

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

Spirits!



With spirits being a major category in the beverage industry, there's a reason to know what defines each of them and have some producers/brands in your back pocket. Knowing the various categories, styles, and producers/brands of liquor can certainly give you a leg up working in the beverage industry ...or just make you a more knowledgeable drinker!

Included in this guide are what defines each spirit (below), as well as some major brands of each on the pages following. While I know there are many more, there's plenty here to get you started!

VODKA

- a neutral spirit without a distinctive aroma, taste, or color
- can be made from ANY starch or sugar-based plant: wheat, rye, potato, corn, barley, beets, grapes...
- BUT mostly made of water!
- usually made in a continuous still and filtered with charcoal
- typically around 40% ABV

GIN

- a neutral spirit that has been flavored with botanicals and redistilled
- juniper berry is a common ingredient
- began in Holland as a spirit known as Genever (which was medicinal)
- a broad range of spirits that can be made in a pot still or continuous still
- typically around 40% ABV

RUM

- a spirit made from fermented and distilled sugarcane juice or molasses
- originated in the Caribbean in the 1700s
- can be made in any sugar-producing area
- light color can come from oak aging, while dark color indicates added caramel
- typically between 30-50% ABV

TEQUILA

- produced from the fermented pineapple of the agave plant (must be at least 51% blue agave, but the best are from 100% weber blue agave)
- must be from the state of Mexico

WHISKEY

- distilled from a grain base (typically barley) that may or may not be malted

EAU DE VIE

- common

VODKA

Organized by country, although styles can vary within each country...

- **RUSSIA:** *Vodka is the national drink here. It's made from the various grains that grow around the country and is almost always served neat and chilled (not mixed).*
 1. Smirnoff - made from corn - the largest vodka brand in the world - currently distilled in the US
 2. Stolichnaya - made from wheat and rye - the first brand to sell flavored and premium bottles in America
 3. Russian Standard - made from wheat - another premium brand that is smooth with a touch of sweetness
- **POLAND:** *Vodka is also the national drink here. They consume almost as much as in Russia. Traditionally it's made from grain, but also produced from potato and corn etc.*
 4. Chopin - made from potatoes (although they produce a rye and wheat as well) - the world's most awarded potato vodka - distilled 4 times
 5. Belvedere - made from rye - the world's first 'Super Premium' vodka
- **SWEDEN:** *There's a great reputation for vodka here. Most of it is made from winter wheat.*
 6. Absolut - made from potatoes (although they produce a rye and wheat as well) - the world's most awarded potato vodka - distilled 4 times
- **FINLAND:** *There's a national love for vodka here. Brands often have a very high alcohol content.*
 7. Finlandia - made from barley (as well as glacial spring water) - naturally pure with a bite
- **NETHERLANDS/HOLLAND:** *vodka is well-respected here. It is typically made with copper pot stills.*
 8. Ketel One - made from 100% wheat - filtered over loose charcoal - named for the original coal-fired copper still
- **FRANCE:** *Produces some of the most elegant vodkas that are subtle in flavor. They are usually made from wheat or grapes.*
 9. Grey Goose - made from soft winter wheat and natural spring water - considered the world's best-tasting vodka
 10. Ciroc - made from grapes (Mauzac Blanc and Ugni Blanc) - distilled 5 times - very clean and unique
- **USA:** *Vodka is newer to the American cocktail scene. They vary in style and are usually based on locally available resources.*
 11. Titos - made in Austin TX from corn - use old fashioned pot stills - known for body and rich character
 12. Skyy - made from wheat - filtered through California limestone - America's first quadruple distilled and three times distilled premium vodka

GIN

Organized by "style", although there can be various representations...

- **LONDON DRY:** *The most popular style of gin. Most come from the UK and are very dry and juniper-forward with citrus notes. These are the bulk of gins you will see at stores, bars, and restaurants.*
 1. Beefeater - from the UK - very juniper and citrus-forward - affordable and easy to find
 2. Tanqueray - from the UK - a favorite of many - great for a gin and tonic
 3. Citadelle - from France - juniper-forward, but uses a lot of citrus - very clean, light bodied and flavorful
 4. Bombay Dry - from India - very dry and juniper-forward - uses a lot of citrus - very clean, light bodied and flavorful

+ examples for RUM,
WHISKEY, TEQUILA,
EAU DE VIE, and CORDIALS!