inaugurated the racing syndicate Bourbon Lane Stable and the pinhooking syndicate Spruce Lane. All of their runners are given names that include the word “bourbon,” so it is no shock that McMahon and Hill have also decided to get into the business of spirits.



Castle & Key features 113 scenic acres

“We have a group of friends who all love bourbon,” explained Hill. “Nine years ago we were having a great weekend at Keeneland and one of them had a lead on this place in Bardstown, so we took a drive and found a building in the middle of nowhere that had a bunch of barrels of bourbon. The idea was hatched.”

Along with partners Jay Peterson and Charles Fulford in New York, McMahon and Hill bought 150 barrels and waited for the bourbon to age the requisite four years. In the meantime, the bourbon business began booming, and the partners hit upon naming their product Pinhook Bourbon. First rolled out in 2012 with a 10-barrel release, Pinhook sold out quickly in five states. Every bottle is hand-numbered and has distinctive equine artwork on the label. Each release is named after a stakes horse campaigned by Bourbon Lane. The first honoree was grade 2 win-



Hill and McMahon among some 3,000 barrels of Pinhook Bourbon



Castle & Key's sunken garden was developed by Jon Carloftis

ner Bourbon Courage, with subsequent releases (averaging two a year) featuring Bent On Bourbon, Bourbonize, Hashtag Bourbon, Urban Bourbon, and Bourbon Empire.

"Our partner in New York designed the labels and bottles and did a fantastic job," Hill noted. "It tastes great, and it's a unique bottle when you see it on the shelf."

Added McMahon, "I think the horse connection has really helped. A lot of bourbon brands take different angles, but this is the quintessential Kentucky tie-in. We're two horse guys immersed in the Kentucky lifestyle of bourbon and Keeneland, and that's what people enjoy about our partnerships and our bourbon."

Pinhook is currently sold in seven states from Louisiana to New York, with a plan to be in 30 states within two years and international in five. Those hopes are bolstered by Pinhook's new affiliation with Castle & Key Distillery, which is up and operating on the historic site of the former Old Taylor Distillery near Millville, Ky., just south of Frankfort. The breathtaking 113-acre property had been dormant since the 1970s but has been brought back to life by

owners Will Arvin and Wes Murry (friends of Hill and McMahon) and master distiller Marianne Barnes, formerly of nearby Woodford Reserve.

Castle & Key has begun distilling Pinhook, and there are 3,000 barrels of it currently aging in the long warehouse



there. McMahon and Hill are seeking to expand into rye in the near future.

"We had to be here at Castle & Key," said McMahon. "We needed a place close to home that we could bring people to. It's really going to make Pinhook bigger."

Built in 1887 by Col. E.H. Taylor, the property mimics Windsor Castle, which impressed Taylor upon his visit there, in its sunken garden just outside a castle that houses the distilling vats. Taylor built the facility as a destination, and it is being refurbished with the same intention. A visitors' center/retail store is scheduled to open this summer, and the owners hope to turn the old administration building into a boutique hotel.

The "Key" of the distillery's name comes from a key-shaped pool of limestone-rich water in the spring house that is the source of the facility's products. The property is bordered by Glenn's Creek and scenic, tree-



Top: Visitors' center features a skylight and retail area; above, limestone-rich water is the secret to fine bourbon

filled hillsides that make it a paradise tucked in close to, but a world away from, Interstate 64.

As far as McMahon and Hill go, the bourbon business is a win-win for their various enterprises.

"It's a great way to leverage our brand," McMahon noted. "Our business is horses, and we have a chance to get our name in front of masses of people with a really cool product. When we began distributing, the name of our racing stable went from a less-branded name to a major national brand."

Look out world. McMahon and Hill are racing in South Africa, plan to run in Australia, and just pinhooked their first horse in Europe.

Cheers. **BH**



Hill and McMahon want to share the Kentucky lifestyle