

Our annual lineup of the boozy best

BY KARA NEWMAN

Once again, it's been a memorable year for the spirits category, with amazing entrants across a broad range of bottlings. Within the limits of what was tasted within the past year, these are the spirits that I couldn't stop thinking about, the ones you should seek out for your home bar or gift list.

The categories reviewed in 2016 spanned from rich Calvados to crisp aquavit, from añejo Tequila to white rum, plus a sea of whiskies and luscious liqueurs from around the world. With an average score of 93.7, there's no shortage of good cheer to choose from on this list.

Here's to another year of enjoying the best in class or, should I say, the best in your glass. *Santé!*



Blended Scotch



97 Usquaebach Blended Malt Scotch Whisky Aged 15 Years (Scotland; Cobalt Brands, Englewood, NJ). A blend of selected Highland malts “from the proprietor’s own special reserve,” this is a complex, lovely sipper to savor. The rich bouquet offers dried apricot, sherry, vanilla and baked apple. The robust, rounded palate is relatively dry, resonating with almost Bourbon-like leather, tobacco, tea and oak, finishing in long, mouthwatering notes of orange peel and spice, and just a hint of peat.
abv: 43% **Price:** \$80

95 The Exceptional Malt Scotch Whisky by Sutcliffe & Son (Scotland; Craft Distillers, Ukiah, CA). Made in collaboration with Willie Phillips—who for 23 years was The Macallan’s managing director—this blend of malts offers an enticing, breezy bouquet that evokes fresh apples, pears, vanilla and white flowers. The silky palate leads with vanilla and lemon peel, with a core of peat smoke that builds gradually with repeated sips before finishing on lemon-cream pie and baking spice tones. The fade is delicate and ethereal.
abv: 43% **Price:** \$110



93 Kirkland Signature Blended Scotch Whisky Aged 27 Years (Scotland; Misa Imports, Dallas, TX). A mix of Highland and Lowland whiskies, this topaz-hued sipper offers bold pear and caramel scents. On the palate, creamy, palate-coating caramel leads, while fruity flavors—pear, tropical fruit and marmalade—emerge midpalate before finishing with a gentle smoky-spiced fade.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$80

93 The Feathery Blended Malt Scotch Whisky (Scotland; Frederick Wildman & Sons, New York, NY). Made from a blend of rare and old Highland malts, this tawny Scotch is earthy and complex. The aroma mixes baked apple, subtle smoke and toffee richness. The palate is relatively restrained, starting with unsweetened chocolate and campfire smoke that evolves into a smoky-spiced midpalate tinged with espresso. It finishes long, with subtle, earthy funk reminiscent of aged cheeses. The name refers to a predecessor of the golf ball, a leather hide stuffed with chicken feathers.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$62

91 Compass Box Great King Street Glasgow Blend (Scotland; MHW, Manhasset, NY). This robust bottling is a permanent addition to the Great King range, added in 2014. Light golden in the glass, look for a lightly smoky aroma with fresh pear notes underneath. On the palate, a waft of peat smoke mingles with lemon cream, vanilla and pear, flavors supplied by Sherry cask-aged whiskies. Slight salinity sets the mouth watering. **Best Buy.**
abv: 43% **Price:** \$45



91 John Barr Reserve Blend Blended Scotch Whisky (Scotland; Whyte & Mackay, New York, NY). A mix of malt and grain whiskies from the Highland and Speyside regions yields a fresh apple scent accented by a touch of vanilla. On the palate, this is smooth, light and easy-sipping, leading with vanilla and caramel, plus gentle peat smoke floating into a baking spice finish. Sip or mix. **Best Buy.**
abv: 40% **Price:** \$25

90 Wemyss Malts Peat Chimney Blended Malt Scotch Whisky (Scotland; Palm Bay International, Port Washington, NY). Peat-lovers will enjoy this blended Scotch, which leads with smoke and baked pear on the nose and a heavy dose of peat on the palate. A bit of honeyed sweetness underpins notes of smoke, iodine, soot and charred oak, accelerating straight through to the rounded, peppery finish. **Best Buy.**
abv: 46% **Price:** \$40

Bourbon

97 Wild Turkey Master’s Keep Bourbon (USA; Wild Turkey, Lawrenceburg, KY). The first product released by Eddie Russell (son of Jimmy Russell) as Master Distiller is a knockout. This powerful, flavorful, limited-edition whiskey starts with a rush of rich salted caramel and goes down warming and butterscotchy. The finish is exceedingly long, with toffee, chocolate, hazelnut and a faint smoky exhale. It needs nothing more than a bit of water to balance the alcohol heat. Aged 17 years.
abv: 43.4% **Price:** \$150

96 Blade and Bow Limited Release Aged 22 Years Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (USA; Stizel-Weller Distilling, Louisville, KY). Look for big, bold, concentrated caramel on the nose and palate. The complex flavor extends toffee, dusty cocoa and orange peel into the super-long and clove-accented finish. Add water to taste on this sipping Bourbon, but go easy on the dilution to reward yourself with the smooth orange and caramel. Before you realize, the glass is empty.
abv: 46% **Price:** \$150



96 Michter’s Toasted Barrel Finish Bourbon (USA; Michter’s Distillery, Louisville, KY). After aging in a charred barrel, this Bourbon then rests a second time in a custom barrel that has been toasted but not charred. This results in rich *dulce de leche* and butterscotch aromatics. The pleasantly sweet palate discloses almond paste, clove and cinnamon, plus a long, warming caramel fade with a faint citrus-peel note. Pour over a big cube of ice and garnish with a lemon twist.
abv: 45.7% **Price:** \$53

95 Elijah Craig 18-Year-Old Single Barrel Bourbon (USA; Heaven Hill Distillery, Bardstown, KY). Due to inventory shortages, this bottling had been discontinued; in fall 2015, it returned after a three-year hiatus. This is a robust, full-flavored whiskey, scented with oak and toffee. It tastes almost like an Old Fashioned, meaning distinct orange peel and cherry notes intertwined with the vanilla and cara-

mel. The long finish offers vanilla, oak and orange peel. 15,000 bottles released.

abv: 45% Price: \$120

95 Four Roses Limited Edition Small Batch 2015 Release Barrel Strength Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (USA; Four Roses Distillery, Lawrenceburg, KY). Master Distiller Jim Rutledge recently announced his retirement after almost 50 years in the biz—and this bottling marks his exit on a high note. The youngest whiskey in this bold barrel-strength blend is 11 years old. Look for a bright copper-penny shine and plenty of caramel aroma. It's quite fiery on the palate, but water tones down the heat and brings forward crême brûlée, vanilla, candied lemon peel and clove.

abv: 53.85% Price: \$120

94 Bulleit Bourbon Barrel Strength (USA; Bulleit Distilling, Louisville, KY). Look for a warm, concentrated caramel aroma and a relatively sweet palate that suggests cookie dough, vanilla bean, espresso and almond, with a concentrated hit of booze on the finish. Dilution with water smooths out flavors to sugar cookie and *dulce de leche* sprinkled with ground coffee bean. Limited edition.

abv: 59.7% Price: \$50

93 Barrell Bourbon Cask Strength Batch #007 (USA; Barrell Craft Spirits, Georgetown, KY). This is a five-year-old Tennessee straight Bourbon bottled at cask strength, so be prepared to add a little water, otherwise it's quite hot. The reward is luscious caramel and toasty butterscotch, finishing with orange peel and clove.

abv: 61.2% Price: \$85

93 Catskill Distilling Company The Most Righteous New York Straight Bourbon Whiskey (USA; Catskill Distilling Company, Bethel, NY). Made from New York State grains and aged on site, this dark-amber Bourbon has a bold caramel and toffee aroma. On the palate, drier flavors dominate: espresso, toffee, cocoa and leather. It offers burnt orange-peel brightness on the long, mouthwatering finish.

abv: 42.5% Price: \$45



92 Union Horse Distilling Co. Reserve Straight Bourbon Whiskey (USA; Union Horse, Lenexa, KS). Despite the rich brown sugar and vanilla aroma, this whiskey is relatively lean and austere, featuring

plenty of oak up front, leather midpalate and finishing long with plenty of tingly spice. Good sipper.

abv: 46.5% Price: \$48

91 Amador Whiskey Co. Double Barrel Kentucky Bourbon Whiskey Finished With Napa Valley Wine Barrels (USA; Amador Whiskey Company, Mira Loma, CA). This whiskey is made from a blend of Kentucky Bourbons aged from three to ten years old and finished in former Napa Valley wine barrels. Caramel sweetness intertwines with oak, vanilla and coconut, while a meandering, slightly earthy finish suggests mellow cocoa and a puff of campfire smoke. Dilution coaxes out a marshmallow-y sweetness. Overall, the experience is reminiscent of s'mores, with that cocoa-smoke finish. Sip or mix. **Best Buy.**

abv: 43.4% Price: \$40

Japanese Whisky

93 Nikka Taketsuru Pure Malt Whisky (Japan; Anchor Distilling, San Francisco, CA). The luxe aroma mixes rich butterscotch and apple sweetness. On the palate, this whisky is light and gentle, interspersing fruit and smoke and finishing with a spark of cinnamon heat. Add a splash of water; recommended for sipping.

abv: 43% Price: \$70

91 Hibiki Japanese Harmony (Japan; Beam Suntory, Deerfield, IL). The newest blended whisky offering from Hibiki is burnished gold in the glass and has a bold aroma that mixes vanilla, fresh pear and a hint of smoke. The smokiness comes forward at the first sip, wrapping around a core of oak and vanilla custard and finishing long, with a mouthwatering bitter-chocolate note.

abv: 43% Price: \$65

Rye Whiskey

97 WhistlePig 15 Year Rye (USA; WhistlePig, Shoreham, VT). This remarkably complex sipper leads with caramel and vanilla, then reverberates with rounded dried fruit, Sherry and almond, fading into a long, gentle baking-spice finish. Made with 100% rye sourced from Canada, this is finished in barrels made from Vermont oak and bottled in Vermont.

abv: 46% Price: \$200

96 High West Yippee Ki-Yay (USA; High West Distillery, Park City, UT). Attention wine lovers: this fab bottling with the cowboy label is made with a blend of straight rye whiskies finished in two wine casks, formerly holding vermouth and Syrah. The result is a deep ruddy amber hue and a strikingly concentrated flavor profile. Look for warming layers of caramel, toffee and espresso, drying to leather, zingy orange peel and spice. Sip or mix into Manhattans or any drink including sweet vermouth.

abv: 46% Price: \$65

95 George Dickel Rye Whiskey (USA; Diageo North America, New York, NY). On the smoother, sweeter side of the rye spectrum, this whiskey offers a restrained aroma that mixes vanilla and oak and luxe, bold flavors that resound with cigar wrapper, leather, toffee and cocoa. The long finish is perked up by a fleeting cut-apple freshness, marked by allspice and clove. Cocktail friendly. Made in Indiana, bottled in Connecticut. **Best Buy.**

abv: 45% Price: \$25



94 Masterson's 10-Year-Old Straight Rye Whiskey (Canada; 3 Badge Beverage Corporation, Sonoma, CA). The complex aroma suggests rich caramel, maple and butterscotch. The same flavors are echoed on the palate, showing a flash of sweetness, drying alcohol heat and a spicy finish. Water tames this 100% rye to a maple-almond flavor profile, finishing with cocoa and plenty of mouthwatering spice.

abv: 45% Price: \$79

93 Low Gap California Whiskey (USA; American Craft Distillers, Ukiah, CA). The aroma is markedly rich and sweet, evoking tropical fruit, almond, maple sugar and butterscotch. It's relatively sweet on the palate too, with confectionary flavors like almond paste, vanilla, cookie dough and a creamy hint of fudge enlivened by espresso, cocoa and allspice on the lush, velvety finish. One of the few ryes suitable for a dessert pairing.

abv: 45% Price: \$65

93 Redemption Barrel Proof Straight Rye Whiskey (USA; Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits, White Plains, NY). Aged eight years and bottled at a stunningly high proof, look for rich aromatics of caramel, almond and maple. On the palate, this whiskey almost suggests a dark beer—it feels effervescent, and shows espresso, toffee and clove. Dilution (and plenty of it) coaxes out some sweetness, adjusting the flavor profile to caramel and toffee, finishing dry and spiced, plus a flash of almond. Distilled in Indiana, bottled in Kentucky.

abv: 61.4% Price: \$80

93 Turley Mill Cask Strength Single Barrel Rye Whiskey (USA; KGB Spirits, Alcalde, NM). Aged six years, this unusual "Western whiskey" is scented with rich vanilla and brown sugar. The bold flavor explodes on the palate: Tons of vanilla morphs

into orange peel and spice cake. It's cask strength, so dilute to taste; it holds up well, still delivering plenty of bold flavor and a lingering ribbon of vanilla.
abv: 58.75% **Price:** \$90

92 Mad River Revolution Rye (USA; Mad River Distillers, Warren, VT). Made with three different rye varieties, including malted and roasted "chocolate" rye, and aged at least one year, this 100% rye has a notably dark amber hue, with oak and cedar aromas. Fudge, toffee and espresso finish exceedingly long, bolstered by clove and burnt orange peel.
abv: 48% **Price:** \$50

92 Rough Rider Bull Moose Rye Whiskey (USA; Long Island Spirits, Baiting Hollow, NY). Named for former president and native Long Islander Teddy Roosevelt and his "Rough Riders" volunteer cavalry. Look for a vanilla and oak scent, plus a touch of apple. On the palate, this rye has a concentrated vanilla flavor tinged with espresso and cocoa, finishing on mouthwatering fruit and spice.
abv: 45% **Price:** \$36



91 Koval Single Barrel Rye Whiskey (USA; Koval Distillery, Chicago, IL). Burnished gold, this rye has aromas of vanilla and coconut. A faint sweetness shows on the palate, with initial notes of coconut and almond, while the finish is gently spiced and drying. This certified organic whiskey is versatile for cocktails.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$50

90 Nahmias Et Fils Legs Diamond Whiskey (USA; Baron Nahmias, Yonkers, NY). Burnished gold in the glass, this rye is boldly scented with baked pear, vanilla and pecan pie. The palate is lighter and crisper than the aroma suggests. The floral entry rounds to a nutty midpalate and finishes feather-light, with a bounce of ginger spice.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$40/375 ml

Other Whiskey

94 Westward Oregon Straight Malt Whiskey (USA; House Spirits Distillery, Portland, OR). Made from 100% malted barley grown in the Pacific Northwest and fermented with ale yeast, this single-barrel single malt is brisk, flavorful and hints

at beer. The sweet, gentle aroma offers vanilla and a subtle root beer-like herbal note. The palate is on the drier side, but pleasing, showing lots of vanilla and a hoppy note at the end chased by allspice and clove.
abv: 45% **Price:** \$55/375 ml

93 Brenne Ten (France; Classic Imports, Braintree, MA). Golden and delicately perfumed with peach, white flowers and tropical fruit, this newly launched 10-year-old French single-malt whisky shows coconut, almond, vanilla, and tapers off gently with cinnamon and clove. Add a splash of water or a cube of ice to soften the alcohol sting (it's 96 proof, after all). Aged in a mix of new French oak and old XO Cognac casks. 290 cases produced.
abv: 48% **Price:** \$120



92 Collier and McKeel Tennessee Whiskey (USA; Tennessee Distilling Company, Nashville, TN). Made from a mash of corn, rye and malted barley and aged four years, look for very sweet, bold aromas: lots of vanilla and caramel. The first sip is dry, showing cocoa, espresso and leather, but then the flavors seem to grow sweeter, more in line with the aromas, and coat the mouth with crème brûlée and a hint of butterscotch. It finishes spiced, with a flicker of alcohol heat.
abv: 43% **Price:** \$60



91 Bain's Cape Mountain Whisky (South Africa, Terlato Wines International, Lake Bluff, IL). This unusual whiskey was built like a Bourbon—made with 100% corn and aged in ex-Bourbon casks for an average of five years—but sips like a mellow Canadian whiskey. It's supersoft, with lots of vanilla

and sweet maple, plus a gentle, drying finish of allspice and clove. A surprising, rounded black-cherry note suggests Manhattans in this whiskey's future.
Best Buy.
abv: 43% **Price:** \$30

91 Jameson Irish Whiskey Caskmates Stout Edition (Ireland; Pernod Ricard, New York, NY). Beer lovers will enjoy this Irish whiskey aged in craft beer barrels. It appears burnished gold and smells oaky and grainy. The flavor evokes a pleasing combination of beer and whiskey, accented with hops, bitter chocolate and a clove-spiced finish. It even feels slightly fizzy, like the carbonation of beer. **Best Buy.**
abv: 40% **Price:** \$30

Calvados

98 Lecompte Age 18 Years (France; Park Street, Miami, FL). A complex, excellent sipper. The rich aroma promises caramel, toffee and oak, which is delivered on the silky, lightly sweet palate. The finish is long, succulent and dessert-like, nuanced with cocoa, candied orange peel, apple compote, gingerbread and spice cake.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$175

95 Père Magloire Memoire XO Calvados (France; Sazerac Company, Chicago, IL). Redolent with toffee, vanilla and dried figs, this brandy shows a flash of sweetness up front that suggests Sherry or Madeira, layered with rich caramel, dark honey and a creamy, rounded finish that flirts with cocoa and espresso.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$125

94 Domaine Dupont Vielle Reserve Calvados (France; Domaine Select Wine & Spirits, New York, NY). This golden brandy is scented with rich vanilla and honey, plus a surprising herbaceous lilt. The bold flavor has a savory, almost meaty note at first sip, but finishes with more delicate freshness, fading into honey, white flowers and vanilla. This complex, distinctive sipper is worth getting to know.
abv: 42% **Price:** \$55

London Dry-Style Gin

94 Martin Miller's Westbourne Strength Gin (England; Kindred Spirits of North America, Miami, FL). Crisp and classic, this gin is ideal for martinis. A light cucumber aroma leads the nose, opening up with more cucumber and juniper on the palate, finishing smooth and brisk on nutmeg and coriander accents.
abv: 45.2% **Price:** \$40



93 **Mayfair London Dry Gin (England; Epic Wines & Spirits, Capitola, CA).** Produced in the last remaining independent distillery in London, this G&T-worthy gin is bracing, clean and crisp, with lots of juniper, a light floral note midpalate, and spicy-sweet finish of coriander.
abv: 43% **Price:** \$40



92 **Graton Distilling Co. D. George Benham's Sonoma Dry Gin (USA: Graton Distilling Co., Sonoma, CA).** The bottle is vibrant turquoise but the contents are perfectly clear. The sweet aroma suggests candied lemon peel, warm orange peel, and a faint licorice note. Bold licorice leads on the palate, fading into bracing juniper, black pepper and clove.
abv: 45% **Price:** \$40

91 **Diplome Dry Gin (France; Heavenly Spirits, Lakeville, MA).** The base spirit of this gin is distilled from sugar beets, not grain, which may explain its pronounced sweetness (note: the recipe dates back to 1945). The aroma is almost neutral, with just a faint breeze of pine. On the palate, the juniper-pine note comes forward, along with a marshmallow sweetness, though it finishes with citrus chased by earthy anise and black pepper.
abv: 44% **Price:** \$36



91 **Gin MG London Dry Gin (Spain; Vision Wine & Spirits, Secaucus, NJ).** Ideal for martinis and G&Ts, look for a brisk, bracing aroma that mixes juniper and anise. The palate is smooth, dry and citrusy, with most of the flavor on the cinnamon-accented finish. **Best Buy.**
abv: 40% **Price:** \$23



91 **No. 209 Gin (USA; Distillery No 209, San Francisco, CA).** Scented with juniper and lemon peel, this light, silky gin is distinctly citrusy and crisp, suggesting lemon and grapefruit peels. It finishes lightly sweet, enlivened by white pepper and candied ginger sparks.
abv: 46% **Price:** \$39



90 **Bloom Premium London Dry Gin (England; Prestige Wine & Spirits Group, St. Paul, MN).** The nose is mild, almost neutral, while the palate shows juniper, white flowers and anise, breezing into a gentle finish brushed with white pepper and

the merest hint of grapefruit peel. Save that pretty pale-green bottle to showcase some spring flowers.
Best Buy.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$29

Añejo Tequila



97 **Gran Patrón Piedra (Mexico; Patron Spirits Company, Las Vegas, NV).** Patrón's first-ever extra añejo is aged at least three years, and is named for the stone wheel (*piedra*) that crushes agave to make Tequila. It has an amber hue and a rich aroma that mixes caramel, dried fruit and peppery notes. The palate is silky and rounded, with lots of caramel and oak up front, tapering off gently with anise, ginger and cinnamon.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$400

95 **Cazul 100 Tequila Añejo Reserva (Mexico; Distiller Sales Co., Princeton, MN).** This golden Tequila balances honey and lighter jalapeño and bell pepper notes for a classic profile, finishing with vanilla, ripe banana and echoes of cinnamon and clove. Sip or mix. **Best Buy.**
abv: 40% **Price:** \$38

95 **Dulce Vida Extra Añejo Tequila (Mexico; Dulce Vida Spirits, Austin, TX).** A special edition for the company's five-year anniversary, this Tequila was aged a full five years in Napa Valley wine barrels that previously held Merlot and Cabernet. The end result is a tawny selection with a rose-gold glimmer and lovely, complex fragrance that melds floral, fruity and honeyed agave, spiced up with peppery hints. At 100 proof, it's understandably fiery, but mellows with some dilution to a juicy-sweet profile that shows orange, red fruit and honey, finishing long, spiced and warm.
abv: 50% **Price:** \$160

95 **Partida Añejo (Mexico; Tequila Partida, San Rafael, CA).** Hitting all the right notes, this 18-month-aged añejo melds tropical fruit and fresh-cut apple with silky vanilla and agave nectar, finishing on a brisk peppery-cinnamon note.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$50

95 **TI Sensacional Tequila Extra Añejo (Mexico; TI Tequila, San Antonio, TX).** Aged for three and a half years in former Scotch barrels, this extra añejo, introduced in November 2015, has an amber hue and mixes honey and pepper in the aromatics,

plus a rich maple threat. It's velvety, well-structured and mouthwatering, showing an assertive cooked agave and honey note that dries to raucous baking spice and jalapeño, plus a raisin and chipotle note on the finish. Ideal as a digestif.

abv: 42% **Price:** \$119

95 Tequila Herradura Ultra Añejo (Mexico; Brown-Forman, Louisville, KY). This unusual crystal-clear añejo, launched in June 2015, seems to be aiming for the premium vodka nightclub crowd. The bottling mixes añejo with extra añejo, plus a hint of agave nectar. Tequila purists likely won't approve, but the subtle coconut-pineapple-vanilla flavor profile—more drying and astringent than rum or vodka—seems ideal for mixing tropical cocktails and is addictive to sip.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$55

94 3 Amigos Añejo (Mexico; San Bartolo Farms, El Mirage, AZ). Though it seems shy in the glass, with its light-gold hue and mild vanilla fragrance, on the palate this añejo is quite bold, with caramel and vanilla drying to leather, baker's chocolate, cinnamon and a hint of dried fig. Addictive and easy sipping. **Best Buy.**

abv: 40% **Price:** \$34

92 Santera Tequila Añejo (Mexico; Santera Spirits, New York, NY). Soft rose gold in the glass, this añejo has a distinctly sweet, rich fragrance, like vanilla syrup. That rounded sweetness is echoed on the palate, with vanilla, almond and toffee, drying to allspice, clove, leather and espresso. Overall, it drinks a bit like an overproof bourbon. Aged up to 16 months in American oak barrels then blended with a touch of extra añejo.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$55

91 Cruz Del Sol Añejo Tequila (Mexico; Los Diablos Intl, Phoenix, AZ). Brisk and light, this añejo has a pale straw hue and a scent tinged with vanilla and fresh apple. On the palate, look for vanilla, cooling mint, and a brisk flurry of black pepper and a mouthwatering saline touch on the finish.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$59

91 Ixa Añejo Tequila (Mexico; Greenbar Distillery, Los Angeles, CA). This certified organic Tequila has a bold pineapple fragrance, with a hint of vanilla. More vanilla shows on the palate, plus caramel, toffee and a warm, toasty flavor reminiscent of roasted coffee beans, finishing with an explosion of clove and black pepper.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$60

Vodka

94 3 Howls Blood Orange Flavored Vodka (USA; 3 Howls, Seattle, WA). The light aroma mingles orange, lemon and a faint floral note. The palate shows juicy, bouncy, lively tangerine flavor, finishing with a gentle hint of anise. Overall, it's complex and light, with just the right amount of flavor for cock-

tails and punches without being overpowering. **Best Buy.**

abv: 40% **Price:** \$22

94 Silo Vodka (USA; Silo Distillery, Windsor, VT). Nuanced, flavorful and clean, this offers a light scent that mixes vanilla and citrus. The smooth palate has mild sweetness that suggests cocoa and almond, but finishes citrusy and brisk, with a fleeting pine note. It will please those seeking a vodka that's neutral but not bland. Distilled from Vermont corn.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$29

93 Cardinal Spirits Vodka (USA; Cardinal Spirits, Bloomington, IN). Wine lovers will approve: This vodka is made from white grapes that are fermented in Italian wine tanks and then distilled. The result is an enticing cocoa character on the nose and creamy palate, along with subtle vanilla braced with alcohol heat on the nutmeg-accented finish. Overall it's a versatile, mixable vodka.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$25

93 Charbay Vodka (USA; Charbay Distillery, St. Helena, CA). With touches of almond sweetness and a faint citrusy note on the smooth finish, this vodka made from corn and rye will please those seeking a pure, neutral canvas, with just enough nuance to keep things interesting.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$36

93 Claremont Vodka (USA; Claremont Distilled Spirits, Fairfield, NJ). Soft and mild, this potato vodka has a neutral aroma and flavor, finishing clean with the barest earthy-cocoa note on the exit. Mix it into chilled vodka martinis.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$29

93 Square One Bergamot (USA; Square One Organic Spirits, Novato, CA). Light, complex and not overly sweet, this flavored vodka offers a warm, welcoming orange-peel scent that reads more like bitter orange on the palate, accented with cardamom and ginger heat. This rye-based vodka is infused with bergamot, mandarin, navel orange and tangerine—a whole lot of citrus in one bottle.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$35

92 49th Parallel Vodka (Canada; Pangea Wine & Spirits, Sarasota, FL). This robust, corn-based vodka has an earthy aroma that hints at cacao, plus a slight raspberry-jam fruitiness. The cacao note is echoed on the palate, finishing surprisingly long and spicy, if a little bit hot. Mix into White Russians and other dessert-like drinks.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$30

92 Vodkila Straight (USA; Temperance Distilling, Temperance, MI). A blend of 80% corn vodka and 20% blanco tequila, bottled in Michigan, this offers a warm honey aroma and soft, slightly viscous texture. The palate echoes honey sweetness and layers in plenty of spice: cinnamon, nutmeg, white pepper and a long finish featuring gentle cayenne heat.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$33

91 Chopin Rye Vodka (Poland; Chopin Imports, Stamford, CT). Relatively neutral on the palate, this vodka has soft vanilla and caraway scents and a subtle but surprising rich dark-chocolate undercurrent. It finishes clean, with a flicker of ginger heat.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$30

90 St. George All Purpose Vodka (USA; St. George, Alameda, CA). Distilled from grain and fruit—specifically, Bartlett pears—this complex vodka doesn't have the neutral profile some vodka drinkers expect. The warm scent suggests roasted almonds. On the palate, vanilla and almond intertwine with a mild sweetness that recalls agave, with a barely perceptible, mouthwatering salinity. The finish is malty and roasty. The overall effect is a vodka that ever-so-subtly winks at the whiskey bottle down the shelf.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$30



90 Wyborowa Vodka (Poland; Crillon Importers, Paramus, NJ). Overall, this rye-based vodka is neutral and pristine, with a faint sweetness on the nose and a palate that hints at bitter almond. It offers a modest peppery bite on the finish. Recommended for Bloody Marys and other savory sips.

Best Buy.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$16

White Rum

95 Diplomatico Blanco Reserve (Venezuela; Domaine Select Wine & Spirits, New York, NY). It almost doesn't seem fair to stack up this "extra añejo" rum against barely aged counterparts. This is the Cadillac of white rums, one of the few suitable to keep as a standalone sipper. Look for silky smoothness and pure, concentrated sugar-cane flavor that mellows into accents of brown sugar, caramel and baking spice on the finish.

abv: 40% **Price:** \$30

94 Plantation 3 Stars (Jamaica/Barbados/Trinidad; W.J. Deutsch & Sons, White Plains, NY). Made with rums from Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad, and blended in France by Cognac Ferrand, this pleasing white rum offers a mild aroma like a grassy breeze and a smooth, slightly viscous texture.

A lightly sweet coconut flavor morphs into vanilla, candied lemon peel and cinnamon sparks on the warming finish. Sip or mix. **Best Buy.**
abv: 41.2% **Price:** \$25

94 Trigo Reserva Añeja Rum (Puerto Rico; Grillos International, Miami, FL). Aged 10 years, this luscious sipper has an amber hue and mellow vanilla scent. Velvety on the palate, look for concentrated notes of vanilla, maple and caramel, which linger into the spicy finish that's accented by black pepper, cayenne and clove.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$42

93 Bayou Rum Silver (U.S.; Louisiana Spirits, Lacassine, LA). This bold, unusual rum calls for tropical drinks at first sniff. The enticing aroma mixes juicy orange, cocoa, marshmallow and an earthy note reminiscent of mezcal. Look for mild sweetness and a fair amount of alcohol bite. It's made using sugar and molasses from Louisiana, one of the few U.S. states that grows sugar cane. **Best Buy.**
abv: 40% **Price:** \$22

93 Brinley Gold Shipwreck Coconut Rum Cream (St. Kitts; Market St. Spirits, Glen Rock, NJ). Milky white and scented with coconut, this liqueur is sweet and creamy on the palate, with plenty of coconut flavor. It's not as thick as some other cream liqueurs, which makes it relatively easy drinking. Ideal for mixing into piña colada-style drinks in place of coconut cream.
abv: 15% **Price:** \$25

92 Avalon United States of America Silver Rum (U.S.; The California Spirits Co., San Marcos, CA). Look for a bold, fruity and floral profile. A delicate lychee note comes forward and mingles with mouthwatering pineapple and rosewater flavors. The drying, lip-smacking finish also brings a gentle waft of marshmallow sweetness.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$30

92 Caña Brava Reserva Añeja (Panama; The 86 Co., New York, NY). Aged seven years, this honey-hued rum has an enticing vanilla-maple scent and velvety feel. Vanilla, maple and oak glide smoothly into the baking spice-flavored finish. Versatile for sipping or mixing, this is a solid choice for any home bar; try it in a rum Old Fashioned.
abv: 45% **Price:** \$45

90 Bacardi Gran Reserva Maestro de Ron (Puerto Rico; Bacardi Corporation, Miami, FL). Smooth and mildly sweet, this rum has a pronounced vanilla note, tapering off to a gentle marshmallow fade followed by a hint of white pepper heat. It's made using a "double aging process"—rums aged for at least one year are blended and then returned to white oak barrels for an additional three months. **Best Buy.**
abv: 40% **Price:** \$25

Vermouth

95 Dopo Teatro Cocchi Vermouth Amaro (Italy; Haus Alpenz, Edina, MN). This silky, garnet-hued sipper features a double dose of bitter quinine, but don't worry, it doesn't read as especially bitter. It features an enticing spiced-cherry scent and a flavor that suggests cherry compote, with a violet lilt on the finish and just the right amount of bitter edge. Sip or mix. **Best Buy.**
abv: 16% **Price:** \$20/500 ml

94 Atxa Red Vermouth (Spain; Maison Selections, Chapel Hill, NC). Dried dates and figs lead the nose on this bold, complex vermouth. The succulent dried fruit character also shows up on the palate, as a flash of sweetness dries to a tannic, mouthwatering finish accented with cocoa, orange peel and spice. **Best Buy.**
abv: 15% **Price:** \$20

92 Riserva Carlo Alberto Vermut de Torino Vermut Blanc (Italy; Martin Scott Wines, New York, NY). This is a bold, rich vermouth that could stand up in cocktails with more assertive spirits. Vibrant marigold in the glass, the rich, sweet aroma is almost dessert-like, evoking Sherry, golden raisins, honey and cardamom. The palate echoes those notes—baked apple, vanilla, honey, plus a gentle spiced fade.
abv: 18% **Price:** \$38

92 Vermut Lustau Rojo (Spain; Europvin USA, Van Nuys, CA). An interesting newcomer to the U.S. market, the base of this vermouth is rich, nutty Sherry—80% amontillado and 20% Pedro Ximenez, to be precise. It has a coffee-brown hue and a bright dried-herb scent. The palate wows with sticky toffee, dried apricot, orange peel and cocoa. Ideal for adding complexity to drinks featuring dark spirits.
abv: 15% **Price:** \$22

91 Drapo Bianco Vermouth (Italy; VOS Selections, New York, NY). Featuring a honey-like color and aroma, this easy-drinking vermouth has a slightly sweet, pleasant oxidized flavor profile, finishing crisp. **Best Buy.**
abv: 16% **Price:** \$20

90 Cruz Conde Vermouth Rojo Reserva 1902 (Spain; Copa Spirits, Huntingtown, MD). A Sherry base (oloroso and Pedro Ximenez) gives this sweet vermouth a rich head start. Scented like dried dates and orange peel, the palate is herbaceous at first sip, then channels dark honey, cardamom and clove-studded orange peel.
abv: 15% **Price:** \$25

90 Ransom Sweet Vermouth (USA; Ransom Wine Co., Sheridan, OR). Packed with citrus and dried fruit, this bold, tawny-orange vermouth has a scent that suggests dried orange peel and dried fig, while the palate mixes grapefruit, orange and honey. The herbal finish is redolent of warm chamomile, cardamom and baking spice.
abv: 17.8% **Price:** \$20/500 ml

90 Vya Vermouth Extra Dry (USA; Quady Winery, Madera, CA). Ideal for Negronis and other cocktails, this zesty vermouth has a honeyed sweetness, dried figs and sarsaparilla, plus a rounded finish with plenty of dried apricot, dried fig, Sherry and baking spice notes.
abv: 16% **Price:** \$23

Aquavit

95 Linie Aquavit (Norway; Sazerac, Metairie, LA). Stored in former Sherry casks, this aquavit famously takes a sea voyage across the world, sailing to Australia and back, crossing the equator or "linie" twice. The end result is a bright buttercup hue and mellow vanilla, spearmint, clove and oak tones, plus a silky butterscotch finish.
abv: 41.5% **Price:** \$30

93 Brennivin Anniversary Edition Cask Aged (Iceland; Brennivin America, Jackson, WY). This barrel-aged aquavit is pale straw in the glass and shows just the barest whiff of vanilla. On the palate, look for toasty oak, pear and light honey sweetness, finishing gently spiced.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$54

90 Ovrevaan Aquavit (USA; Vikre Distillery, Duluth, MN). Look for a pleasantly sweet orange peel and caraway aroma. The palate is slightly malty, with a caraway-forward note that accelerates into the tingly finish. Cocktail friendly.
abv: 44% **Price:** \$30

Amaro/Herbal Liqueurs

96 BroVo Amaro 14 (USA; BroVo Spirits, Woodinville, WA). Created with direction from Chicago bartender Mike Ryan, this is almost like a bottled cocktail. It's burnished copper and cloudy in the glass, with a dynamite citrus-vanilla nose reminiscent of a well-made daiquiri. It feels light on the palate, with a rich cocoa edge, subtle orange-peel bitterness and finishing with ginger, cinnamon and white pepper sparks.
abv: 32% **Price:** \$35

95 Hünerkopf Alt (Germany; CCB Horizon Imports, Carol Stream, IL). Categorized as a "half-bitter," this ruddy brown spirit is complex and pleasing, mixing brandied cherry, candied orange peel, caramel, mild horehound and allspice, with just a hint of amaro bitterness on the exit. All together, the flavors suggest Christmas cake studded with candied fruit. Mix or sip.
abv: 32% **Price:** \$30

93 Nardini Tagliatella (Italy; Craft + Estate, The Winebow Group, New York, NY). This ruddy amaro has a deep fruity nose, like strawberry jam mixed with light herbal notes. The flavor is pleasant, showing root and bark notes, a light mintiness, and smoothed over with sweet orange peel, cocoa and vanilla. Feels light and finishes with a slight lilt of mint. Sip or mix, only mildly bitter.
abv: 35% **Price:** \$27/375 ml

92 Amaro delle Sirene Special Edition (USA; Don Ciccio & Figli, Washington, DC). This special edition amaro is barrel-aged for 12 months. It's brown in the glass and has an intense herbal aroma of mint and a touch of chocolate. Bitter espresso, dark chocolate and walnut lead, chased by mild vanilla sweetness and a hint of clove.
abv: 29% **Price:** \$47

92 Branca Menta (Italy; Infinium Spirits, Aliso Viejo, CA). With a concentrated spearmint aroma, this liqueur has a chocolaty core and plenty of cooling mint, like a Thin Mint cookie with a moderately bitter edge. Use to sass up a classic Grasshopper or other drinks that call for crème de cacao. **Best Buy.**
abv: 30% **Price:** \$28

92 Hum Botanical Spirit (USA; Hum Spirits Company, Chicago, IL). This rum-based hibiscus liqueur has a deep black-cherry hue and deep, juicy, fruity scent mixed with dried herb notes. It's warming and jammy on the palate, with loads of dark fruit. The floral finish overlaps with a lingering fruit compote note that practically begs for mixing into Kir-style cocktails.
abv: 35% **Price:** \$41

92 Southern Amaro Liqueur (USA; High Wire Distilling, Charleston, SC). Reminiscent of birch beer, this amaro has a brown hue and a relatively sweet, mellow molasses-like flavor, with a hefty twang of anise midpalate followed by pine and licorice on the finish.
abv: 30% **Price:** \$32

90 Mezzodi Liqueur (Italy; Caffo Beverages, Carlstadt, NY). Look for a deep poppy-red hue and grapefruit aroma in this liqueur. It's hard not to compare the lightly bitter flavor profile to the popular Campari, though this easy drinker is a little softer, lighter and sweeter, and has a light floral fade. The label is particularly fun, featuring a handsome Italian waiter offering an aperitivo on a tray. **Best Buy.**
abv: 15% **Price:** \$17/1 L

90 Villa de Varda Camomile Liqueur (Italy; Quintessential, LLC, Napa, CA). This liqueur is made in Italy's Trentino region, where chamomile flowers grow in the mountains. Honey is the dominant note on the nose and palate, mingled with nutmeg, cardamom and vanilla, plus spearmint on the finish. Made with a grappa base.
abv: 28% **Price:** \$70

Other Liqueurs



97 Faretto Decadent Biscotti Chocolate (Italy; Chatham Imports, New York, NY). Dessert-like and delicious, this medium-bodied liqueur has a rich cocoa and marzipan scent, and tastes just like its namesake biscotti cookies. It warms the palate with nutty and chocolate flavors, perked up by hints of fennel and orange peel.
abv: 28% **Price:** \$27

96 Belle de Brilllet Pear Liqueur (France; Kobrand Corp, New York, NY). This Cognac-based liqueur incorporates 20 pounds of pears in each 750-ml bottle, yielding a rich golden hue and bold fresh-pear scent. As a digestif-worthy sipper, look for a balanced honey and vanilla flavor profile, with a suggestion of pear on the finish. Ideal for cocktails, baking or sipping straight.
abv: 30% **Price:** \$46

95 Tempus Fugit Spirits Crème de Cacao a la Vanilla (Switzerland; Anchor Distilling, San Francisco, CA). Made with Venezuelan cacao and Mexican vanilla, this complex take on a staple liqueur is ruddy in the glass and flavorful with cocoa powder, almond, vanilla and a touch of hazelnut richness on the long finish. Viscous and slightly too thick for straight-up sipping, this is a tasty upgrade for cocktails. Based on a 19th-century recipe.
abv: 24% **Price:** \$33



92 Salizá Amaretto (Italy; Niche Import Co., Cedar Knolls, NJ). Distilled from almonds, not just flavored, this tawny liqueur offers bold, sweet almond and marzipan flavors without becoming too heavy or cloying, braced up by a sprinkle of cinnamon on the finish. Ideal as a dessert pairing, or for use in sweetening cocktails or baked goods.
abv: 28% **Price:** \$30

91 Ancho Reyes Ancho Chile Liqueur (Mexico; William Grant & Sons, New York, NY). Though it's made with ancho chiles, this liqueur is modest on the spice scale. Caramel-y brown in the glass, look for a lightly herbaceous aroma similar to root beer and rounded flavors that mix caramel and cocoa with raisin and cinnamon heat, with a faint smokiness on the finish. Particularly harmonious mixed in cocktails with brown spirits like whiskey.
abv: 40% **Price:** \$33

90 Marie Brizard Liqueur Pear William (France; The Other Wine & Spirits, Miami, FL). This viscous, pale straw liqueur mingles honey and pear in the fragrance. The sweet but relatively light flavor profile starts with pear, gives over to vanilla mid-palate, and finishes with a bright flick of ginger. Recommended for cocktails. **Best Buy.**
abv: 25% **Price:** \$20