Seek Definition Of 'Bourbon'

It's the barrel as much as the taste buds that determines whether the whisky in your highball is bourbon.

There's a flap going on in Washington these days over the definition of bourbon -- some folks want to change it, others want to keep it just the way it is.

By government regulation of some 30 years ago, bourbon whisky is the distilled product from a mash made up of at least 51% corn, less than 160 proof (80% alcohol) and stored in new, charred oak barrels.

* * *

THE EMPHASIS is on the word "new."

Straight bourbon whisky must be stored in new charred oak kegs for at least two years and can be bottled at 80 proof or higher. Bonded bourbon must be stored in new, charred oak barrels for at least four years and bottled at 100 proof or higher.

If the distilled product is taken off the still at 160 proof or higher, it is known as neutral spirits.

Neutral spirits doesn't darken so much on aging and is known as a light whisky, so some distillers put it away in used charred oak kegs.

The emphasis is on the word "used."

Anything stored in used kegs can't be called bourbon and when bottled, the labels must state that the liquor has been stored in used kegs.

If neutral spirits and bourbon are mixed, it is a blended whisky and labels on the bottle must so state.

* * *

NOW, SOME DISTILLERS want a change in definitions.

Some want to allow any shisky stored in new or used charred oak casks to be called bourbon, and to claim age. Others want to abolish the requirement that whisky stored in used kegs must be so labeled on the bottle.

Heavy opposition comes from other distillers who produce the famous old brand-name bourbons and also from the cooperage industry which manufactures the oak kegs.

Opposing distillers contend that if it isn't stored in new charred oak kegs, it just can't be bourbon. It's something else.

Jury Awards Rising In Damage Cases

SAN FRANCISCO--Civil damage juries are coming back with "more adequate reward" and Attorney Melvin Belli's rooftop cannon is smoking.

Belli, who made his name as "King of Torts" for damage claim victories in court, has written the book.

It is called "The Law Revolt" and shows the swing to higher damage verdicts. The volume also makes the law plain, in Belli's colorful language, for the layman.

When he wins a case, Belli mounts the stairway to his office rooftop and fires off a small cannon.

Belli, who defended Jack Ruby for the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald, has probably won more money for his clients in personal injury suits than any lawyer in history.

"There is a law revolt, or revolution if you will, going on in this country and Belli is at the forefront," said the 59-year-old lawyer who has successfully represented Marie ("The Body") McDonald, Mae West, Errol Flynn and Tony Curtis.

Belli is not a bashful man when it comes to describing his success.

"The American Bar Association and the newspapers usually call me flamboyant when I talk like this," Belli said. "Well, let me tell you something. I've got a message to promote and when I'm done, nobody can say I haven't got that message across."

Belli's principal interest lies in "civil law"-- that section of the law which deals with the private rights of individuals (libel, slander and personal injury cases, for example) where there is no question of criminal liability.

* * *

THERE is a revolution taking place in civil law which is every bit as significant and important as the well-publicized revolt in the criminal law," Belli said during a recent interview. "But in this case, there is no 'Escobido' (the Supreme Court decision which established the right of suspects to be advised of their Constitutional rights), there is only Belli."

Belli says proudly that he was the first attorney to collect $100,000 in damages for a client. This won him the title "King of Torts."

Belli's theatrics in the case, in which he won the judgment on behalf of a mother of three who lost a leg, have become legend. He recalled that the lawyer for the insurance company made a point of emphasizing how well a person can function with an artificial leg.

Belli brought a package into court the first day of the trial and placed it on the counsel table. He moved it around occasionally, but never unwrapped it or mentioned it during the long sessions that followed.

* * *

"WHEN IT came time for me to argue the case, I took the package to the jury box and slowly unwrapped it," Belli said. "I told them, 'This is what my client is going to have to wear for the rest of her life--this marvelous scientific invention.' I handed it to the jurors and asked them to feel it and to move the noiseless joints. The jurors passed it gingerly from one to another. Then I asked them, in effect, if I were to put 100 brand new $1,000 bills in the jury rail, who would pick it up in return for his own leg and this great piece of scientific achievement as the defense called it. The jury was back in 30 minutes with a unanimous verdict for $100,000."

Since that time, Belli has won verdicts up to $385,000 and holds records for having won the biggest awards ever recorded in California, Alaska, Hawaii, Montana, Nevada, Kentucky and Maine. He has become the bane of the insurance industry which he refers to collectively as, "The Holy Grail Insurance Company."

* * *

BELLI believes there has been an abrupt legal trend toward what he calls the "more adequate award" and more business-like procedures in civil courts, a trend he describes in his latest book, "The Law Revolt."

Belli calls "The Law Revolt" a "swinging law book."

"For the first time," the stocky attorney said, "we're at a point where somebody other than dust-covered lawyers can understand the law. Modern law is a vital, alive subject. What we've done in this book is to eliminate the 'whereases.'"

Screen Door Glamorized

A screen door may not be the home's most glamorous feature, but there's no need to put up with poor appearance during the eight months or so that you need bug-proofing.

If the screen door is wood framed, it's easy to jazz it up with a wooden grille, nailed to the outside of the door, across the screened section.

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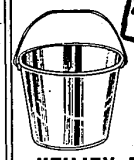

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