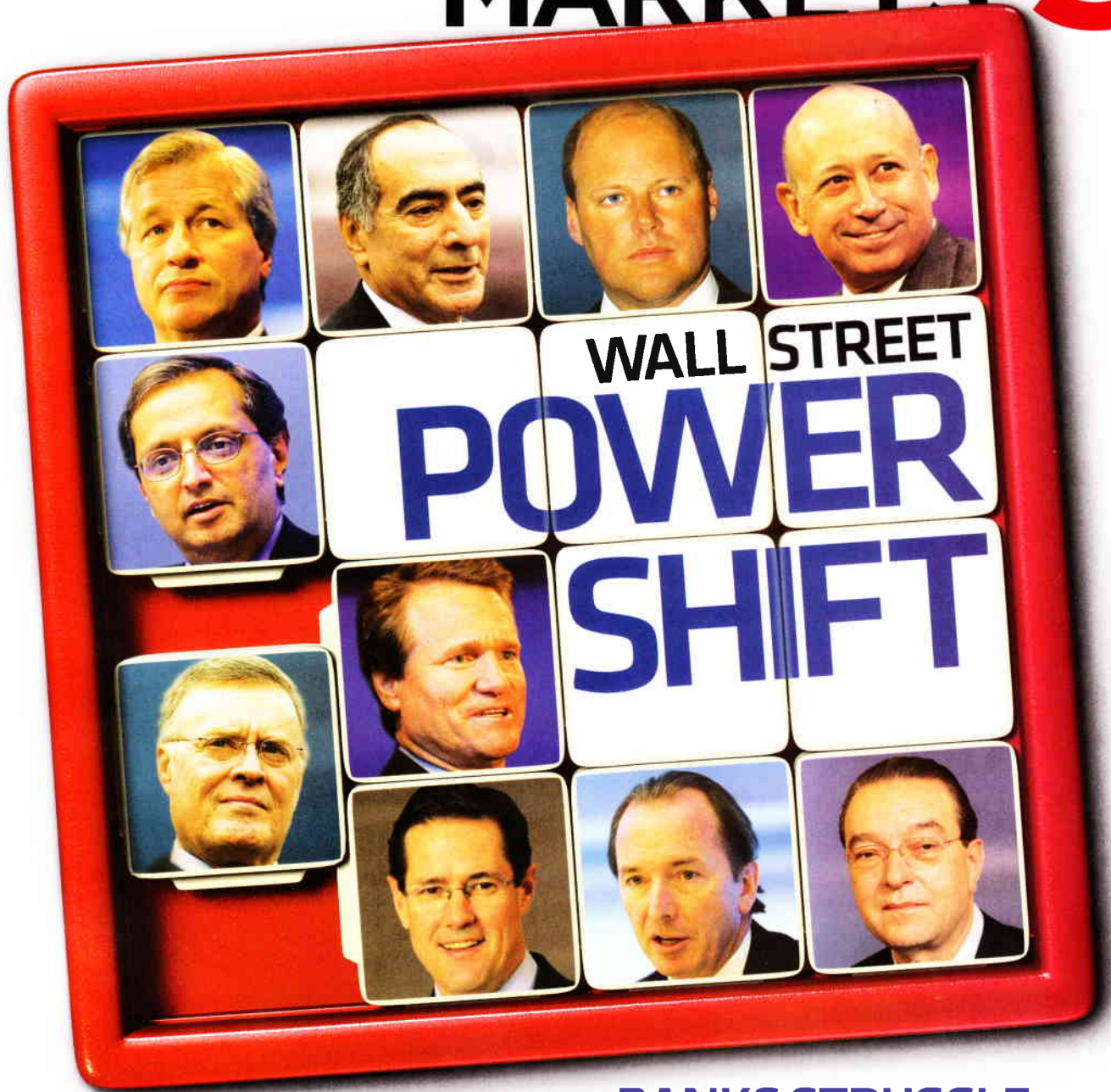


INSIDE: THE WORLD'S BEST BROKERS

MARCH 2010

# Bloomberg MARKETS



**BANKS STRUGGLE  
TO SOLVE THE  
SUCCESSION PUZZLE**

\$4.95 C\$4.95 €4.95 £4.50



0 0912847222 5

DRINKS

# Washington's Whiskey

Rye, the spirit of early America, is making a comeback—and so is the distillery near historic Mount Vernon.

By ELIN McCOY Illustration by LOU BEACH

AT A RECONSTRUCTED VERSION OF George Washington's distillery, I'm stirring a barrelful of boiling water and grain with a heavy wooden rake. The mash feels like thick soup. This task, distillery manager Steve Bashore says, is the first step in making whiskey the 18th-century way.

In 1799, on this spot about 3 miles (5 kilometers) from Washington's historic Mount Vernon mansion overlooking the Potomac River, the first U.S. president's five busy copper stills churned out 10,500 gallons (40,000 liters) of booze valued at more than \$7,600. It was one of the largest whiskey-making operations in the country.

More than 200 years later, on a freezing December day, I'm touring the site of the original stone-and-wood distillery, which burned to the ground in 1814. The distillery was rebuilt in 2007, and both it and the neighboring gristmill are back in business. A tiny amount of spirit made here from the original recipe goes on sale for the first time at the Mount Vernon gift shop on April 1.

Washington's whiskey was rye. This signature spirit of early America has become the latest obsession of the cocktail world. The colorless 18th-century version was unaged; today's rye spends time in charred barrels, a process that gives the whiskey an amber or mahogany color and lends it complexity and smoothness.

Dennis Pogue, Mount Vernon's associate director of preservation, gives me a history lesson as I warm myself near the wood fire below a copper pot still. The first president turns out to be much more interesting than I ever learned in school. He owned a dog named Sweet Lips, had a reputation as a great dancer and was a shrewd businessman.

Just before Washington left office in 1797, James Anderson, his newly hired Scottish farm manager, convinced the skeptical president that he could make money by distilling whiskey from the rye and corn grown on his 8,000-acre (3,200-hectare) plantation, much of which is now covered by suburban-Virginia sprawl. Anderson was accustomed to making single malts from barley, but early settlers from Ireland and Scotland had found it was easier to grow rye in the New World. "There were thousands of small distillers back then," Pogue says. "This was a drinking country."

Pogue shows me a copy of one of Washington's meticulously kept ledgers with its spidery scrawled entries. Whiskey was sold by the barrel to neighbors and local merchants for 60 cents a gallon for the rougher, twice-distilled version or \$1 a gallon for the smoother stuff that was distilled four times—though many customers paid in ducks or chickens or even with a barrel of oysters. Following Washington's death at the end of 1799, his granddaughter kept the distillery going for a few years.

The revived recipe of 60 percent rye, 35 percent corn and 5 percent malted barley is similar to the original. Bashore, who's wearing a thick sweater and fingerless wool gloves, says that after yeast is added to the mash, the mixture ferments for three to five days. It's then dumped into the stills. Because alcohol boils at a lower temperature than water, it can be evaporated and recondensed in another barrel after traveling through

a copper worm surrounded by cold water.

In February 2009, a team led by master distiller David Pickerell used the recipe to distill 100 gallons of rye. Half of it will be sold as rye spirit in 375-milliliter half bottles for about \$80 apiece. Pogue pours me a taste. It has the typically dry, complex, spicy taste of rye and is smoother than I anticipated. The other 50 gallons is aging in barrels and will be bottled and sold for an undetermined price next year.

The demand for rye never recovered after Prohibition. Sweeter, smoother corn-based bourbon took over, and until recently, only a handful of distilleries were keeping rye's leaner taste alive.

During the past decade's cocktail revolution, though, bartenders have rediscovered rye as an original essential ingredient in classics such as the Manhattan and the Sazerac, and they've created such new rye-based drinks as La Dolce Vita at New York's Death & Co. bar.

Long-aged bottlings have become the latest sipping spirits, and microdistillers have recently introduced more than a dozen new labels. The father of his country would undoubtedly approve.

Columnist **Elin McCoy** is based in New York. [elinmccoy@gmail.com](mailto:elinmccoy@gmail.com)

#### LA DOLCE VITA

2 oz. camomile-infused rye  
0.75 oz. Campari  
0.5 oz. St-Germain

Stir ingredients in a mixing glass with ice. Strain into a double rocks glass filled with ice.

To make the camomile-infused rye, add 4 tablespoons of loose camomile tea to 1 liter of Old Overholt Straight Rye Whiskey. After 1½ hours, strain the whiskey through cheesecloth.

Thomas Waugh, head bartender, Death & Co.



## BLOOMBERG PICKS

### Modern-Made Ryes

**High West Rendezvous (\$50)** A full-flavored blend of 6- and 16-year-old ryes. Tastes of cinnamon and candied fruit.

**Hirsch Selection 22-Year-Old Kentucky Straight (\$135)** Bold and complex, with layers of toffee, caramel and honey flavors

**Hudson Manhattan (half bottle, \$42)** This floral, smooth rye is the first to be distilled in New York state since before Prohibition.



**Old Potrero 18th Century Style (\$65)** Aged in lightly toasted barrels, this love-it-or-hate-it bottling is herbaceous, with an aggressive kick.

**(ri)' (\$48)** This light and refreshing rye in a designer bottle aims to be cutting edge.

**Thomas H. Handy Sazerac (\$60)** Dry and herbal on the nose. Tastes like sourdough rye bread with bright herbs.

E.Mc.