

## THESE ARE THE UNDER-THE-RADAR VODKAS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Contributed by **Dan Q. Dao**

Posted on Aug 08, 2016



(image: Tim Nusog)

It was a calculated mass-media ad campaign that launched [vodka](#)—led by [Absolut](#), specifically—into its golden age during the 1980s. And more than two decades later, the clear spirit seems to still be closely tied to its roots in mainstream advertising, with high-end vodka brands constantly setting standards for marketing and product placement.

Nonetheless, some of the best vodkas out there won't be found plastered across any billboards or making cameos in rap music videos. They're independent operations by small-business entrepreneurs using an array of unorthodox products to redefine what vodka can be. From sativa to sugar beets, these are five fun under-the-radar vodkas to try this summer.

## 1. SNOW LEOPARD



*(image: Tim Nusog)*

Like the endangered cat after which it's named, this Poland import (\$40) touts a bit of a rare quality: It's the first to be distilled using the ancient spelt grain, a staple food dating back to the Bronze Age. Crafted at the century-old Polmos Lublin distillery by master distiller Joanna Dawidowicz, the vodka is distilled six times and double-filtered over charcoal, yielding a peppery, slightly nutty taste with a creamy full-bodied texture. It's the brainchild of entrepreneur Stephen Sparrow, and the bottle's proceeds go in part toward snow leopard conservation efforts, with more than \$250,000 raised since its inception. Drink it in a dry rosemary-garnished Martini or crystal clear on the rocks.

## 2. BĒT



*(image: Tim Nusog)*

Farm-to-bottle is the name of the game with this unique Midwestern vodka (\$39), distilled entirely using sugar beets from the American heartland. Minneapolis young guns Ben Brueshoff and Jerad Poling launched the brand after receiving a grant from Minnesota's Department of Agriculture, working with a local farm cooperative to source the beige-hued roots. To create the vodka, granulated beet sugar is dissolved into a nutrient-dense water, fermented for two weeks and distilled three times before passing through active carbon. The resulting pour is smooth, with a peppery spice and trace of vanilla. Enjoy it simply with dashes of orange bitters and a lemon twist, or mix it with [Cynar](#) and dry vermouth for an easy spirit-forward cocktail.



### 3. KARLSSON'S GOLD



*(image: Tim Nusog)*

While most premium vodka labels emphasize the number of distillations their product undergoes, Karlsson's does the exact opposite with its complex, savory Gold vodka (\$39), imported by [Anchor Distilling](#). Made with a blend of virgin new potatoes harvested from Cape Bjäre in Sweden, the spirit is distilled just once and is completely unfiltered, allowing for the most natural expression of those potatoes. Full-bodied and viscous, it's comparable to a potato-based white [whiskey](#), whispered with herbs and smacking of black pepper. Double up on that note by sipping it chilled and neat (ice dilutes it too much) with fresh cracked peppercorns, or mix it into a [Bloody Mary](#) for a subtle richness.

## 4. HUMBOLDT'S FINEST



(image: Tim Nusog)

Yes, this is cannabis-sativa-laced vodka (\$30), but no, it's not going to get you high. Northern California's **Humboldt Distillery** takes its quadrupled-distilled sugar cane vodka and infuses it with legally grown Oregon hemp—the THC content abides by state law at less than .3 percent dry weight—for a fragrant, botanical spirit that's one of the first of its kind. Nodding to the local community's recent marijuana boom, the vodka offers a distinct aroma of cannabis with a smooth finish that's reminiscent of a light gin. Stir it into a Martini or use it as a stand-in for your favorite gin cocktail recipes.

## 5. MADE REAL



(image: Tim Nusog)

Part vodka label, part lifestyle brand, Made Real vodka (\$25) is a joint effort between marketing veteran Nicole Williams and a band of eight like-minded female co-creators to celebrate the true strength of women. Produced in New York State in collaboration with **Pernod Ricard**, the vodka is distilled with wheat and honey, yielding a slightly sweet, exceedingly drinkable spirit with a vanilla aroma and spicy finish. Employ this versatile sip in a classic Martini, or shake it into any of your favorite refreshers with citrus, muddled berries or cucumber.