

Hiram Walker & Sons

Hiram Walker & Sons is Ontario's sole "grain-to-glass" distillery. The company produces Vodka, Rum and Canadian Whisky.

Headquarters	2072 Riverside Drive E, Windsor, Ontario, N8Y 4S5
Year Established	1858
NAICS	312140 - Distilleries
Employees	300
Major Expansions	1935
Exports	US, EU, Australia
Parent Company	Pernod Ricard S.A.
Other Locations	Corporate Headquarters - Toronto

The Hiram Walker & Sons Limited (Hiram Walker) facility sprawls along the bank of the Detroit River in Windsor, Ontario. From this site, the company has produced Canadian whisky for over 150 years, growing to become North America's largest beverage distillery.

Hiram Walker is the only "grain to glass" manufacturer in Ontario. The company's history can be traced back to 1857, when Hiram Walker, an American entrepreneur, opened a distilling plant in Windsor. Walker first started his business as a grain merchant. Millers and farmers brought their grains to him to mill, and paid for the service with a percentage of those grains. With this extensive access to grain, Walker was able to convert the excess into alcohol and store the product in wooden barrels. When the barrels were opened two years later, Walker found the flavour had changed significantly. He decided to experiment with the aging process to create a consistent product, and Hiram Walker & Sons was incorporated.

Over time, Walker's vision shaped the distillery industry in Canada, and even led to the development of a model town in Windsor for the company's employees (Walkerville). With its reputation for quality and consistent flavour, Hiram Walker whisky began to be sold in the U.S. market. Canadian Club Whisky and J.P. Wiser's were the company's two most successful brands in the 19th century. Today, Hiram Walker's product line has expanded to include vodka and rum as well as whisky. The firm's most popular brands are Polar Ice Vodka, McGuinness Liqueurs, Lamb's Rum, J.P. Wiser's Whisky, Royal Reserve Whisky, and Special Old Rye Whisky.

Over the past 150 years, Hiram Walker has witnessed the National Prohibition period in the United States (1920–1933) and huge consolidation in the distillery industry (1935), as well as ups and downs in the

market. In late 1980s, the downturn in whisky started due to the migration of consumer preferences toward vodka and flavoured vodkas, which made it difficult for Canadian distilleries hard to compete.

When you compare the manufacturing process between vodka and whisky, the latter costs more because of the mandatory aging period in Canada [Canadian regulations require that all components of Canadian whisky be aged for at least three years],” says Jim Stanski, vice president of operations at Hiram Walker.

“A significant portion of the product becomes “angel’s share” because of evaporation,” explains Stanski. Even though some distilleries started cutting corners in whisky production, Hiram Walker is continuing its commitment to produce high-quality, innovative products in Canada.

Canadian regulations specify that manufacturers can include up to 9.09 per cent of a different product in blended whisky. Therefore, Hiram Walker tailors the flavour of some of its products in line with this rule, producing blended whiskies with popular flavours such as apple and vanilla.

When asked why Hiram Walker chose Windsor as his original facility, Stanski explains, “Windsor was surrounded on three sides by water, and it is a great agriculture place.” Today, huge amounts of great whiskies are shipped out of the Hiram Walker facility via train, ship, and trucks after bottling. In fact, the entire manufacturing process—from milling, fermentation, distilling, resting, and maturing of the spirits, to bottling and packaging—is finished under one roof. “In a year, Hiram Walker has the capability to produce 55 million litres of absolute alcohol, and 60 to 70 per cent of all Canadian whisky,” says Stanski. The company also holds 1.6 million barrels of spirits in its 14 maturing warehouses, which are located in Lakeshore, Ontario.

Hiram Walker’s facilities are almost completely self-sustained; over 95 per cent of the electricity used is produced by the company itself, and the firm makes its own steam for production purposes. Further, the company’s sustainable practices include the utilize of distiller’s dried grain (DDG) [DDG can be sold as high protein livestock feed that increases efficiency] and biofuel projects. “Hiram Walker is developing and refining the DDG process so that the fermented portion of the grains can be more useful and nutritious for cattle; we are also trying to extract corn oil from corn and sell it as biofuel,” notes Stanski.

Hiram Walker’s massive Windsor plant houses not only its production facilities, but its finance, human resource, and information technology departments as well. “Our human resource department does a great job interviewing and picking the best talent for our company,” says Stanski. In total, Hiram Walker employs 300 staff members on site; 130 work in the production side alone.

As Stanski describes, the company partners closely with Lambton College, “Thanks to Lambton College’s continuous process operator program, we hire great employees with huge background on control theory, industry operations, drying, distilling, reacting, cooking, and evaporating.



In addition, the company has a good relationship with the University of Windsor, and hires co-op students from the school every year in different roles.

In terms of government assistance, Hiram Walker applies for the Scientific Research and Experimental Development Tax Incentive (SR&ED) program on an annual basis. The firm has its own research and development team working on different projects; “DDG and biofuel are the ones we are working on right now, and SR&ED is a great way to drive continuous innovation,” says Stanski.

Over the course of its illustrious history, Hiram Walker has shaped itself as an innovative, progressive, and self-sustaining corporation. Stanski has total confidence in the future of the company: “With innovative products and passionate employees, we stay on top of the market, and we can be what we want.”