

# Floating rickhouse for whiskey barrels on the Mississippi River

O.H. Ingram River Aged has doubled its capacity and throughput with an exclusive barrel racking system on a floating barge.

Country: **US** | Sector: **food & beverage**



## CHALLENGES

- Increase storage capacity for bourbon and rye whiskey on a **floating barge**.
- Streamline barrel loading/unloading operations.

## SOLUTION

- High-density barrel racking system.

## BENEFITS

- 135% increase in barrel storage capacity.
- Twice the number of barrels loaded per hour.



O.H. Ingram River Aged is a bourbon whiskey producer renowned for its unique ageing method, which involves storing barrels on barges floating in the Mississippi River. This technique was inspired by historic ageing practices, when whiskey barrels were transported by river, allowing the motion, temperature and humidity to enhance the maturation process. By reviving this tradition, O.H. Ingram River Aged has achieved rapid growth and recognition in the bourbon whiskey industry.

» **Founded: 2015**

» **Barrels stored per barge: 4,000**

Orrin Henry “Hank” Ingram’s family has been moving goods on the river for five generations since the first O.H. Ingram began shipping oak logs in 1857. As the bourbon industry grew, the river was left behind in favour of less expensive and more predictable modes of transport. Ingram, CEO of the company, sought to understand if the magic of those early barrels of whiskey was lost as the river faded from the whiskey-making process. The floating barrelhouses of O.H. Ingram River Aged return bourbon to its roots when its flavour was mellowed on the Mississippi. “We started with six barrels in a barge as a test and have since grown to over 4,000 barrels ageing on the river,” says Ingram.

When it came to outfitting O.H. Ingram River Aged’s rickhouses with barrel storage systems, Interlake Mecalux and partner Henry A. Petter Supply came up with the ideal solution. “Barrel racking serves a dual purpose: it enhances the storage capacity of a space and allows for greater airflow around the barrels, which, in turn, helps with the maturation process. Petter Supply recommended Interlake Mecalux for this racking project because of its reliability and experience with other distillery projects,” says Ingram.

### **Design to double capacity and performance**

In 2018, before consulting experts, the company built its first floating rickhouse. However, it failed to fully utilise the space and could only store 1,700 barrels. Its second barge was constructed in 2022. Interlake Mecalux was much more involved in the design of this version. “Creating a barrel racking system for bourbon and rye whiskeys inside a floating structure presents additional challenges, but the results are well worth the effort,” says Ingram.

The new barge features a mezzanine that maximises the available space. “With the same size barge, we can now store close to 4,000 barrels,” says Ingram.

In addition to increasing storage capacity by 135%, the mezzanine has doubled operational throughput: “The mezzanine greatly increased our speed to load barrels and significantly improved safety,” Ingram says. Thanks to the new racking system and the modifications made to the barge, O.H. Ingram







River Aged has gone from loading 30 barrels per hour to 70, using two lorries and a ramp.

The storage system installed is also designed to accompany the business as it expands: “As our bourbon has grown in popularity, so too have our storage needs. The solution designed by Interlake Mecalux will help us sustainably scale up our operations,” says Ingram. The facility features a centre aisle with five barrels deep on either side. “We use every square metre of the barge for racking. Interlake Mecalux’s expertise was invaluable in refining and ultimately delivering the definitive logistics solution,” says Ingram.

### Benefits of a life on the river

Storing whiskey in barrel racking on a barge has its advantages, according to Ingram. “O.H. Ingram River Aged is the only whiskey in the world that spends its entire life on the Mississippi River. The time of being exposed to the microclimate and humidity of the river, along with its constant motion, provoke a unique interaction between oak and spirit to drive complexity into our products,” he says.

The process for storing the whiskey is as follows: using a system of ramps and hoists, operators load each barrel by hand onto the barges. Once situated in the racking, the barrels are left undisturbed for their entire life; the motion of the river, the consistent breeze and the sun do the rest.

“After four years, we begin sampling each barrel to determine if it’s ready for bottling or if it’s something we want to age longer. Our oldest barrels are currently 8 years old. Barrel maturation accounts for over 50% of the flavour of a bottled whiskey, so our facility is a big differentiator in an industry flush with land-based warehouses,” says Ingram.

### Whiskey aged on the Mississippi River

Interlake Mecalux’s extensive experience in customising storage systems coupled with Henry A. Petter Supply’s long history of distillery-related projects proved to be the perfect combination for O.H. Ingram River Aged. The company is now equipped with a storage system that has doubled both its

capacity and throughput. Moreover, it ensures safe goods handling and preserves product quality. “There is no playbook for river-aged whiskey, so we’re writing it as we go. We’re always looking for improvements with each design iteration. We’re on version 3 with our latest barge, and we couldn’t be more pleased with its performance,” says Ingram.

Interlake Mecalux partner Henry A. Petter Supply is also delighted with the collaboration with O.H. Ingram River Aged: “As a 35-year storage specialist and proud Kentuckian, I particularly enjoy projects in the bourbon industry. Hank Ingram is one of the most innovative faces in the business. If all customers were as personable as Hank, I might continue for another three decades,” concludes Brian Dowell, Storage Specialist.

**The racking has doubled operational throughput and increased capacity by 135%**

