

MATT BOLUS

MANNING THE STOVE AND "THE SAUCE"

STORY BY ANN WALCZAK
PHOTOS BY ANDREA BEHREND

Chef Matt Bolus and whiskey go way back. It is a relationship as rich and complex as the spirit itself. And how it got started is no secret for a guy bred in Whiskey Country. "The myth of people putting whiskey on your gums as a little kid is 100% true. The celebration of Mint Juleps on Derby Day when you're from Louisville... I think it's just in your blood... I don't know if it's just being from the South or [being] born in Kentucky and being raised in Tennessee, I just think it's [part of the culture]. Part of the, I don't want to say heritage, but my dad drank whiskey, my grandad drank whiskey, arguably their fathers did too... not that my mom didn't, my mom does. I think it just happened."

Chef Bolus' deep seeded love for whiskey has since blossomed into a full-fledged passion. Along with an extensive home collection, he has absorbed the entire responsibility of the program for his restaurant, The 404 Kitchen and Gertie's bar. Currently boasting the largest collection in the state of Tennessee, it's safe to say the whiskey program has become quite the undertaking. "I don't have a number in mind. I'm not trying to show how big it is. I want the best curated, most interesting list there is. If we have 500 today, maybe tomorrow we have 700, maybe the day after that we have 300... it's going to organically grow and shrink. It just depends on what it is." The most recent count is 238 bourbon bottles, 120 ryes, 100 American whiskeys, 60 scotch, 30 Irish whiskeys, 30 Japanese, and almost 20 Taiwanese, as well as French Canadian, Dutch, English, and German whiskeys. Chef Bolus is currently working on South African, Indian, and Israeli additions and is continually procuring more barrels from various



distillers. The 404 Kitchen and Gertie's bar currently own 29 barrels, the yield of which is given exclusively to them, making the whiskey list all the more special.

Though developing and training an entire whiskey program is an almost unheard-of task for an Executive Chef, for Matt it comes naturally. And though the list is large and seemingly intimidating, Chef Bolus hopes his guests take a different view. "[I hope guests think our list is] fun. [That it's] curated. Again, it's not about being the biggest or the loudest or anything. I want novices to be able to come in here and find something they really enjoy and start their whiskey trail, if you will. I want enthusiasts to come here and not be able to choose because they want so many different ones. I want master distillers... to come in and go 'my god. This is so well put together.' But at the end, I want everybody to be able to have fun and really get into it because whiskey drinker or not, we probably have something that you would enjoy."

TAKE YOUR WHISKEY SERIOUSLY?

The 404 Whiskey Society is an elite club consisting of 30 members, each granted 6 barrel picks a year, their own private locker within Gertie's bar for their booze, and first access to events with distillers and guest chefs, priority reservations, lectures, tastings, and special gatherings.

Visit the404nashville.com/whiskey-society for more information or call 615-251-1404.