

Vodka power play

This team of high scorers is clearly in a league of its own

If there was a Stanley Cup for most popular spirit in America, then the reigning champion is vodka. Once inexpensive, this Eastern European-born alcohol has experienced an enormous league expansion, culminating in the creation of the high-priced ultra-premium vodka. These players, hailing from all over the globe, boast numerous distillations (to extract impurities from the prime ingredient) and undergo filtrations in state-of-the-art facilities to further cleanse the neutral spirit. Finally the high-quality water, often from exotic sources, is blended in. Most are 750 mL bottles, and each is rated on a 10-point scale. It's time to bring your vodka martini to the next level. Game on!

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SHOT ON LOCATION AT THE RED BANK ARMORY/ICE COMPLEX PHOTO RETOUCHING: JEFF COILSON

Chopin
(Poland / Potato)
True to vodka's origin, this is created from potatoes (it takes 40 to make one bottle). Full-bodied with a hint of sweet potato. Four times distilled.
Price: \$30
Rating: 9.5

Skyy 90
(U.S. / Wheat)
The wealthy relative to the blue-bottled Skyy, the 90 (named for its volatile proof) undergoes seven distillations at its \$25 million facility.
Price: \$37
Rating: 8.5

Jewel of Russia Ultra
(Russia / Rye & Wheat)
Silky, creamy and luxurious: a hat trick. Only 20,000 hand-painted, 1-liter bottles are imported yearly.
Price: \$75
Rating: 9.9

Siku Ultra
(Holland / Wheat)
Siku (appropriately "ice" in Greenlandic) blends water from a 60,000-year-old glacier with grain. Slight anise flavor.
Price: \$40
Rating: 9.0

Roberto Cavalli
(Italy / Wheat)
Italian grain filtered through crushed marble. The fashion icon strikes again.
Price: \$60
Rating: 9.2

Stolichnaya Elit
(Russia / Wheat)
A recipe served to the czars is the formula for Stoli's top of the line product.
Price: \$60
Rating: 8.8

Jean Marc XO
(France / Wheat)
Wheat from France's Cognac region faces nine distillations. Cinnamon notes.
Price: \$55
Rating: 9.7

Grey Goose
(France / Wheat)
The Wayne Gretzky of vodka. The first superstar by which other premium vodkas aspire.
Price: \$30
Rating: 9.2

Dębowa Polska Premium
(Poland / Rye)
Uniquely packaged in wood, a sliver of oak inside departs flavor to the rye-based ingredients. Earthy and vegetal.
Price: \$30
Rating: 8.7

Snow Leopard
(Poland / Spelt grain)
With 15% of the profits going to protecting its namesake, this is the spirit with a soul. Available early 2007 in the U.S.
Price: \$40
Rating: 9.0