

# Stranded on a Desert Island? This Well-Traveled Bartender Thinks These Are the 5 Bottles You Need.

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You're trapped on a desert island, but the good news is that you can bring five bottles of booze with you to pass the time. Look, there's even ice and bar tools—you're all set. What would you choose?

Rob Mariani is a world-traveling cocktail enthusiast currently behind the stick at [Alley Twenty Six](#) in Durham, North Carolina. Under the name [Behind the Stick Provisions](#), he recently launched Alley Twenty Six Tonic Syrup. The versatile reddish-hued syrup is a flavorful and potent concoction made with cinchona bark, lemongrass, lime and sugar. While he threatens to sneak a bottle of his own tonic syrup with him onto the island, these are his top five picks.

## 1: [El Dorado 15-Year Rum](#) (\$42)

"If I could only pick one bottle, this would be it," says Mariani says. "Pure magic from Guyana."

El Dorado rum, Mariani points out, is made via an assortment of five different stills, including several ancient wooden stills, offering a complex and unmatched flavor profile. "With toffee, tobacco, dried fruit and vanilla notes, it just *sings* rum and has gotten me singing a time or two," says Mariani. "And hey, I'm stuck on an island, right? Got to keep the spirits up."

## 2: [Conniption Navy Strength Gin](#) (\$40)

"I love [gin](#), and this one is world-class," says Mariani. It's another product that has a unique production process, with several flavors being separately vacuum-distilled and then blended into the pot-distilled gin base. "The clean citrus and fig notes from the roto-vap distillate combined with classic juniper and cardamom notes from the copper pot still make this gin so bold yet remarkably smooth for its strength."

Mariani is also thinking logistically with this navy-strength gin. "At 114 proof, we know it's a good fire starter," he says. "Plus, it can be used to preserve the fruits of your foraging."

He's not done yet with Conniption's multifunctionality, though. "Something is going to cut you on a desert island, and what's better than a juniper-scented antiseptic? And if you've ever tried to pick up a 12-bottle case before, this may be one of the heaviest bottles ever. So if you run into that *Lord of the Flies* moment when you're confronted by a wild boar, take a big swig, then a big swing. It can easily take out a wild boar and still be intact to address your wounds and palate."



### 3: Carpano Antica Formula Vermouth (\$29)

For Mariani, Carpano Antica Formula is "the gold standard of sweet **vermouth**, hands down," he says. He knows there's plenty of good options for his vermouth pick, but this one stands apart for him.

"I like a lot of different vermouths, but there is no drink containing vermouth that cannot be enhanced by this one," says Mariani. "It can also pair well with the exotic fruits and vegetables I hopefully find and that wild boar, assuming I won."



### 4: Tempus Fugit Gran Classico Bitter (\$35)

Gin, sweet vermouth and now a bitter—it's clear Mariani has **Negronis** on the brain. "It was a tough choice between this and **Campari**," says Mariani.

"But Gran Classico has such strong notes of gentian and rhubarb and would pair well with actual rhubarb if the island has any," says Mariani. "It also has such a lush, full body that it can ease my mind on a tough day scouring an island for ingredients to make a Negroni of some kind. It's also good for basting a wild boar." We take that back—Mariani has boar on the brain.



### 5: Fernet Vittone (\$26)

"Why yes, I am a bartender. How could you tell?" Mariani asks as he ventures into the bartender-favorite fernet realm. "And while I have a **Fernet-Branca** coin in my pocket as we speak, Vittone is the brand I would choose. It has just slightly less mint on the front, letting the saffron, cardamom and other botanicals shine."

There are a few added perks to Fernet, as well. "It's medicine," says Mariani. "Which you're going to need it at some point. If someone says fernet does not work as a digestivo, then they clearly have never tried it. And if you can enjoy your medicine, then you're one step ahead already."

Maybe having a taste of your own medicine isn't always such a bad thing.

