

HOW JAPAN CREATED THE MODERN AMERICAN BOURBON MARKET? (ЯК ЯПОНІЯ СТВОРИЛА СУЧАСНИЙ АМЕРИКАНСЬКИЙ РИНОК БУРБОНУ?)

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У доповіді надається оцінка ролі Японії у відновленні та подальшому зростанні американського ринку бурбону, що опинився на межі краху у 70-х роках минулого сторіччя.

It was 1975 and bourbon sales in America were tanking. The brown spirit had hit its peak just five years earlier, selling some 80 million cases in 1970 – but it all went downhill from there.

Baby boomers coming of drinking age were rejecting the stuffy-seeming whiskey their parents drank, instead favoring beer, cheap wine, and, most especially, clear booze like vodka and tequila. The American whiskey industry was reeling and running out of ideas.

“This was a daunting task since the market was totally Scotch-taste oriented”, William Yuracko, then head of Schenley International’s export division, told the The New York Times in 1992. Japanese people mostly drank Scotch – the country had lifted all restrictions on imported spirits in 1969 – or their own homegrown whiskey, which was likewise based on a Scotch flavor profile. “Bourbon was unknown and a total departure from the taste pattern”, he wrote.

Remarkably, within a few short years, Yuracko (who would become Schenley president from 1975 to 1984) and others would create a frenzy for bourbon in Japan. In fact, the country’s desire for very well-aged, high-proof, premium-packaged, limited editions and single-barrel bourbons helped Kentucky survive when the American bourbon market was dead as disco.

The U.S. would, in turn, follow Japan’s lead and, as the world entered a new millennium, start latching onto these trends and introducing products that helped revive America’s fervor for the once-humble spirit, ultimately and unwittingly turning it into something now rabidly pursued by connoisseurs the world over. Bourbon’s rebirth in America has caused many brands to pull back their products from the Japanese market and raise prices on the little still sent there. Japan’s taste for bourbon has dwindled. Now American tourists were heading to Japan to clear shelves of old stock.