

Harlen Wheatley

Professional Profile

Harlen's formal education in chemistry and chemical engineering brought him to Buffalo Trace Distillery, but it's the on-the-job experience that led him to become the resident Master Distiller in 2005.

Born in Mount Sterling, Kentucky, in 1969, Harlen has spent almost all of his life in the Bluegrass. After relocating and spending much of his youth in Florence, KY, Harlen attended Northern Kentucky University, attaining his degree in chemistry. He then migrated to work full-time at a chemical company in Central Kentucky while completing a chemical engineering degree at the University of Kentucky, gaining formal training in distillation and separation techniques.

Harlen joined the Distillery as a supervisor in 1995. Not long after, the Distillery was rechristened and the flagship Buffalo Trace Bourbon was introduced. It marked a new era in the Distillery's esteemed history and Harlen continued to make his mark as he was promoted to Distillery Manager in 2000. Harlen was named Master Distiller in 2005, becoming Buffalo Trace's sixth Master Distiller since the Civil War.

Having worked in every aspect of production from raw materials to barrel aging, as Master Distiller, Harlen has driven many initiatives, including solidifying standards and consistency, quality focus and efficiency gains. He is responsible for a number of distilling and aging operations in various locations, all while promoting and educating the public on some of the world's finest bourbon whiskeys.

Harlen is a four-time James Beard Award nominee in the Outstanding Wine and Spirits Professional category.