Sazerac to revive shuttered KY distillery

Company buys Lancaster facility for $20 million

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Sazerac has purchased a Lancaster facility, known as Garrard County Distilling, which sits on approximately 210 acres and includes two, 20,000-square-foot barrel warehouses. The facility opened in 2024 and closed in 2025 amid financial woes.
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Global spirits company Sazerac has acquired a shuttered Garrard County distillery as part of the Louisville-headquartered company's plans to increase its production capacity.

Sazerac offered $20 million during a court-ordered June auction of the former Garrard County Distilling Co. property in Lancaster, Kentucky, and on Aug. 21, the company announced its plans for the site.

Jake Wenz, president and CEO of Sazerac, noted in a statement that while the company has invested over $1 billion over the last decade at its Kentucky facilities, much of which went toward expanding production capabilities, more capacity is needed.

"Even with all the investments we have made to expand, we need more supply to keep up with demand, and the addition of the Lancaster facility gives us valuable distilling capabilities to support that growth," he said.

Sazerac is a fourth generation, family-operated and privately held company co-headquartered in Louisville and New Orleans, Louisiana. Its portfolio of more than 500 brands includes Weller, Fireball Cinnamon Whisky, BuzzBallz, Southern Comfort and Wheatley Vodka, among many others.

Situated on approximately 210 acres, the former Garrard County Distilling Co. property at 450 Southern Soul Way includes a 50,000-square-foot distillery with two column stills and two 20,000-square-foot warehouses for barrels.

The acquisition will restart production at the site, which has sat quiet for over a year.

Founded by Atlanta-based Staghorn, Garrard County Distilling Co. began production in January 2024, representing an announced $250 million investment at a site that could produce 150,000 barrels of bourbon annually.

But by April 2025 the independent distillery had ceased operations, with its lender Truist Bank filing suit, alleging the distiller had defaulted on its loans and owed just over $26 million.

The Garrard County Circuit Court then ordered the property into receivership, in which a third-party takes control of a property to preserve the asset, possibly leading to a sale.

Tom Collins Distilling, affiliated with Sazerac, bought the Truist loan agreements in February 2026, court records show, and in March the spirits company moved to have the property sold in a foreclosure auction.

The property was auctioned at a master commissioner's sale June 26, selling to sole bidder Tom Collins Distilling for $20 million. A June 2026 appraisal valued the property at just shy of $28 million, court records show.

The Lancaster distiller now joins Sazerac's footprint in Kentucky, which includes Buffalo Trace Distillery in Frankfort, the most visited distillery in the state; Barton 1972 Distillery in Bardstown; and The Glenmore Distillery in Owensboro.

The company employs nearly 3,000 people across its Kentucky operations and that headcount is expected to grow with the new facility.

Sazerac has not yet determined which of its spirits will be produced in Lancaster, though it plans to use the facility's existing infrastructure to do so.

It was not immediately clear when the site would become operational or how many people it will employ once it is, but the company did note it intends to expand the initial team as operations there develop.

While there was a public-facing component to Garrard County Distilling Co.'s operations at the site, Sazerac plans to only use it for production.

The acquisition comes as the alcohol industry overall, American whiskey included, is facing struggles on a variety of fronts, from Americans reporting they're drinking less or not at all to shifting tariff policies affecting bourbon exports.

It also comes after the second of two public rejections of unsolicited $15 billion cash offers to acquire another Louisville-based spirits giant, Brown-Forman, which makes Jack Daniel's and Woodford Reserve.

In a news release, Sazerac highlighted recent investments in its Kentucky properties, including approximately $50 million at its Barton 1792 Distillery, where it added a new boiler house, more fermenters, expanded bottling operations and added three new aging warehouses that increased the site's barrel storage capacity by 25%.

The company also wrapped a 10-year, $1.2 billion expansion project at Buffalo Trace Distillery in January 2025, adding a new still house and bottling operation, expanding its visitor center and adding 19 new aging warehouses, among other additions. The investment upped production capacity by approximately 150%.

At its Glenmore distillery, Sazerac has poured about $40 million over the last five years to improve processing capabilities and upgrade its barrel equipment, bottling lines.

Other Kentucky projects include construction of new barrel warehouses in Laurel and Taylor counties.

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Letter from Brown-Forman family members details concerns with company

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Two members of the Brown-Forman founding family are reportedly criticizing the company's strategy and leadership, according to a letter obtained by The Wall Street Journal and Bloomberg.

The seven-page letter was signed by W.L. Lyons Brown III and his brother Stuart R. Brown, whose father held multiple leadership roles, including CEO and board chairman, from 1975-1996. It was sent to more than 130 of their relatives July 10 — days before the company announced President and CEO Lawson Whiting's retirement July 13.

"The numbers are stark and undeniable," the letter reads, according to a Wall Street Journal report. "Brown-Forman's stock price has fallen from the mid-$70s per share to the mid-$20s per share over the past three years, eliminating billions of dollars of generational wealth for the Brown family and all other shareholders."

According to a Louisville Business First report that cited Bloomberg, the pair wrote that the "decline has occurred in full public view, with a lack of management accountability and key analysts continue to downgrade the stock."

In response to an inquiry from The Courier Journal, Brown-Forman spokesperson Elizabeth Conway said the company does "not have a comment at this time."

Brown-Forman, founded in 1870, is the maker of Jack Daniel's, Woodford Reserve and Old Forester. A group of Brown family members now represents the majority of the company's Class A shareholders.

In the letter, the two brothers likened Jack Daniel's to Baskin-Robbins ice cream because the whiskey is now sold in multiple flavor options, The Wall Street Journal reported. The pair also accused their family members and the Brown-Forman Board of Directors of withholding merger discussions from them, which have occurred multiple times in 2026.

Brown-Forman previously rejected an "unsolicited" offer from spirits competitor Sazerac, the maker of Buffalo Trace and BuzzBallz, which the Brown family determined was "not actionable," the board said in a July 26 statement. Sazerac's offer came after a failed merger attempt between Brown-Forman and the France-based Pernod Ricard, the world's second-largest spirits maker, which was announced April 28 following more than a month of confirmed discussions.

According to Louisville Business First, Bloomberg reported the pair said Whiting's performance over the last three years has been "defined by poor operating performance, failed transactions and significant increases in personal compensation, even as the stock languished and employees were terminated."

"The board is rewarding failure, and doing so lavishly and publicly," the letter reportedly said.

In recent years, the company has cut jobs, closed facilities – including its Louisville cooperage – and launched strategic restructuring plans in an effort to deal with the turbulent environment surrounding spirits. It has also faced negative impacts by global trade tensions resulting largely from President Donald Trump's on-again, off-again tariffs.

During a March 4 earnings report, Brown-Forman reported a decrease in sales and profits for fiscal year 2026 after continued trade disputes and lower used barrel sales.

"While we expect the cyclical headwinds to eventually subside, we recognize the highly dynamic nature of our industry and acknowledge that some of the current pressures could persist," Whiting said at the time. "Therefore, our primary focus remains squarely on actively managing the factors within our control."