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BY JAMES CLUER MW

The Fine Vintage Spirits Course

By James Cluer MW

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History of Spirits

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact date when distillation started. Early civilizations first learned how to create medicines and perfumes through the practice of distillation. There is evidence of crudely distilled alcoholic beverages being made from rice dating as far back as 800 BC in Asia. In Britain, mead was being distilled in 500 A.D. and in 1000 A.D. Irish monks brought the technique of distilling perfumes back from their travels to the Mediterranean.

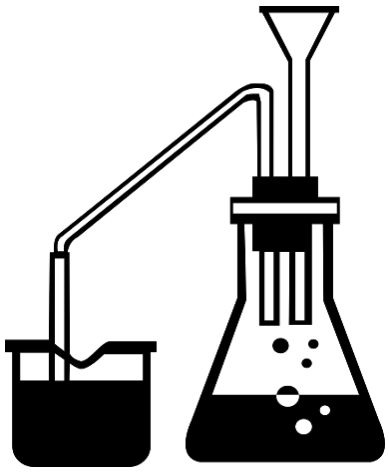
The practice of distilling alcohol was refined specifically in the 9th century, and was used primarily for ritual or medicine. In fact, the first documented use of distilled alcohol comes from a 12th century Italian medical school.

Distilling for recreational use took off in the 17th and well into the 18th century with trade, exploration, and colonization. As the practice spread, distillation evolved to what we see today.

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Distillation

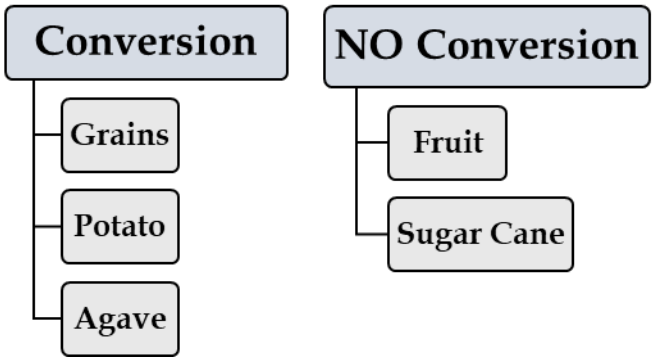


The Steps

1. **Raw Material**
2. **Conversion**
3. **Fermentation**
4. **Distillation**
5. **Maturation**

1. Raw Material

Raw material is the product destined for fermentation. You must have a fermented material before you can distill. For wine production this is easy as grapes are naturally high in sugar. Yeast eats the grape sugars and creates alcohol (ethanol) during the fermentation process. However, with raw materials that are concentrated in starch such as grains, potato, and agave a conversion of starch into fermentable sugars must take place first before fermentation can happen.



Conversion

Grains and vegetables such as potatoes and agave (inulin) all have a starch content that needs to be converted into sugar before fermentation can happen.

NO Conversion

Anything in the fruit category such as grapes, pears and raspberries do not need conversion as there is sugar readily available in the fruit. This would also apply to all sugar cane products like molasses and sugar cane juice.

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2. Conversion

Starch can be converted into fermentable sugars through a few processes. Various methods such as malting (barley) and cooking (corn and agave) will be explored in each of the respective chapters.

3. Fermentation



Fermentation happens when yeast is added to a liquid containing sugar. Yeast will eat the sugar available and create alcohol (ethanol) with CO_2 being a bi-product that escapes off. Once the yeast is finished converting all the sugar into alcohol, a liquid containing 6-10% alcohol is left. This liquid is known as the **wash.**

Fermentation is a vital step for the creation of flavour in the final spirit. Distillation will concentrate the flavours and aromas that were created during the fermentation process.

A distiller can manage the length of fermentation to suit their needs. For example, a vodka producer does not want too much flavour, so their objective is a short fermentation to create a simple wash. A whisky producer creating a big flavourful spirit, however, will allow the fermentation to span over a period of days to create a more flavourful wash.

4. Distillation

The distillation process of concentrating alcohol occurs in a **still**. This is possible as different alcohols and constituents have different weights and boiling points. This allows the distiller to separate a high proportion of ethanol for the creation of a spirit.

A wash of 8% abv (alcohol by volume) before distillation means 92% of that liquid is water and other constituents such as acids and flavonoids. Through the process of distilling it is possible to concentrate the alcohol. The more times something is distilled a higher alcohol concentration will be achieved.

Ethanol has a lower boiling point than water. This allows ethanol to vapourize first, leaving the water behind. The ethanol vapours pass through a condensing unit that consists of copper piping surrounded by cool water. When the ethanol alcoholic steam reaches the cooler piping, it condenses back into liquid at a higher alcoholic strength.

Ethanol boiling point = 78.3° C

Water boiling point = 100°C



VAPOUR HITS COLD = CONDENSATION = LIQUID



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On the final distillation the distiller will separate the liquid into three components:

- **Heads**: this is the first component that runs off the still and contains toxic components such as methanol. The heads are removed and sent to be redistilled;
- **Heart**: also called the **middle cut**, this is the most important as it contains the highest proportion of ethanol. This is spirit that is kept for dilution and bottling or is sent for ageing;
- **Tails**: this is the last component and consists of fusel oils. As with the heads, the tails are removed and sent to be redistilled.

There are **two styles of stills** used for the creation of spirits. Each type will have several variations on its theme but will still operate on the same principles. These are covered below.

Pot Still

The pot still is the oldest type of still. A pot still will produce a more flavourful spirit that comes off the still at a lower strength. Using a pot still is a slower and more labour intensive process as it must go through **two** distillations. This is called **batch distillation**.

Pot still spirits come off their second distillation at approximately 70-72% abv. This is lower than a spirit coming off a column still which could be as high as 96%abv. The 30% variance can represent some harsher alcohols that over time integrate and become more flavourful. Pot stills also retain more flavour from the base material used.

Most pot stills are made of copper. Copper is a good conductor of heat and is easy to shape and mold. Copper also removes any unwanted sulphur compounds created during fermentation.

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Classic Pot Still Spirits

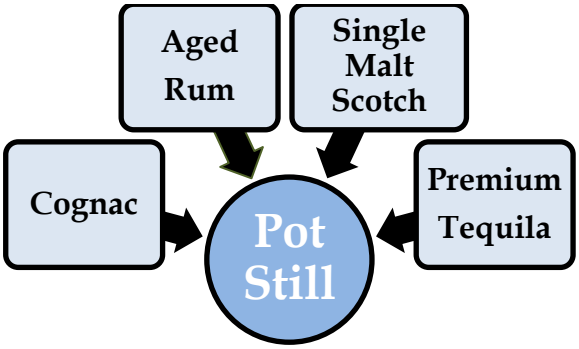




Diagram of a Pot Still

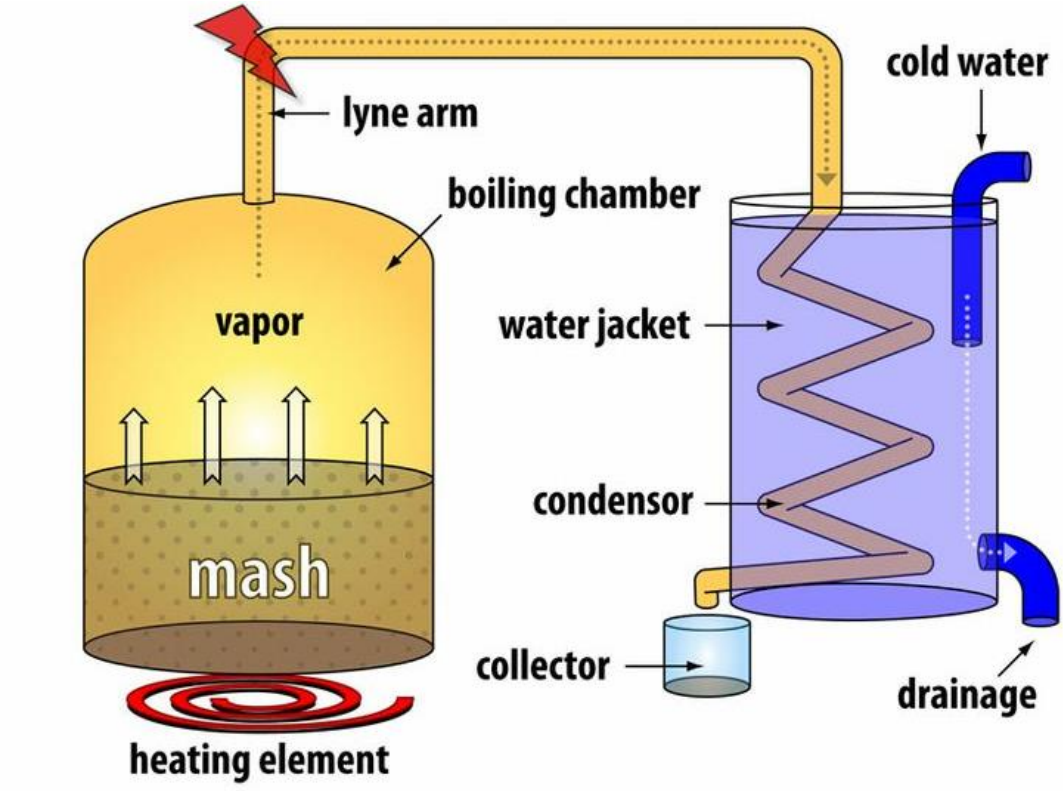


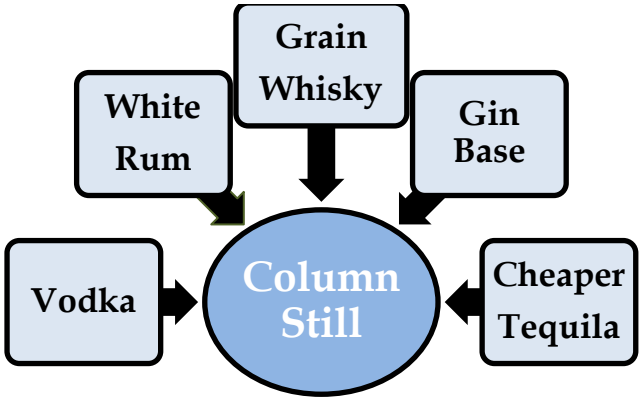
Diagram showing basic components of an alcohol still: Boiler, Lyne Arm, Condenser
Author: Redrex; Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International

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Column Still

As the name suggests, this still consists of a series of columns and offers a continuous process of distillation. It can also be referred to as a **continuous still**. This type of still is used to produce high volume spirits as it is an efficient way to achieve a higher strength product.

Classic Column Still Spirits





5. Maturation



All spirits come off the still colourless. Any colouring the spirit comes from either long-term ageing in oak casks or from natural or artificial colouring agents. Spirits also come off their final distillation bone dry. Sweet spirits therefore would have a sweetening agent added to it.

Most brown spirits have ageing requirements attached to them by law. For example, a Scotch whisky must be aged a minimum of 3 years to be called “Scotch whisky.” Each of these laws will be discussed under each spirit type.



Spirits are diluted to approximately 60% abv before being transferred to oak casks for ageing. Two things will happen during this period. First, the spirit will seep into the wood to extract colours and flavours that add extra complexity. Second, there will be a slow evaporation of the spirit called the **angel’s share**. This evaporation helps concentrate the complex flavours and colours.

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Tasting Spirits



When tasting spirits there is no need to swirl vigorously as one would with wine to release the aromas. The high alcohol content of a spirit makes them quite volatile and you do not want to burn your nose!

Approach the glass with caution and take a few quick sniffs before adding water. These initial sniffs are to gauge the cleanliness of the spirit and the initial characters. Upon adding water, some characters might become more pronounced while others more subtle.

Always add water before tasting a spirit. Mineral water at room temperature is best because it has the least impact on the flavours of the spirit. One third of the content of your glass is recommended as this helps subdue the alcohol, making it easier for identification of flavours.

Swirl and savour the spirit on your palate before spitting out. The alcohol may feel warming but that is to be expected. Spirits do not have acidity like wines do and most are dry (liqueurs and some dark rums would be an exception). You otherwise evaluate the body, flavor intensity and length as with wine.

Look
- **Colour**
- **Intensity**

Nose
- **Add water**
- **Sniff**

Taste
- **Sip**
- **Savour**
- **Spit**

Colour
- Colourless - Pale - Medium - Deep
- Lemon- Gold - Amber - Copper - Brown

Aroma
- Neutral - Light - Medium - Pronounced
- Fruits - Floral - Grains - Vegetal - Oak - Spices - Botanicals

Palate
- **Sweetness:** Dry - Off-dry - Medium sweet - Sweet
- **Body:** Light - Medium - Full
- **Alcohol:** Smooth - Warming - Hot
- Fruits - Floral - Grains - Vegetal - Oak - Spices - Botanicals

Quality
- **Length:** Short - Medium - Long
- **Complexity:** Simple - Some complexity - Very complex

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Quality

B	**Balance**
L	**Length**
I	**Intensity**
C	**Complexity**

Average	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Outstanding

Brandies



Brandy can be produced anywhere in the world where grapes are grown. By law, brandy must be produced from grapes and then fermented into wine before distilling. Brandies are aged spirits that display floral and grape aromas combined with layers of spices from long-term ageing in oak barrels.

Cognac

Cognac is a region that sits north of Bordeaux. Records of wine being distilled here date back to 1549. In the mid-18th century the Dutch had an increasing demand for "***brandewijn***" (burnt wine) which they would add to the drinking water on ships for long sea voyages. This spurred the growth of several of the major Cognac houses we see today such as Martell, Rémy and Hennessey. In the 19th century, Cognac's success continued to grow as it became very popular with the British and the Irish.

The turning point for the industry took place in 1871 when a disease called phylloxera infested the Cognac vineyards. As it took 20 years to find a solution, Scotch whisky took hold of the UK market and Cognac never really recovered to its full glory. Sales are back on the rise showing large growth in the United States with Singapore and China also proving to be strong export markets.

- **Key Brands:** Rémy Martin – Hennessey – Martell – Courvoisier.

Cognac Production

Grapes



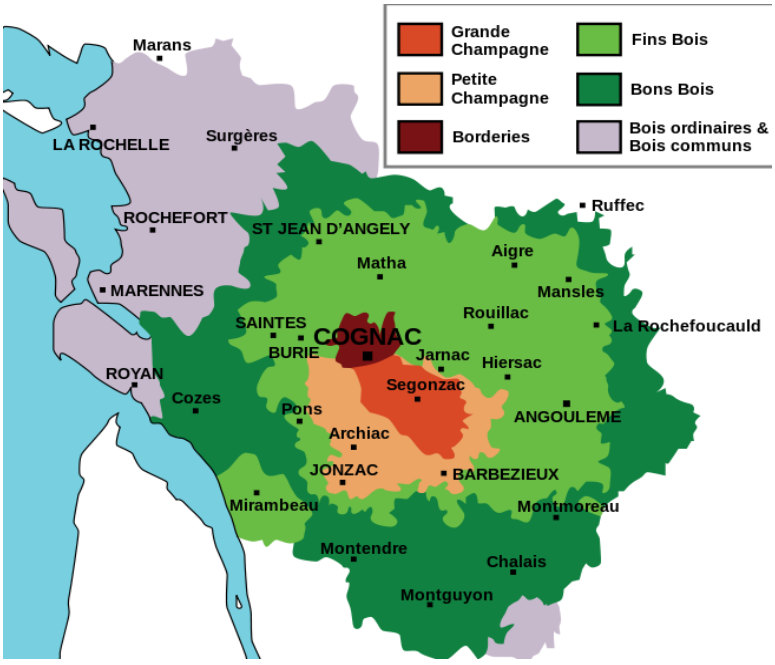
Ugni Blanc accounts for 98% of the plantings. Grapes are harvested early to ensure the high acidity and low sugar levels ideal for distillation. The wine is slightly neutral but after distillation has a lovely floral and grapey aroma.

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Regions

Cognac has 6 regions but only 4 are of importance. These are listed in descending order:

- ***Grande Champagne***
- ***Petite Champagne***
- ***Borderies***
- ***Fin Bois***



Author: Henri Mattson - *Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0*

Distillation

By law, Cognac must be distilled in a copper pot still called a ***Charentais* still**. This is a batch distillation process, meaning it must be distilled **twice**. Distillation must take place before March 31st the year following the harvest.



- **First Distillation:**
  The spirit comes off the still at 27-30% abv and is called ***brouillis*.**

- **Second Distillation:**
  The heads and tails are cut and distilled with the next batch of ***brouillis***. The final spirit (heart) comes off the still at 70-72% abv.

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Maturation



Cognac is matured in Limousin oak sourced from nearby forests. All Cognac must be aged in oak cask for a minimum of **two years**. For the first six months the spirit will be aged in new oak casks before being transferred to older barrels for mellowing.

- **Ageing Designations**

  The designations below represent the minimum age allowed in the blend.

AGEING TERM	YEARS
VS or ***	2 years
VSOP	4 years
XO – Napoléon	10 years
Hors' D Age	10 years



  - ***Note:*** *Prior to 2018 the minimum ageing for an XO – Napoléon - Hors d'Age was 6 years.*

Armagnac

The Armagnac region is situated in Gascony in south-west France. Armagnac has a longer history than Cognac and was France's first brandy. There are records of wine being distilled in this region dating back to 1310. By 1441, brandy was being traded in exchange for other goods, however being located further inland it did not make it as accessible for trading as Cognac.

Armagnac Production

Grapes

3 grapes play a major role:

- **Ugni Blanc** – 55% of plantings
- **Baco 22A** – 32% of plantings
- **Colombard**
- ***Note:*** *Baco 22A is the only hybrid grape allowed in the French AOC system. It contributes a rich, earthy and prune-like note to the final brandy.*

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Regions

There are 3 main regions in Armagnac:

- ***Bas Armagnac***
- ***Ténarèze***
- ***Haut-Armagnac***
  - Rarely used for brandies.



Carta dei crus dell'AOC Armagnac – CC license – author Pinyaev

Distillation

Armagnac is typically produced in a unique single column still called an ***alambic Armagnaçais***. It comes off the still at a lower strength (60% abv) than Cognac, producing a spirit that tends to be a little more rustic in nature. Copper pots stills such as those used in Cognac are allowed but most producers choose not to use them.

Maturation

Armagnac must be aged in cask for a minimum of 1 year. The newly made spirit is first aged in new oak before being transferred to older oak barrels to allow the flavours to mellow. ***Limousin*** oak is often used along with a local black oak called ***Monlezun*** which can give an unique aroma to the brandies.

- **Ageing Designations**

  The designations below represent the minimum age allowed in the blend.

AGEING TERM	YEARS
Blanche	Unaged
VS or ***	1 year
VSOP	4 years
XO or Napoléon	6 years
Hors d'Age	10 years
Vintage	10 years

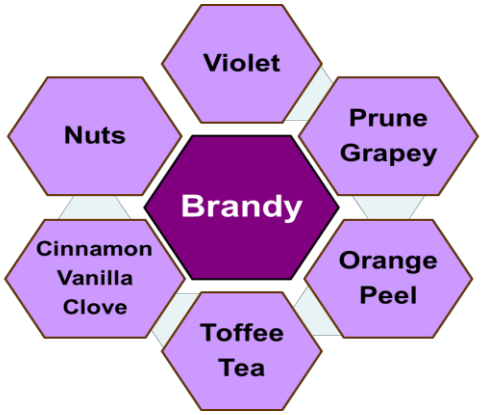
- ***Note:*** *Blanche Armagnac is a new unaged style that is stored in inert containers for a few months before bottling. The ageing designations above do not apply to this style.*

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Brandy de Jerez

Brandy de Jerez is produced in the town of Jerez, Spain in southern Spain (also famous for its Sherry wines). It is the number one selling brandy in the UK. It is based on the white Airén grape grown in La Mancha in central Spain. Pot still is used for the premium brandies and they are aged in ex-Sherry butts in the solera system. Brandy de Jerez is a rich style with flavours of warm spiced toffee and a hint of sweetness.

Brandy Flavour Wheel





Other Grape-Based Spirits

Pisco

Pisco is a grape brandy made in Chile and Peru that is typically unaged. Both countries use a high proportion of aromatic grapes such as Muscat which gives the spirit a perfumed and floral character. Each country will have a different style and slightly different production methods.

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Grappa

Grappa has been part of Italian culture since the 14th century and may only be called *grappa* when it is made in Italy. It is a spirit produced from the grape pomace (***vinaccia***) left over after fermentation. Most grappa is unaged and can be produced from a single variety or a blend of varieties. Aromatic grapes such as Muscat and Gewurztraminer make for excellent single variety grappa.

Grappa Production

Grape Pomace

The pomace used must be fresh, moist and of quality to avoid any off flavours in the final spirit. White and red grape pomace is handled differently.

- **White Pomace**
  As with white wine production, the white grape skins will not have undergone fermentation because the juice is pressed from the skins prior to fermentation. Therefore, the distiller must add water and yeast to the skins to allow fermentation to happen first. Then skins may then be distilled.

- **Red Pomace**
  The pomace will contain alcohol from the previous red wine fermentation. It can be sent for distillation immediately.

Distillation

Most grappa stills will have a type of basket inserted to ensure the grape pomace does not stick to the inside of the still while being heated. Grappa may be produced in a pot or column still.

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Other Fruit-Based Spirits

Calvados

Calvados is an apple-based spirit from Normandy, France. Records of production date back to 1533. It is closer in style to an aged grape brandy. Calvados is aged in oak and has similar ageing designations to those in Cognac.

Calvados Production

Apples and Pears



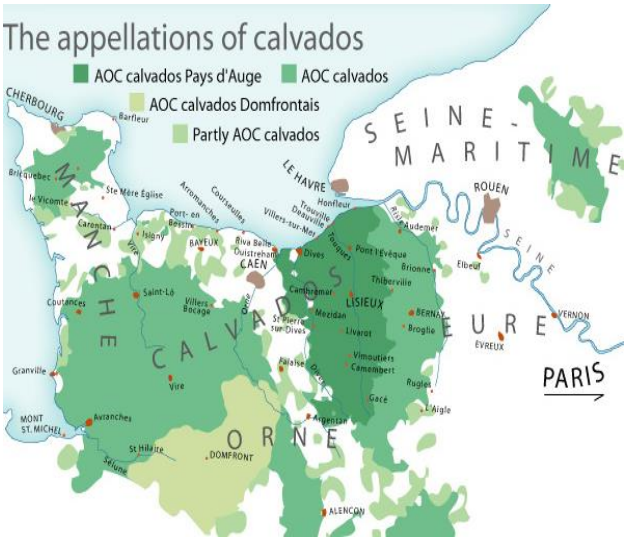
Calvados is made primarily from apples, but Perry pears may be added to the blend. Several different apple varieties are used, but they are divided into categories not varieties. These four categories are:

- ***Acidic and sour***
- ***Bitter-sour***
- ***Bittersweet***
- ***Sweet***

Regions

There are 3 appellations in Calvados:

- ***Calvados***
  Covers most of Normandy
- ***Calvados Pays d'Auge***
  Smaller centre in Normandy
- ***Calvados Domfrontais***
  Western edge of Normandy



Fermentation

Apples are harvested and crushed to release the juice. Only natural wild yeast is used for fermentation. Once fermented the juice produces a cider of 6% abv.

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Distillation

For production of basic Calvados AOC, a pot or column still may be used. For **Calvados Pays d'Auge**, only double distillation using a copper pot still is allowed. These stills are very similar in style to the *charentai*s stills used in Cognac.

Maturation

The new spirit is aged in ***Tronçais*** or ***Limousin*** oak.

- **Ageing Designations**

  The designations below represent the minimum age allowed in the blend.

AGEING TERM	YEARS
VS or ***	2 years
Vieux-Reserve	3 years
VSOP or VO	4 years
Napoléon	6 years
XO or Hors d'Age	10 years

Eau de Vie

Eau de Vie are fruit-based spirits from Alsace, Germany, Austria, and central Europe. The aim is to capture the pure essence of the fruit. These spirits are unaged and are clear in colour.

Common Eau du Vie Spirits

- ***Kirsch (cherry)***
- ***Mirabelle (yellow plum)***
- ***Poire William (pear)***
- ***Framboise (raspberry)***







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Gin



Originally produced in Holland, juniper-based elixirs date back to the 14th century. It was common practice to add botanicals to alcohol not only for medical purposes but also to cover up any harsh flavours. In 1689, King William of Orange from Holland ascended to the British throne. His ascension, along with the existing ban on French goods, ensured gin would take Britain by storm! To distill gin, all one had to do was post a public notice. This backstreet distilling resulted in the "gin craze" of the early 18th century. Gin became the comfort of the poor to ease the hardships and living conditions at the time. In 1751, British parliament granted exclusive production to a few large distillers to bring the matter under control.



Gin Production

Base Material

Gin producers use a high-strength (96% abv), neutral grain-based spirit. This spirit is then redistilled with botanicals. All gin must be juniper dominant in flavour.

Botanicals

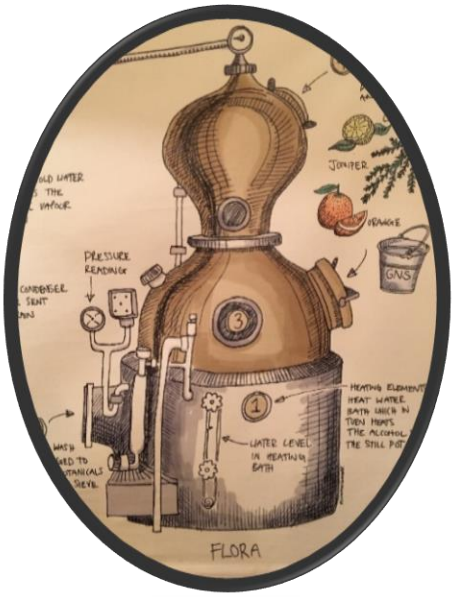
- *Juniper*
- *Coriander Seed*
- *Angelica Root*
- *Orris Root*
- *Dried Citrus Peel*
- *Black Pepper*







- ***Note:** Every brand will have its own recipe. Only the distiller and his apprentice will know the exact ingredients and proportions!*



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Distillation

It is impossible to distill a high strength neutral spirit of 96% abv. Water is therefore added to bring the spirit down to 60% abv for distilling. The final spirit is collected at a strength of 80% abv. Distilling takes place in a copper pot still in the presence of botanicals. Some producers will use a basket inserted into the neck of the still to hold the botanicals. This is referred to as a ***Carterhead*** still. **Bombay Sapphire,** for example**,** uses a ***Carterhead*** still.

Once distilled the gin will be cut with water for a bottling strength of 40% abv.

Styles of Gin

- **London Dry Gin**
  This is a light pure style which can be produced anywhere. No flavours or sweeteners may be added. It must be distilled with botanicals and be juniper dominant.
- **Plymouth Gin**
  Similar style to a London Dry Gin but must be from Plymouth.
- **Distilled Gin**
  Must be distilled with botanicals but may add natural flavours after distillation.
- **Gin with Added Flavours**
  Juniper flavours are added to a high strength neutral spirit.
- **Key Brands:** Gordon's – Beefeater – Tanqueray – Bombay Sapphire – Hendrick's



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Genever

Like Gin, Genever is a juniper-flavoured spirit. Production is limited to Belgium, Netherlands and northern France. Distillers use a low strength grain spirit called ***moutwijn*** which gives Genever a rich and slightly oily texture. Some styles may be oak aged.

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Vodka



There is little historical material available to pinpoint the exact origin and beginning of vodka although it is known to have originated in Eastern Europe. The first written document using the term vodka dates as far back to 1405 in Poland, but legend has that a monk in Russia started producing "bread wine" in 1430. By the end of the 16th century large scale production had started in Poland. The term vodka stems from the Russian word "***voda***" meaning water.

Vodka Production

Base Material

Vodka is a high strength neutral spirit typically produced from grains, although it can be made from anything containing starch or fermentable sugars. As of 2008, however, any producer using base materials other than grain or potato must state otherwise on the label.

The goal of the vodka producer is to let some of the character of the base material show through but at the same time not to have it too flavourful. This way, vodka is ideal for mixing in cocktails.

- **Wheat**
  Gives a smooth texture with a hint of anise. **Absolut** and **Grey Goose.**
- **Rye**
  A zesty citric note with a spicy bite on the finish. **Belvedere**.
- **Barley**
  Light in character with a crisp, clean finish**. Finlandia.**
- **Potato**
  Fuller in body with a creamy texture. **Luksusowa** and **Chopin.**



Distillation

Continuous stills are needed to produce such a highly rectified spirit like vodka. It can be redistilled several times for purity and by law will come off the still at a minimum high strength of 95% abv.



Maturation

Nearly all vodka is unaged.

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Finishing

Most vodka will undergo charcoal filtration for purity. The alcohol is then cut with water to bottling strength. With vodka being somewhat of a neutral spirit, the purity and quality of the water added for dilution is essential. Some producers may add limited amounts of glycerol or sugar to add to the texture and mouthfeel.

Flavoured Vodkas

Traditional

Old recipes using herbs and berries.

- **Zubrówka** from Poland is an traditional style using bison grass.

Modern

Premium vodkas will use natural fruit flavours that have been infused into the spirit. Cheaper brands may use artificial flavouring agents.



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Rum



Christopher Columbus introduced sugar cane into the Caribbean in 1493. Rum began as a by-product of the sugar cane industry and by the middle of the 17th century most Caribbean sugar mills had distilleries tacked on. There are old documents found in Jamaica discussing the fiery drink they called **"*rumbullion*"** and "***kill-divil*".**



Rum first became industrialized in Cuba in 1862 by Don Facundo Bacardí. In 1960, the Bacardi company was exiled during the communist takeover in Cuba. Foresight on their part allowed the brand to survive as they relocated their main headquarters to Bermuda. To this day, **Bacardi** remains the number one selling rum in the world.

Rum Production

Rum can be made anywhere in the world, but it must be produced from sugar cane juice or molasses.

- **Sugar Cane**
  Sugar cane is a tall, grassy plant that thrives in tropical climates. The canes are harvested, and juice is obtained by crushing the stems in a mill. As sugar cane juice contains sucrose (sugar) there is no conversion needed for fermentation to happen. When rum is produced from sugar cane juice it is called ***rhum agricole.*** This style originates from the French islands of Martinique and Haiti.



- **Molasses**
  Most rum is produced from molasses which is the product left over after the crystalized sugar has been extracted from the juice. This is achieved through a boiling and centrifugal process.



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Fermentation

In the production of a molasses-based rum, the molasses is cut with water before fermentation as it is too high in sugar for the yeast to survive. It is generally cut with a ratio of 50 % molasses to 50% water but will vary depending on the style of rum.



- **Light Rum**
  Molasses will be cut with more water followed with a shorter fermentation.
- **Heavy Rum**
  Molasses is cut with less water and a longer fermentation is used for better creation of esters and flavour.

Distillation

By using different methods of distillation, producers can create several different styles of rum for blending. This can be done by using a variety of stills and collecting the final spirit at different strengths. Some of these rums will be destined for oak ageing. An amber rum can be created by blending a lighter rum with an older aged rum.

- **Light Rum**
  Column still and collected at a **higher** alcohol strength.
- **Heavy Rum**
  Pot still and collected at a **lower** alcohol strength.

Maturation

The Caribbean has a warm climate with ample humidity. This results in accelerated ageing with a high evaporation rate giving pronounced extraction of oak flavours in a short period of time. One year of tropical ageing in the Caribbean is the equivalent of three years ageing in a cooler climate such as Scotland. Some producers ship their rums to cooler climates for a slower maturation. Rum is typically aged in ex-Bourbon casks.



Finishing

Colour is not a good indicator of whether a rum has been oak aged or not. Some lighter rums may be charcoal filtered to remove any colour after ageing in oak. Some heavier rums may have a hefty dose of spirit caramel added to adjust the colour.

Caramel and any added sweetening agents are one of the last steps prior to bottling. The rum will then be diluted with water to bottling strength.

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Styles of Rum

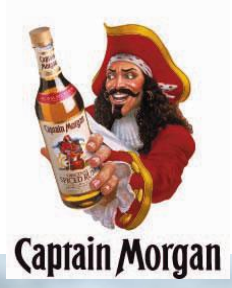
- **White**
  The relatively light body with light to medium intensity of flavours makes these rums ideal for mixing in cocktails. Most white rums are unoaked, but some producers will age in oak for a period and filter the colour out later.

- **Amber**
  These rums will have some colour and flavour from time spent in oak. They may also be a blend of older and lighter rums.

- **Dark**
  These are aged longer than the amber rums. Long term oak ageing will contribute rich sweet spices on the palate along with flavours of dried tropical fruits, fig, and raisin.

- **Navy**
  A blend of dark rums will be used as a base for Navy rum. Many of these will have a hefty dose of spirit caramel added for colouring.
  - **Key Brands:** Lamb's - Pusser's

- **Spiced**
  An amber or dark rum base is used which is then flavoured by the addition of spices and is sweetened. These are usually flavoured with sweet vanilla, clove, and cinnamon.
  - **Key Brands:** Captain Morgan's Spiced Rum - Sailor Jerry Spiced Rum



Country Styles of Rum



- **Barbados**
  Elegant and fruity, Barbadian rums are mostly an amber colour.
  - **Key Brand:** Mount Gay

- **Latin American**
  A style originating from Cuba that encompasses lighter and amber rums.
  - **Key Brands:** Bacardi - Havana Club

- **Jamaica**
  Jamaican rums have a high ester content and are known for being full bodied with pungent aromas. Long fermentations along with pot stills are used to create more concentrated flavours for this richer style of rum.
  - **Key Brand:** Appleton Estate

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- **Guyana**
  Guyana is one of the world's largest sugar producers. Guyanese rum has long been used as the base for Navy rum. These rums are medium to dark coloured with rich and spicy flavours. They are often known as Demerara rums after the Demerara sugar.
    - **Key Brand:** El Dorado

- **French Antilles Islands**
  These are cane juice *rhum agricole* with a very distinctive grassy taste that is similar in flavour to Cachaça. *Rhum* is the French word for rum.
    - **Key Brand:** Clément

Cachaça

Brazil is a huge sugar cane producer. Cachaça is a cane juice based spirit that is typically unaged. There is a grassy vegetal note to this spirit and the majority is sold locally. Caipirinha is Brazil's national cocktail, made with cachaça, sugar and lime.

Rum Flavour Wheel





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Whiskies

Scotch Whisky



All Scotch is an oak-aged spirit produced from cereal grains that must be produced and aged in Scotland for a **minimum of three years**. If states a region is stated on the label, the whisky must be distilled in that region. There are two main categories of Scotch: **Blended Scotch** and **Single Malt**.

- **Blended Scotch**

  Blended Scotch is the largest category for sales. These whiskies offer the consumer a smooth texture with hints of toffee and peat at an affordable price. Grain whisky is blended with single malt whiskies to create a branded house style.
  - **Key Brands**: Johnnie Walker - Famous Grouse - Ballantine's

- **Single Malt**

  Single malts are made from 100% malted barley from one distillery. They are high quality Scotch whiskies with an age statement typically on the label. Note that the age statement represents the youngest whisky in the blend. Single malt whiskies can be very distinct in style and may not always appeal to the broader palate. Within the single malt category there are stylistic differences based on where they originate in Scotland.

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Single Malt Scotch

Production Steps

Malting - *Barley is soaked in steeps*
Spread on malting floor to become green malt
Dried in peat fired kiln

Milling - *Dried barley is ground into grist*

Mashing - *Grist mixed with hot water in mashtun*
Creates sugary liquid called wort

Fermentation - *Yeast is added to the wort*
Eats sugars to convert to 7-10% abv = wash

First Distillation - *Distilled in wash still to 28% abv*
Called the low wines

Second Distillation - *Distilled in spirit still to 70% abv*
Foreshots (heads) and feints (tails) removed

Maturing - *Aged in ex-Sherry or ex-Bourbon cask for min. of 3 years*

Blending - *Casks blended for style and age statements*

Finishing - *Diluted to bottling strength*
Spirit caramel for colour may be added here

Bottling

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Single Malt Scotch Production



Barley

Barley has a high starch content and contains the needed enzymes to help convert the starch into fermentable sugars. This is done through the malting process.



Peat

Peat is partially carbonized vegetation that was once used as a fuel source. It is cut from the earth in grids and then allowed to dry. When burnt at a low temperature peat will give off a sweet smoke that coats the outside of the barley grain. This gives a wide range of aromas and flavours to the whisky from seaweed to smoke to forest floor and floral notes. This is referred to as ***"peat reek".***

Malting



1. The barley grains are soaked in water. This breaks down the outer walls of the barley to help unlock the enzymes in the core. This process is called the ***steeps.***

2. After the grains have been soaked, they are spread out onto a malting floor to allow the barley to germinate. When the barley has started to sprout it is then called ***green malt.***



The barley is moved to a kilning floor which is sometimes fired by peat. The warmth and smoke from the kiln arrest the germination by drying out the barley and the smoke adheres to the outside of the barley grain. This gives the whisky its ***peaty*** note.

***Note:* most distilleries now buy their barley from a commercial maltster. The malting company will take care of the three steps mentioned above.**

Milling

Once the barley is dried it is ground into a ***grist.*** The grist consists of flour and barley husks.



Photo Credit: Malcolm Manners

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Mashing



The ***grist*** is mixed with hot water in a vessel called a ***mash tun.*** This activates the enzymes in the barley to help convert the starch into fermentable sugars. Once the mashing is complete, a sweet sugary liquid is left over and is called the ***wort.***

Fermentation

1. The sweet ***wort*** is cooled and moved into a fermentation vessel called a ***wash back.*** These are often made of wood.

2. Cultured yeast is added to the cooled ***wort.***



Fermentation can last from 48 hours to 5 days depending on the distillery. A shorter fermentation creates a malty and nutty flavour whereas a long fermentation will contribute a floral and fruity note to the whisky**.** The completed fermentation will produce an alcoholic liquid of 7-10% abv that is similar in style to a beer. This liquid is called the ***wash.***

Distillation

1. Single malt Scotch whisky is **double-distilled** in large copper pot stills. As with Cognac, copper works as a conductor of heat and helps remove any unwanted sulphur compounds from fermentation.



2. **First Distillation**

Takes place in a ***wash still***. The spirit will come off the first distillation at 23 – 28% abv. It is now called ***low wines.***

3. **Second Distillation**

The ***low wines*** are transferred to the ***spirit still***. The heads (***foreshots***) and tails (***feints***) are removed. The heart of the spirit is collected at 70-72% abv.

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Maturation

All whisky in Scotland must be aged for a minimum of three years by law. 70% of the flavour in a whisky comes from the time spent ageing in wood.



Oak – Scotch is typically aged in ex-Bourbon barrels or ex-Sherry butts. Bourbon barrels give rich wood spice and vanilla notes to the whisky. Sherry will contribute characters of fruitcake, raisin, and nuttiness.

An age statement on the label (e.g. 12 years) will represent the youngest whisky in the blend.



Casks maturing in Islay, Scotland

Blending

Each cask filled with whisky will mature a bit differently depending on the age of the barrel and where the cask is situated in the warehouse. Blending the casks is essential for consistency of flavour and to create a house style. The master blender will take a range of casks from various ages to blend and create their brand. For example, a 12-year single malt whisky should always represent the distillery style and be similar in flavour to the last bottle purchased.

Finishing

Once the whisky has been blended it will go through the finishing process before bottling. Most whiskies are filtered, and water then added to bring the alcohol content down to bottling strength. Major brands will adjust the colour with spirit caramel.

Note: *The spirit caramel does not change the flavour profile of the whisky. It only ensures a uniform colour between bottlings.*

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Regions



- **Highland and Island**

The Highlands encompass a large area in Northern Scotland including some of the islands, Orkney Isle in particular. Highlands and Islands whisky tends to be rich, fruity, and spicy.

- **Key Brands**: The Dalmore - GlenDronach
- **Islands:** Highland Park (Orkney Isles) - Talisker (Isle of Skye)

- **Speyside**

Speyside has the greatest concentration of distilleries and is home to the famous Whisky Trail that follows the river Spey. Speyside is technically located in the Highlands, so producers can use the term Speyside or Highland on their label.

- **Key Brands:** Glenfiddich – Glenlivet – Glenfarclas - The Macallan

- **Lowland**

There are only a few distilleries producing single malt whiskies in the Lowlands. Most of the grain distilleries are located here. Lowland single malts tend to be quite floral and light in style. The use of peat in these whiskies is rare.

- **Key Brands:** Auchentoshan

- **Islay**

The island of Islay produces a very distinctive style of Scotch. The peat sourced on the island contains a high proportion of marine vegetation giving the whiskies a distinctive seaweed, iodine and campfire note.

- **Key Brands:** Lagavulin - Laphroaig – Ardbeg - Bowmore

- **Campbeltown**

Campbeltown once had a high proportion of single malt distilleries. Now it is home to just three. The whisky here tends to have a slight salty tang.

- **Key Brands:** Springbank - Glen Scotia

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Blended Scotch



Accounts for the majority of Scotch whisky sales. More than one grain will be used in the blend, most commonly wheat or corn. Grain whisky has an important role in flavour and there can be anywhere from four to forty whiskies in the blend.

Blended Scotch Production



Grains

This will be a mix of malted barley and other grains, mainly corn and wheat. Ten percent of malted barley will be added to provide the enzymes needed for conversion.

Conversion

The grains will be pressure cooked to release the starch before being mixed with hot water in a ***mash tun.*** The liquid ***(wort)*** will then be moved to the ***wash back*** where yeast will be added to allow fermentation to take place.

Distillation

This will take place in a column still to produce a high strength spirit.

Maturation

All whisky in Scotland must be aged for a minimum of three years in oak casks by law.

Blending

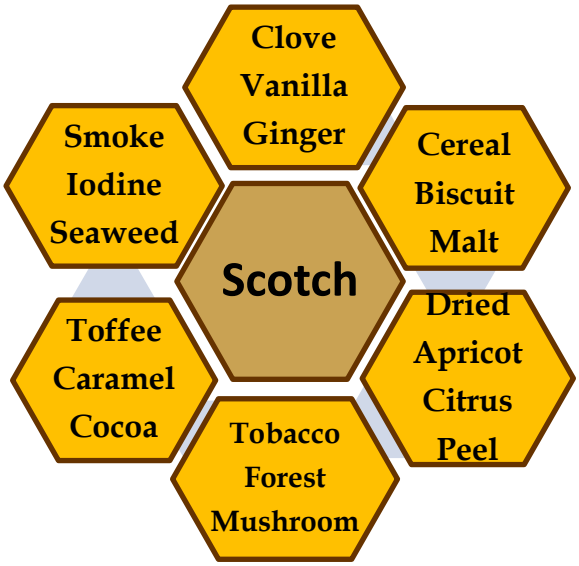
Grain whiskies are used primarily for blending to produce a Blended Scotch whisky.

Scotch Whisky Labelling Terms

TERMS	DESCRIPTION
Single Malt	Malted barley from a single distillery
Single Grain	Blend of grains from a single distillery
Blended Malt	Blend of single malts from a few distilleries
Blended Scotch	Blend of single malts and grain whisky

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Scotch Flavour Wheel





Irish Whiskey

It is believed that Irish monks brought the technique of distilling perfumes back to Ireland from their travels to the Mediterranean around 1000 A.D. The oldest written records of Irish whiskey date back to 1405. **Bushmills** was founded in 1784 and claims to be the oldest surviving licensed distillery in the world.

In 1880 there were more than 160 distilleries in Ireland but by the middle of the 20th century there were only three remaining. Factors that led to the decline of Irish whiskey consisted of Prohibition in the United States in 1920 (until then Ireland's strongest export market) followed by a trade war in Britain and the outbreak of World War Two in 1939.

Nowadays, Irish whiskey is the fastest growing spirits category in the world. From only four distilleries in 2003, there are now 16 in operation with more to come. The rise and fall and rise again of Irish whiskey!

Irish whiskey is a great introduction into whiskey. Gentle with a creamy smooth texture it offers aromas of honey, spring flowers, and toffee spice. Irish whiskey is made from a blend of grains and must be produced and aged in Ireland for **three years**. Although the aging requirement is the same as Scotch whisky, the classic point of difference is that most Irish whiskies use no peat in their production and are triple-distilled.

As a noted point, Irish whiskey is spelt with an "e" along with American whiskey. Whereas Scotland, Japan, India and Canada do not spell whisky with the "e". An easy way to remember this is if the country of production has an "e" in the country name (Ireland and United States) then it is spelt as whiskey!

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Irish Whiskey Production

Grains

Irish whiskey must include malted barley and unmalted barley but may also include other cereal grains such as corn, rye, or wheat. Each type of Irish whiskey will have different legal requirements which is covered below under styles. Most Irish whiskies do not use peated barley.

Distillation

Although Irish whiskey is commonly triple-distilled it is not a legal requirement. Both pot and continuous stills may be used except in the case of a pot still Irish whiskey. When triple distillation is used it creates a smooth, light and elegant whiskey.

Maturation

All Irish whisky must be aged in oak for a minimum of three years in Ireland. Both ex-Bourbon and Sherry casks will be used.

Irish Whiskey Styles



- **Malt**
  Made using 100% malted barley and must be distilled in pot stills. Single malt whiskey comes from only one distillery.
  - **Key Brands:** Connemara Peated Single Malt - Bushmills Single Malt

- **Pot Still**
  Pot still Irish whiskey is made from using a minimum of malted and unmalted barley with other cereal grains. It must be distilled in pot stills. The unmalted barley is an essential ingredient of an ***Irish Pot Still*** whiskey as it gives both a spicy flavor and a distinct creamy mouthfeel.
  - **Key Brands:** Redbreast - Green Spot

- **Grain**
  Grain Irish whiskey is made using no more than 30% malted barley in combination with other unmalted cereals (corn, wheat, or barley) and must be distilled in a column still. ***Single Grain*** whiskey means it comes from only one distillery.
  - **Key Brands**: Teeling Single Grain

- **Blended**
  A mixture of any two or more of the styles of malt, pot still, and grain whiskey.
  - **Key Brands:** Jameson – Bushmills - Powers

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Irish Whiskey Labelling Terms

TERMS	DESCRIPTION
Single Malt	Malted barley from a single distillery using pot still
Single Grain	Blend of grains from a single distillery using column still
Single Pot Still	Malted and unmalted barley from a single distillery using pot still
Blended	Blend of two or more styles (malt, pot still, grain)

Irish Whiskey Flavour Wheel





Bourbon

Bourbon can be produced anywhere in the United States, but Kentucky is the only state that can put its name on the label. European settlers immigrated to America in the 17th century, bringing with them the technique of distilling. Originally rye was used as a base ingredient for American spirits but as settlers moved to Kentucky, they found corn was plentiful. Bourbon has gone through a few stylistic changes from big and flavourful prior to Prohibition (1920-1933) to the post World War Two preference of lighter spirits to the 1980s when tastes reverted to the big, flavourful, and rich whiskies we see today.

Bourbon Production

Mash Bill

The mix of grains used in the production of Bourbon is referred to as the ***mash bill***. All Bourbon must use a minimum of 51% corn in the mash bill. Rye, wheat, and malted barley may be added.

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Conversion



Corn is ground into a flour and cooked at a high temperature with water before adding other grains. Malted barley will be added to aid in conversion. Once cooked, the mash will then be pumped into a fermentation vessel with **backset**.

Sour Mash (Backset)

Sour mash is the acidic liquid residue left at the base of the still after the first distillation. Sour mash (backset) is added during the fermentation of the mash to balance pH and aids to fight off any bacterial infection.

Fermentation

Yeast is highly regarded in the Bourbon industry and each distillery will culture their own yeast strain. Fermentation will last two to three days.



Ken Thomas - KenThomas.us

Distillation

- **First Distillation**:
  Takes place in a single column still called a ***beer still***. The resulting spirit comes off the still at 50 – 60% abv. Liquid residue that is left at the bottom of the still will be used as the backset (sour mash).
- **Second Distillation:**
  This takes place in a pot still called a ***doubler.*** The new make spirit must come off the second distillation under 80% abv (160 proof). This spirit is then referred to as "***white dog***".



Maturation

Bourbon must be aged in new charred American oak by law. An age statement is only required on a label when it has been under aged less than four years. The ageing takes place in large warehouses.

Finishing

By law, Bourbon is not allowed to be colour adjusted with spirit caramel before bottling. Barrels are blended for house style and then water will be added to bring it down to a bottling strength of 45% abv (90 proof).

- **Key Brands:** Jim Beam - Maker's Mark - Woodford Reserve - Wild Turkey

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Tennessee Whiskey



This whiskey must come from the state of Tennessee. It is produced like a Bourbon using a minimum of 51% corn in the mash bill. The difference between a Bourbon and Tennessee whiskey is the use of the ***Lincoln County Process*** which is covered below.

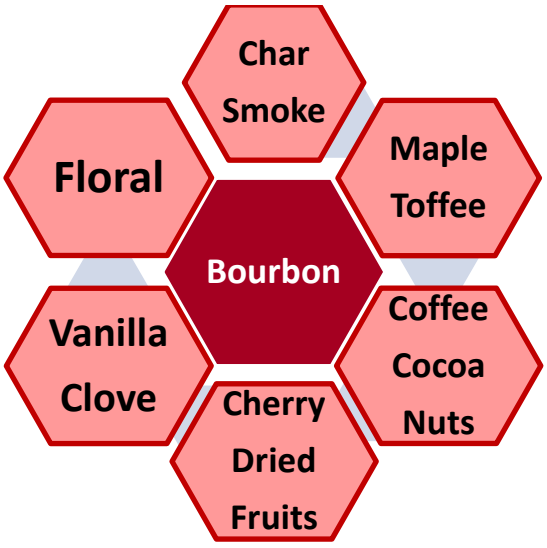
- **Key Brands:** Jack Daniel's

Tennessee Whiskey Production

Lincoln County Process

The new make spirit is filtered through a bed of freshly burnt sugar-maple charcoal before being sent to age in barrel. This removes any impurities and contributes a smoky sweetness to the whiskey.

Bourbon Flavour Wheel





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Other Whiskies

Canadian Whisky



A blend of grains is used for most Canadian whiskies although 100% rye whisky is becoming popular. Canadian whiskies are typically soft and easy drinking although the trend is for longer wood ageing and more flavourful styles akin to Bourbon. **Crown Royal** is the number one selling Canadian whisky worldwide and is a rich and flavourful whisky dominated by wood spice.
Key Brands: Crown Royal - Canadian Club - Forty Creek

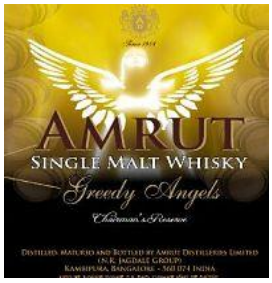
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Japanese Whisky



Japanese whisky was first distilled in 1923 at Suntory's Yamazaki distillery. Following a Scotch template, Japanese whisky uses the same method of production. Japanese whisky differs in style from Scotch whisky as it offers delicate and clean, crisp flavours.
Key Brands: Nikka - Suntory

ウィキ太郎 (Wiki Taro)



Indian Whisky

India is a huge whisky drinking nation. Most Indian whisky cannot be sold in Europe as whisky as molasses is often used as a base material. Better quality whiskies are produced like a Scotch whisky using 100% malted barley. Any peat being used will be purchased from Scotland or pre-smoked barley may be used.
Key Brands: Officer's Choice – Amrut - Paul John

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Tequila



Fermented agave beverages have long been consumed in Mexico, but it was the Spanish who introduced the practice of distillation in the 16th century. In 1795, the first license to distill was awarded to José **Cuervo** and in the late 1870's Don **Sauza** exported the first Tequila. Today these companies remain as two of the largest brands on the market.



Tequila is an agave-based spirit that must be grown and distilled in one of five regions in Mexico. More than 95% is produced around the town of Tequila in the state of Jalisco.

Key Brands: Jose Cuervo; Sauza; Patron; Cazadores

Tequila Production



Agave

The agave plant belongs to the succulent family and is not related to the cactus species. There are many different agave species in Mexico, but it is only the ***blue agave*** that can be used in the production of Tequila.

- ***Note:*** *If the Tequila does not state 100% agave on the label it is labeled as a* ***mixto****. Other ingredients, such as corn-bases syrups, may be used to produce mixto.*



Harvesting

Agave plants reach maturation between 7 - 10 years. They are harvested by cutting off the outer leaves to expose the piña which is packed with the carbohydrate ***inulin.*** Plants used for premium Tequila will be harvested at ten years whereas those destined for basic styles will be harvested earlier at seven years.

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Cooking



The cooking process softens the hard piña core and converts the ***inulin*** into fermentable sugars. The piña can be cooked in either slow bake ovens or pressurized cookers. Once cooked, the flavour is similar to that of a cooked sweet potato. After cooking the piñas are left to rest for 2 days and liquified sugars, called ***aguamiel***, will collect at the bottom. Much the same as when baking a yam or sweet potato, the caramelized sugars will be released. The ***aguamiel*** will later be blended with the cooked agave juice prior to fermentation.



Milling

The soft cooked agave is crushed to release the sweet sugars, leaving behind a fibrous mass. The crushing process was traditionally done using a large stone grinding wheel called a ***tahona***. Nowadays most distilleries will use a cutter/shredder to extract the juice.

Fermentation

Fermentation will occur in stainless steel or wooden vats. For a 100% agave Tequila, the milled agave juice will be mixed with ***aguamiel.*** For cheaper ***mixto*** Tequilas, other sugars such a corn-based syrups may be added to the agave juice.

Distillation

For 100% agave Tequila, double distillation in copper pot stills is used. For ***mixto*** Tequilas a continuous still is typically used.

Finishing

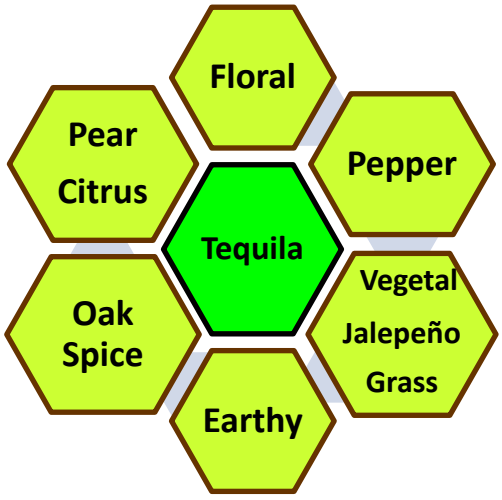
For gold (oro) Tequila, spirit caramel is added to adjust the colour. The aged Tequilas are matured in ex-Bourbon cask.

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Tequila Ageing Designations and Labelling Terms

TERMS	DESCRIPTION
Blanco (Silver)	Unaged
Gold (Oro)	Coloured with spirit caramel
Reposado	Aged a minimum of 2 months in oak
Añejo	Aged a minimum of 1 year in oak
Muy Añejo	Aged a minimum of 3 years in oak

Tequila Flavour Wheel





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Mezcal

Mezcal is a hand-crafted artisanal type of spirit which can be made from any of the agave species. It does not have a delimited region of production such as Tequila and can be produced anywhere in Mexico.

Mezcal Production

Harvesting

The harvesting of agave for mezcal is the same as for Tequila.

Cooking

The cooking process differs from the methods used in Tequila. The piñas are placed in rock-lined pits built into the ground for roasting and then covered with earth. This takes 2 - 5 days and contributes to the unique smoky character found in a mezcal.

Milling

The soft cooked agave is crushed to release the sweet sugars. This is done by using a ***tahona*** as with traditional Tequila production.



Fermentation

Wild yeasts are used which creates a long fermentation that can last up to 30 days.

Distillation

Double distillation using small artisanal copper pots stills.

Maturation

Similar ageing and finishing techniques are used as in Tequila production, however mezcal is rarely aged. There is much less use of oak as the key is to preserve the smoky aromas from the roasted piñas.

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Anise Spirits



Anise flavoured spirits are made using a complex recipe of botanicals, but they all share a similar flavoring compound – ***anethole***. Anethole is found in anise, star anise, and fennel. It is the contributing factor to the distinct liquorice and anise flavour of these spirits. Anethole is not water soluble which is why spirits such as Pastis and Ouzo turn cloudy when water is added. This is called "***louching***".



Anise Spirit Production

Maceration

Each style of anise spirit will have their own method of production. The most common method involves taking a high strength neutral spirit and macerating with botanicals.

Distillation

After maceration the herb infused spirit is then diluted and redistilled.

Finishing

Natural colouring botanicals may be added before bottling. In the case of some cheaper Absinthes, artificial colouring may be added which can give the spirit an unnatural bright green glow.



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Styles of Anise Spirits

- **Absinthe (Worldwide)**



Absinthe's colourful history has contributed to its renewed success. It was hugely popular in the art culture of the 19th century until it was banned in both France and Switzerland in 1915. This is because wormwood, the key botanical in Absinthe, was thought to contribute to hallucinations. Although wormwood's properties are still a bit of a mystery, recent research has since disqualified these claims and bans have been lifted.

Wormwood is still the main ingredient in a true Absinthe. It gives a musky and floral aroma with a strong hit of bitterness on the palate. The wormwood with other botanicals are macerated in high strength alcohol for 24 hours before being diluted and redistilled. Absinthe is bottled as a high strength spirit.

- **Pastis (France):**

Pastis emerged onto the market in France after the ban on Absinthe. Star anise, fennel, and liquorice root are the dominate flavours. The herbs are distilled and percolated to extract flavour and aroma. It is then blended with alcohol and sweetened before bottling. **Pernod** is a brand of sweetened pastis.

  - **Key Brands:** Pernod - Ricard



Photo credit: Phoney







- **Ouzo (Greece):**

Ouzo may only be produced in Greece. Anise and other spices such as clove and cinnamon are macerated in a grape based spirit then redistilled in copper pot stills.



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Liqueurs



Liqueurs are spirits that have been sweetened, flavoured, and often coloured. They are medicinal in origin and were once a means of administering herbs. **Bols** in Amsterdam came out with the first commercial liqueur in 1575 and now offer the widest range of styles on the market. Some liqueurs like **Chartreuse** date back to 1605 and the monks are still involved in the everyday production. To this day the recipe is still a secret!

Liqueur Production

There are **three** main methods of production. All liqueurs are sweetened before bottling.

- **Maceration**
  Flavouring agents such as botanicals and fruits are macerated by infusion.

- **Distillation**
  Neutral spirit is diluted and redistilled with added flavouring agents.

- **Cold Compounding**
  Flavour essences are simply added to the spirit. This is only used for lesser quality liqueurs.



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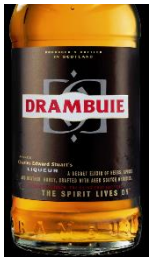
Types of Liqueurs

- **Fruit**

  Orange liqueurs dominate the fruit category. Each will vary depending on the spirit base and which type of orange is used (sweet or bitter). **Grand Marnier** macerates wild Caribbean oranges in neutral spirit before redistilling, afterwards it is blended with Cognac before bottling. **Cointreau** uses a neutral spirit with bitter and sweet orange peels.

  - **Key Brands:** Grand Marnier – Cointreau - Triple Sec





- **Herbal**

Herbal liqueurs are the oldest in origin. The recipe for **Drambuie** was created for Bonnie Prince Charlie in Scotland in the 18th century. It consists of aged Scotch whisky which is blended with cloves, a secret recipe of herbs, and sweetened with heather honey before bottling.

- **Key Brands:** Benedictine – Jägermeister – Chartreuse - Drambuie

- **Nuts and Beans**

  Both **Tia Maria** and **Kahlúa** were created in the 1930s**.** These are rum based coffee liqueurs infused with vanilla and both contain caffeine! Kahlúa is from Mexico and Tia Maria is originally from Jamaica.

  - **Key Brands:** Malibu (coconut) - Amaretto (almond and apricot pit)





- **Cream**

Cream liqueurs must be put through a stringent process to ensure the milk fats do not form lumps. **Baileys Irish Cream** is the original. Created in Dublin in 1974, it is now the world's best-selling liqueur.

- **Key Brands**: Baileys Irish Cream - Carolans Irish Cream - Amarula

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Glossary of Terms

Aguamiel
Aguamiel literally translates to "*honey water*". It is the sweet, sappy liquid that comes from the agave plant when cooked.

Anethole
An organic compound that can be found in many oils such as anise and fennel. Its primary function is as a flavouring substance.

Backset
See under **Sour Mash.**

Brouillis
A term used for the spirit coming off the first distillation in the production of Cognac.

Carterhead Still
Refers to a pot still that has a basket inserted into the neck of the still. This is used primarily in the production of gin. Vapours rise through the basket of botanicals and carry their essential oils. **Bombay** and **Hendrick's** both use a Carterhead still.

Esters
Esters are fruity aromas created during the fermentation process. A long fermentation will increase the ester content of a spirit.

Ethanol
Alcohol for human consumption. When a spirit says 40% abv on the label that represents 40% alcohol (ethanol) by volume.

Fermentation
Yeast will consume sugar in a liquid and turn it into ethanol alcohol. CO_2 will occur during fermentation.

Heads
The heads contain methanol and come off the still first. They are collected to be redistilled.

Heart
This is the middle cut of the spirit coming of the still in the final distillation. The heart contains the highest percentage of ethanol.

Inulin
The name for the carbohydrate located in the core of the agave plant. When cooked the inulin will turn into fermentable sugars.

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Lincoln County Process
Used in the production of Tennessee whiskey. The new make spirit is filtered through a bed of freshly burnt sugar-maple charcoal before being sent to age in barrel. This removes any impurities and contributes a smoky sweetness to the whisky.

Louching
Term to describe a spirit turning cloudy when water has been added. This is found in anise-based spirits that contain anethole which is not water soluble.

Low Wines
Term used in Scotland for spirit coming off the first distillation in a pot still.

Lyne Arm
Part of a pot still, it is the arm running from the head of the still to the condensing unit. Distillers can adjust the lyne arm to promote reflux.

Mash
Mix of grains used to produce a Bourbon or Tennessee whiskey. Often referred to as the *mash bill.*

Peat
Peat is decomposed vegetation which forms when plant material does not fully decay. It consists mainly of wetland vegetation. Historically it was (and still is) used as a fuel source in many countries. In whisky production, when the barley is dried over a peat-fired kiln it will give the whisky a smoky character often referred to as "*peat reek*".

Rectification
The more times something is distilled the more it is rectified, thus increasing the percentage of ethanol. A spirit coming off the still at 95% abv is highly rectified.

Reflux
As vapours rise the still during distillation some heat will be lost. These vapours will condense back into liquid only to be redistilled. Producers will often promote reflux by changing the angle of a lyne arm in a pot still or the shape of the still. This makes for a purer and more elegant spirit.

Sour Mash
Used in the production of Bourbon and Tennessee whiskey. Sour mash is the acidic liquid residue left at the base of the beer still after the first distillation. Often called *backset.* Sour mash (backset) is added during the fermentation of the mash to balance the pH and fight off bacterial infection.

Solera
The solera system is used primarily for the maturation of Sherry. It is a fractional blending system to ensure consistency of flavour and quality. Ex-Sherry butts (oak barrels) are often used for the maturation of whisky. Brandy de Jerez is aged in the solera system.

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Tails
The tails are the heaviest component coming off the still which is why they are last. The tails contain fusel oils which can make a spirit oily and stinky. These are collected to be redistilled.

Wash
The fermented base material prior to distillation.

Wormwood
Wormwood is an herb that is used in the production of Absinthe. It was originally used for its medicinal properties and was later thought to have contributed to hallucinations some experienced when drinking Absinthe. It has a musky and floral aroma but it is quite bitter in flavour.

Wort
The sugary liquid after the starch in the barley has been converted into fermentable sugars. This process happens in the mash tun.

Vinaccia
Term used for grape pomace in the production of grappa.

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