

Part

1

Stepping Up to the Brass Rail

You might have the urge to go right to the recipes chapters in Part 2 and start mixing away, but hold on just a second. Before you do, wouldn't it be better to get the skinny on the sleek techniques that will crown you the Sir or Madam Mix-a-Lot of your friends and family? That's just what you'll learn in Part 1: how to shake, stir, blend, purée, muddle, mix, chill, pour, and prep. You'll also get a down-and-dirty, fast-fact lowdown on the major liquors that make up a basic bar—and a little history, too!

Chapter

1

Top Shelf: The Lowdown on Liquor

In This Chapter

- ◆ The basic makeup of spirits
- ◆ A short spirited history lesson
- ◆ Average prices from affordable to bank breakers

So you want to be the mixologist with the most, eh? Or if your ambitions are slightly less lofty, you at least want to be able to hold your own when hosting a party. Not a problem. You can do it, and I'm here to help. But the very, very first thing you need to do is this: learn your way around a liquor shelf. You can't mix up delectable drinks if you're unfamiliar with what, exactly, you're working with. It's all about the tools. In this chapter, study the main ingredients for your quaffing creations, a little history on their origins, and, because in the end it all comes down to your wallet, how much they cost.

Bourbon

Bourbon is an unblended American corn-based whiskey made from one or two different kinds of mash, which is the crushed, ground corn and other grain(s) used in the fermentation process. The mash is either sour or sweet. Sour mash is new sweet mash combined with some of the residue from the previous batch's fermentation. Sweet mash is made from scratch with fresh yeast.

Bourbon's rich, golden-tinged, dark-brown hue and distinctive ever-so-slightly sweet, woody flavor come from the minimum 2-year aging process in brand-new charred American oak casks, although many bourbons age as much as twice that long. (After the aging in the new oak casks is finished, the casks are never used again to age bourbon. Instead, they are often used to age Scotch whisky.) By law, to be considered bourbon, the liquor must be made from a minimum of 51 percent but no more than 79 percent corn and the rest wheat, rye, or other grains. The alcohol content can be no more than 160 *proof*, which is usually taken down to between 80 and 100 proof after the distilling



Liquor Lingo

The amount of alcohol in a spirit is measured by its **proof**. In the United States, proof translates into twice the percentage of alcohol, e.g., 100 proof bourbon contains 50 percent alcohol. In other countries, the measurements are slightly different.

process.

Bourbon takes its name from Bourbon County, Kentucky, where it was first produced and shipped down river to the original sin city, New Orleans. Before shipping, barrels were stamped with the corn whiskey's place of origin, and the name just stuck. Although today many bourbon distilleries exist outside Bourbon County, 90 percent of all bourbon still comes from the bluegrass state in Anderson, Franklin, Nelson, Woodford, and Jefferson counties.

Although the legal stipulations have to do with what's in it, as outlined above, some feel strongly that if it's not from Kentucky, it just

ain't bourbon. It's something else, like Tennessee whiskey, for instance. Many people make the mistake of calling Tennessee whiskey, like Jack Daniel's or George Dickel, bourbon. For one, the procedure used is different: part of the distilling process for Tennessee whiskey requires steeping the whiskey in charcoal vats, which gives it a much different flavor. Second, it's made in ... Tennessee! Not Kentucky. And if that's not enough proof for you, then maybe you'll take the federal government's word for it—they put Tennessee whiskey in its own, regulated category.

Thank Heaven for the Reverend

As with any story about the origins of a cocktail, the origins of liquor are at times equally as debated. In the tradition of the American tall tale, bourbon is no different. Here's the story I'm told: the first person to distill bourbon—or at least be recorded as the first person to distill



Cocktail Conversation

Heaven Hill Distilleries in Bardstown, Kentucky, makes a rare single barrel, 18 year aged bourbon named after the lovely liquor's founder-apparent, Elijah Craig.

bourbon because he was, in all likelihood, in the company of folks who could read and write—was the Reverend Elijah Craig.

Born in Virginia, Craig was a Baptist minister who gave his sermons all around the southland until he finally settled in Bourbon County, Kentucky, in the mid-1780s. Craig was an enterprising businessman, but it wasn't until he decided to store his corn-based whiskey in charred white-oak barrels that he became known as the inventor of that magical amber liquid, bourbon. Storing whiskey, which is clear after it's distilled, in the charred oak turned the local white lightening into a dark, rich, superior-tasting tippie.

Naming Names

Many fine bourbons are on the market. Some are reasonably priced and good for mixing cocktails. Others are sipping bourbons to be savored

and consumed neat (without ice) or on the rocks (with ice). Here are some names to know and their general price at press time.

Affordable	Mid-Range	Bank Breaker
Old Forester, \$15	Woodford Reserve, \$30	Elijah Craig Single Barrel, \$45
Wild Turkey, \$15	Knob Creek, \$32	Booker's 8 year, \$55
Elijah Craig Small Batch 12 Year, \$18	Maker's Mark, \$25	Jefferson Kentucky Bourbon, \$50

Gin

The original martini maker, this juniper berry–based spirit has a distinctive, herbal taste that seems to draw very clear-cut reactions from imbibers: they either love it or hate it.

The name is derivative of its main ingredient, from the Dutch word *jenever*. In fact, gin seems to have originated in Holland as well, although some argue that it was first made in Italy. Wherever you believe its origins are rooted, the creation process is the same. Gin is made when juniper berries are distilled with a grain mash usually made up of some or all of the following—corn, barley, rye, and wheat—and other flavors such as cassis, coriander, fennel, ginger, lemon peel, and a host of other special (and almost always unnamed for reasons of holding onto secret recipes) botanical flavorings.

For our purposes, I'm dividing gin into two main types/categories:

- ◆ **Dry gin.** Dry or London dry gin is generally around 80 to 90 proof and is the most common gin used in cocktail mixing and general bar requests. Ordering a gin and soda? The barkeep will use dry gin. Old Tom is a version of London dry that is given a little sweetness with simple syrup. Plymouth gin is a London dry that's not sweetened at all.
- ◆ **Dutch gin.** Dutch gin (a.k.a. Holland gin, genever, genievre, or Schiedam) is generally around 70 to 80 proof and is really more of a sipping gin with a malted grain flavor and aroma along with the juniper influence.

The Way It Was

The person responsible for putting the G in your G&T was Dr. Franciscus Sylvius, a seventeenth-century Dutch chemist at the University of Leyden. It was for medicinal purposes, not martinis, that Doc Sylvius concocted the elixir and added juniper berries to make it more palatable (sort of like cherry cough syrup and such). This so-called medicine became pretty darned popular with British soldiers embroiled in the Thirty Years War, who dubbed it “Dutch Courage.”

England’s taste for gin soared ever higher when King William III banned the import of French wine and other spirits (which wouldn’t be the last grumbling between France and England) and gin production soared. It became extraordinarily popular with the poor and working class; maybe a little too popular. In 1739, England enforced the Gin Act, which raised the cost of the spirit so much that the poor couldn’t afford it. But the will of the common man was too fierce for the social experiments of the educated—riots broke out and chaos ensued. Three short years later, the Gin Act was repealed and the millions of gallons of mother’s milk (a.k.a. gin) being produced flowed into the glasses of the common folk.

A Bin of Gin

For those who love the botanical beauty of gin, there are many lovely examples from which to choose in all price ranges and for mixing or sipping purposes. Here are some names to know and their general price at press time.

Affordable	Mid-Range	Bank Breaker
Beefeater, \$20	Plymouth, \$22	Old Raj, \$50
Gordon’s, \$13	Junìpero, \$30	Boodles, \$44
Seagram’s Extra Dry, \$14	Tanqueray, \$24	Tanqueray No. Ten, \$35
	Bombay Sapphire, \$30	

Rum

Rum. The word conjures up dreamy images of palm trees and sandy beaches and bluer-than-blue skies. You can almost hear the steel drums and the

waves lapping against the shores. And with good reason, as much of it is produced in the gentle lands of the West Indies and the Caribbean.

Rum is made from boiled-down sugarcane, which eventually goes through a few processes before it becomes molasses. The thick, pungent-sweet molasses is heated and combined with water and yeast during the distillation process, and the rum is then aged in oak barrels from 6 months to 7 years, depending on what the desired final product is. For instance, light and gold rums are aged from the minimum amount—6 months—up to 4 years. Dark rum gets a taste and color boost from the addition of caramel and an aging minimum of 3 years, although the process can go on as long as 12 years.

Rum comes in three general types—light bodied (white or silver), medium bodied (gold or amber), and heavy bodied (my favorite: dark!)—from several balmy and beautiful places, such as the following:

- ◆ **Jakarta.** Medium bodied. Known for the gorgeous elixir Batavia arak, which uses red rice from Java in the fermentation process along with the molasses and is aged for several years.
- ◆ **Guyana.** Medium bodied. Known for dark-hued rum with a high alcohol content called Demeraran rum.
- ◆ **Haiti.** Medium bodied. Haitian rum has a slightly different distillation technique, whereby the juice of the sugarcane is concentrated and distilled but not made into molasses.
- ◆ **Jamaica.** Heavy bodied. Dark, rich, and aged, this gorgeous, spicy rum gets a little extra coloring from its long aging process and extra added molasses.
- ◆ **Martinique.** Medium bodied. Like Haitian rum, light rum from Martinique is made from the juice of sugarcane.
- ◆ **Puerto Rico.** Light to medium bodied. Known for light and gold rums, and one of the most famous producers of it: Bacardi.
- ◆ **South America.** Light to medium bodied. Although South American countries produce several fine rums, often referred to as *aguardiente de caña*, the most popular here is cachaca, distilled from the juice of sugarcane and the rum to use in the delicious Brazilian delight, the Caipirinha.

- ◆ **The Virgin Islands.** Light-bodied. Known for light rums similar in style to Puerto Rican rums.

There are, of course, flavored rums, too, such as coconut, lemon, spiced, and lime. These are fine for mixing purposes (although, I prefer to use real, basic ingredients).

The Dark Side

Although rum might be the most visually projecting, feel-good spirit of them all (remember those palm trees from before?), it's also a liquor with a sad, sordid past. Think back to your history books, kids. Remember the lesson on the triangle trade? Well, rum was part of that triangle, which also consisted of slaves and sugarcane. Or specifically, rum was traded for slaves for labor; slaves were traded for molasses, which was made into rum state-side; the rum was sold at a high price for a good profit.

The creation of rum, though, is also as much a part of West Indian, South American, and Caribbean culture as winemaking is in Europe. And it may have been the first new-to-them liquor (they brought Madeira and such with them) introduced into the New World during the days of Columbus's exploration of the Americas and the West Indies.

Captain Morgan Drove Me Home Last Night

Okay, that's not really very funny—and, no, you shouldn't ever drive under the influence. Period. It's just plain dumb, dangerous, and dopey. Quite frankly, you know better (and you knew that lecture was coming, so stop acting so shocked).

After your keys are safely in the hands of a sober friend, or if you know you're heading home on foot, try one of the following rums depending on what price point you're willing to shell out.

Affordable	Mid-Range	Bank Breaker
Bacardi Gold, \$16	Montecristo 12 year, \$30	Angostura 1824, \$60
Barbancourt 3 Star, \$18	Pusser's British Navy, \$25	Zaya 12 year, \$44
Gosling's Black Seal, \$19	Mount Gay Extra Old Rum, \$29	Sea Wynde, Pot Still Rum, \$44
Mount Gay Vanilla Rum, \$15		

Tequila

It's got a song. It's got romance. It's sometimes even got a mascot (that scary occasional worm). But what you need to know about tequila is this: it comes in two overarching categories: mixto (average stuff) and 100 percent blue agave (the good stuff!). Mixto must contain a minimum of 51 percent blue agave (the beautiful, spiky plant that grows in abundance in Mexico). The rest of the mix can come from other sources. To be 100 percent blue agave, well, it's got to be made from 100 percent blue agave. Period.

Within blue agave and mixto categories are four classifications of tequila:

- ◆ **Blanco.** Also called silver or white tequila, blanco must be wood-aged less than 60 days.
- ◆ **Joven abocado.** Gold tequila (probably the one you are most familiar with). It gets its appearance and taste from the addition of caramel.
- ◆ **Reposado.** Reposado (which in English means “rested”) must be wood-aged 60 days to a year. Caramel may be added for coloring and taste as well.
- ◆ **Añejo.** The good stuff. Añejo is wood-aged for at least a year.



Cocktail Conversation

Tequila gets its name from the eponymous town it is named for in the Jalisco province of Mexico. Just about all tequila is made there. In fact, by law, to be able to call it tequila, it must be made in or around Tequila.

The Birth of Tequila

Back in the Aztec days, a beverage called *pulque*, fermented maguey tree sap, was the drink of choice. Sounds kind of strange? The Spanish conquistadors thought so, too. They turned the Aztecs on to the technique of distilling, which became *mezcal*. Eventually they began experimenting with the blue agave plant, and tequila was born.

Silver and Gold

If you like tequila but you haven't ventured out of the *mixto* yet, I can't begin to stress how great it is the first time you taste a super-duper 100 percent blue agave tequila. It's a whole different flavor sensation. It's clear, elegant, and smooth. If you don't want to plunk down the money for a bottle, head to a reliable watering hole and do a sampling.

For all your tequila needs, here are some basic prices of everything from your run-o'-the-mill perfectly acceptable affordable tequila to the auspicious añejos.

Affordable	Mid-Range	Bank Breaker
San Matias Blanco, \$18	Herradura Silver, \$39	Tonala Anejo, \$60
Jose Cuervo Silver, \$18	Sauza Commemorativo Anejo, \$25	Cabo Wabo Anejo, \$70
Sauza Gold, \$19	San Matia Anejo Gran Reserva, \$30	Del Maguey Patron Anejo, \$60

Vodka

It's crystal clear. It's easy on the palate. From coast to coast, it's one of the most popular spirits for mixing. Every freezer really ought to have a nice, chilly bottle of it inside. It's vodka—and no bar should be without it.

Sometimes folks get confused with how vodka is made and have a notion that it's all about potatoes. Although, yes, there is potato vodka, most vodkas are made with corn or wheat grain. Vodka is a *rectified spirit*, or goes through at least three rounds of the distilling process. During the final round, it is filtered through charcoal. Because of their abundance of grain, Eastern Europe and Russia is where vodka was born.



Liquor Lingo

A **rectified spirit** is an alcoholic beverage that goes through a minimum of three rounds of distilling.

Back in the Old Country

When the name given a spirit is a derivative of the Russian word for “water” (*voda*), you know the creators of it take it very, very seriously.

Both Poles and Russians claim to have distilled the first batch of vodka, but Russia documented it at the end of the eighth century, so they get the honors here. By the mid-sixteenth century, it was the national drink of both Russia and Poland. But it wasn’t until the eighteenth century, when a Russian professor in St. Petersburg discovered the process of charcoal filtering, that vodka became the spirit we know and happily drink today.

The Bolshevik nabbing of private distilleries during the Russian Revolution and the altogether ban on private distilleries after World War I proved problematic for vodka-making devotees, and many left the Mother Land. One such family, the Smirnoffs, decided to bring their distilling talents to America and set up the first vodka distillery in the United States in 1934, just after the end of Prohibition.

La Vida Vodka

Don’t know your Absolut from your Olifant? Here’s a rundown by price of who’s who on your liquor store shelves.

Affordable	Mid-Range	Bank Breaker
Absolut, \$19	Charbay, \$32	Ultimat, \$50
Smirnoff United States Grain, \$18	Ketel One Triple Distilled, \$26	Jewel of Russia, \$40
Skyy United States Grain, \$16	Stoli Ohranj, \$25	Level Single Batch, \$60
Olifant Citron, \$15		Hangar One, \$35

Whisky

Whisky lovers and connoisseurs may well be the most opinionated tipplers of the lot. Sure, tequila devotees and gin gurus and wine lovers have their very, very strong opinions, but whisky drinkers? Just see what happens when you make a declaration statement around one. It’s

begging for trouble—or, at least, an hours-long conversation about everything whisky.

In general, whisky is made from grain. However, which grains, how much, where from, and the process used determines what kind of whisky you're drinking. In Ireland and Scotland, whisky is made from barley, oats, rye, or wheat. The grain (or grains) is malted (after it has sprouted, it is dried in a kiln and ground into a powder), which causes it to turn starch into sugar and then to alcohol. Scotch whisky, however, takes on a smoky flavor because the drying part of the process occurs over burning peat. Irish whiskey grains are dried in a kiln, and the whiskey has a gentler, sweeter flavor and aroma than Scotch whisky. Canadian whisky undergoes a similar process to Scotch but is always designated as blended (more on that in a minute). American whiskey is made from corn and grains.

Now, as to the business of blended or straight whiskies, here's a quick cheat sheet for you:

- ◆ **Straight whisky.** The American classification for straight whisky. It must have 51 percent of one particular grain and must not be blended with any other whiskey or grain neutral spirit. It must be aged in oak barrels for a minimum of 2 years.
- ◆ **Blended whisky.** A blended whisky is exactly what it sounds like. A minimum of 20 percent must be from one particular grain. But the rest? That can be an amalgam of other whiskies, grain neutral spirits, grain spirits, fortified wine, or even fruit juices. By law, all whiskies in North America must be labeled blended or straight.
- ◆ **Blended straight.** When two or more straight whiskies are blended.
- ◆ **Light whiskey.** Often used for blending, light whiskies are distilled at an above-the-average alcohol level (e.g., more than 160 proof) with water added later to dilute the alcohol content. Light whisky is stored in uncharred oak casks.
- ◆ **Single malt whisky.** Unblended Scotch whisky.



Cocktail Conversation

The spelling of this spirit may leave you a bit befuddled at times. Is it *whisky* or *whiskey*? And what's the difference? In Scotland and Canada, it's *whisky*. In Ireland and America, it's *whiskey*. There now. That wasn't so hard, was it?

The Gaelic Water of Life

Whisky originated in the misty green lands of Ireland and Scotland, where it was called *uisge beatha*, or “water of life.” It’s not exactly clear which country gets the distinction of being the first, although evidence of early whisky production has been found going back as far as the fifteenth century. Not surprisingly, once whisky caught on and became a popular beverage, the English government (true to their tax-happy form) placed a malt tax on whisky production. This tax, which went into effect in 1624, only increased over the years with whisky’s popularity. In fact, by the early 1900s, the tax was doubled to discourage whisky consumption.

Dropping Names

Be it Canadian, Irish, or Scotch, there are plenty of fine whiskies from which to choose. Check out the following sampling of variously priced whiskies to help you familiarize yourself with what’s available.

Affordable	Mid-Range	Bank Breaker
Forty Creek Canadian Whisky, \$19	Dewar’s White Label Scotch Whisky, \$30	Connemara Single Malt Irish Whiskey, \$40
Kilbeggan Irish Whiskey, \$19	Tullamore Dew Irish Whiskey, \$27	Johnnie Walker Gold Scotch Whisky, \$80
	Ballantine’s Scotch Whisky, \$21	

Brandy

Regardless of which brandy’s your pleasure, the basics are still the same. Brandy is distilled from wine and/or fermented juices (peach, apple, pear, or cherry, for instance). Like French wine, French brandy is known for its high quality and strict regional demarcation.

There are many types of brandy, including ...

- ◆ **Armagnac.** From the vineyards in Armagnac in the Gascony region of southwestern France near Bordeaux. It is distilled only once, and no sugar is added. It is aged for up to 40 years in black oak.

- ◆ **Calvados.** From Calvados in Normandy of northern France, this is a dry apple brandy that is distilled twice and aged for a minimum of a year.
- ◆ **Cognac.** The big mac daddy of brandies, cognac—from the town of Cognac in western France—is double distilled after the fermenting process and must age at least 3 years in Limousin oak. You might notice that bottles of cognac have stars. These are to let you know how long the brandy has aged: 1 star is 3 years, 2 stars is 4 years, and 3 stars is 5 years. Anything older gets the slightly silly but descriptive *V.S.* (very superior), *V.S.O.P.* (very superior old pale), *V.V.S.O.P.* (very, very superior old pale), or *X.O.* (extra old) distinction.
- ◆ **Eau-de-vie.** Literally translated as “water of life” in French, this brandy is distilled from fermented fruit juice (other than grapes) and is colorless.



Liquor Lingo

Eau-de-vie is a clear, fruit-based French brandy; examples include kirschwasser and frambois.

- ◆ **Fruit brandy.** Unlike eau-de-vie, a fruit brandy (by U.S. law) must be made with a base of wine-brandy and be more than 70 proof.
- ◆ **Grappa.** An Italian eau-de-vie made from the residue of grape skins and seeds that are extracted during the winemaking process (how’s that for being resourceful?).
- ◆ **Koniak.** Greek brandy that has a grape base and is given extra sweetness with the addition of caramel.
- ◆ **Spanish brandy.** From the Andalusian town of Jerez de la Frontera, Spanish brandy is often distilled from sherry and subjected to a complicated aging system.

Brandy: Getting Burned

Brandy came into being when a clever Dutch trader tried to condense his cargo by taking the water out of wine by heating it and putting it back in once he reached his final destination. The taste of it after this process earned it the name *brandewijn*, or “burned wine.”

Which Brandy Is for You?

Not sure which brandy is the best for you? Here are some examples of what's available.

Affordable	Mid-Range	Bank Breaker
E&J Brandy, \$12	Clear Creek Bartlett Pear Brandy, \$35	Laird's 12-Year-Old Rare Apple Brandy, \$50
Hiram Walker Blackberry Brandy, \$12	Askalon Arack Extra Fine, \$20	Frapin V.S.O.P. Cognac, \$60
Laird's Applejack, \$14	Menorval Calvados, \$29	Courvoisier Napoleon Cognac, \$70 Jean Danflou Armagnac Exceptionnel Reserve, \$90

Liqueurs and Cordials

Liqueurs and cordials are generally served as after-dinner drinks and range from 40 to 60 proof. What's the difference among them? Nowadays, nothing—at least in conversation. But technically, there is a distinction: liqueurs are herb-based, and cordials are fruit-based.

Cordials and liqueurs are made from one type of major spirit as the base and then punched up in flavor with fruit, nuts, flowers, herbs, seeds—you name it. These flavors become part of the final product through one of four methods:

- ◆ **Distillation.** The base liquor is blended with the additional botanical flavor prior to a second distilling process.
- ◆ **Infusion.** Just like tea leaves in hot water, the desired flavoring agent is steeped in the warmed base liquor, which takes on its aromatic and flavor qualities.
- ◆ **Percolation.** Remember that old coffee percolator your parents or grandparents used to have? The process is similar for a liqueur/cordial product using this method, except instead of coffee, botanical flavor is used.
- ◆ **Maceration.** Like infusion, the main flavoring element is steeped in the base spirit and then mixed with a neutral spirit and the additional sugar (which they all must have 2½ percent of).

A Cordial Look Back

The first-known liqueur was most likely created by French or Italian monks, but the one we know about for sure is from Catalan chemist and theologian Arnau de Vilanova at the University of Montpellier in the latter part of the thirteenth century. Vilanova was intrigued by botanicals, and by using methods of infusion, he discovered that the resulting potable was quite tasty.

Cordially Yours

Cordials come in an incredible array of flavors and, depending on your personal taste, you can do a whole lot of sampling. Here are some main liqueurs that are readily available and their general price range.

Affordable	Mid-Range	Bank Breaker
Bonnie Doon Framboise liqueur, \$13	Amaretto di Saronno, \$20	White Cranberry Aquavit, \$30
Hiram Walker Crème de Banana, \$9	Marie Brizard Crème de Menthe, \$25	Chambord raspberry liqueur, \$30
Midori Melon Liqueur, \$18	Frangelico, \$21 Kahlúa, \$22	Grand Marnier, \$39

Wine

Ah, the fruit of the vine. So many people find this alluring alcohol intimidating when really there's no reason for it. This is salt-o-the-earth stuff (or more accurately, rootstock of the earth stuff). Fear not. Once you get a handle on a few terms of the trade and start experimenting with varying grapes, you'll get to know what you like and what you don't.

Red wine and white wine are exactly the same ... that is, until the fermentation process begins and then the big difference becomes clear. Grapes for white wine are stripped of their skin, stems, and seeds. With the latter discarded, they are then mashed and fermented so the clear juice from the fruit is what you end up seeing in the glass. Red wine, however, is fermented with its skins, et al., which is where it gets its color and tannic nature.

It's not just all about reds and whites, of course. There's champagne, too. Champagne—or sparkling wine when not produced in the Champagne region of France—has that wonderful effervescence we all know and adore for celebratory occasions. But here's something that may surprise you: champagne is made up of three grapes—and two of them are red. Yup, that's right: one white (chardonnay), two red (pinot noir and pinot meunier). The process of making bubbly is long, extraordinarily complicated, and filled with mathematical equations to make your head spin more than the bubbles will. Simply put, though, the bubbles come from a part of the process that occurs when carbon dioxide gas is trapped inside each bottle during a second fermentation process.

And then there's also *fortified wine*, better known to you as sherry, port, and Madeira. These, too, go through quite a complicated process before becoming the richly textured wines they are, but the most important thing to know is that these wines are fortified with another spirit, hence their name.

**Liquor Lingo**

Fortified wines are those that have been fortified with another spirit such as brandy. The best examples of this are sherry, Madeira, and port.

Tracing Back the Grapevine

Wine has such a long and complicated history that there's just no way to give you the whole shebang in a paragraph or two. So I'll give you the crib notes. Who "invented" wine? Nobody really knows for sure, but evidence shows wine was being produced in the ancient lands of Mesopotamia in the fertile Tigris-Euphrates valley. The Egyptians were the first to record any evidence of winemaking, around 3000 B.C.E. But it was during the era of the Roman Empire that wine became available to the masses (which was a good thing, because the water was undrinkable!). Techniques were refined, mostly in monasteries, and by the eighteenth century, European wine was widely lauded and celebrated.

Wine of the Times

Although it would be impossible to name every wine from every country (impossible to write and impossible to read), and even in giving suggestions I know I'm leaving out so very much. I offer the following suggestions to guide you at your local wine shop, but I highly encourage you to ask for help and guidance at your favorite wine merchant and to try lots of things.

Want more help? My dear friend Tony DiDio and I wrote a book on wine and food pairing: *Renaissance Guide to Wine and Food Pairing* (Alpha Books, 2003). Check it out for a short but good wine primer section in the front of the book.

Affordable	Mid-Range	Bank Breaker
Boony Doon Pacific Rim Riesling (California), \$10	Trefethen Dry Riesling (California), \$15	Hanzell Chardonnay (California), \$55
Four Sisters Sauvignon Blanc (Australia), \$10	Cable Bay Chardonnay (New Zealand), \$22	Baron de Ladoucette Pouilly Fume (France), \$55
Morro Bay Chardonnay, \$10	Alois Lageder "Benefizium" (Italy), \$21	Arrowood Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve, \$54
Alamos Malbec, \$10	Argyle Pinot Noir (Oregon), \$17	Miner Family Pinot Noir, Gary's Vineyard (California), \$60
Louis Jadot Beaujolais Village, \$9	Pellegrini Coverdale Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon (California), \$20	
Yalumba Oxford Landing Cabernet-Shiraz, \$8	Raphael Estate Merlot (Long Island), \$20	

Prices given for 750 milliliter bottles.

Beer

Although it's not usually the first thing that comes to a mixologist's mind, beer is always important to have on hand when you're expecting guests. But what is beer, exactly? Beer is made from barley that's soaked, sprouted, dried in a kiln (similar to the process for whisky), and crushed

(not ground, like whisky). This is added to purified, heated water to break down the starch into sugar and then other starch from corn, wheat, or rice might be added, depending on what the desired final product is. It then goes through several other processes of straining, boiling, fermenting (with yeast), aging, and filtering. All that just so you can have a cold one!

Follow the Barley Trail

Like wine, it's difficult to pinpoint exactly when beer was first brewed, but ample evidence shows the ancient Egyptians were quite fond of it. In fact, some pharaohs even designated that beer be part of their burial booty to carry them into the next world. But although beer has been brewed and consumed for thousands of years, it was truly during the Christian era when monks perfected the technique. By the seventeenth century, it was a staple in most European diets.



Cocktail Conversation

The oldest brewery in America is Pennsylvania's own Yuengling. You can still find Yuengling beer in most markets.

Beer Here and Now

Depending on your preferences (dark? light? amber?), you have so many beers from which to choose from many, many countries, each with its own style. Check out the following table for a smattering of great beers from all over the world to sample.

Affordable	Mid-Range	Bank Breaker
Yuengling, \$5/6-pack	Corona Extra, \$7.50/6-pack	Corsendonk, \$10/750 ml bottle
McSorley's, \$5/6-pack	Bass Ale, \$8/6-pack	Young's Oatmeal Stout, \$9/4-pack
Miller High-Life, \$6/6-pack	Samuel Adams Cherry Wheat, \$8/6-pack	Franziskaner Hefewiesse, \$9/6-pack
Tecate, \$6/6-pack	Boddington's, \$7/4-pack	Anchor Steam, \$9/6-pack

Sake

Although many people call sake “rice wine,” it’s not. Sake is actually a brewed beverage with rice as its main ingredient; therefore, it’s much more akin to beer than to wine. However, its clear, sometimes earthy, sometimes bright taste is indeed reminiscent of wine. It can be consumed warmed or chilled, in small, earthenware sake cups, in cedar masu sake boxes, or even in a cocktail glass, as is common in stylish cocktail lounges across the country.

Sake comes in several different types, but they all have two things in common. The first is how much fat and protein is milled (i.e., polished) off the rice grain. The more you mill, the higher quality the sake. Most sake is simple table sake (*futuu-shu*), which is about 20 to 25 percent milled. Premium sakes, which are the best of the best, fall into three categories based on their milling (and, as a general rule, are more often than not consumed chilled):

- ◆ **Honjozo and junmai.** These have a minimum of 30 percent grain milled away.
- ◆ **Ginjo and junmai ginjo.** These have a minimum of 40 percent grain milled away.
- ◆ **Daiginjo and junmai daiginjo.** These super-premium sakes have a minimum of 50 percent grain milled away.

The second important factor in sake production is the water. Each city in Japan known for its stellar sake production also has a stellar water source.

The Drink of Dynasty

While evidence of sake production in China goes back thousands of years, it was Japan that refined the art. Sake’s history in Japan goes all the way back to 300 B.C.E., when particular methods of rice planting and cultivation were introduced to the country. Although it was likely that sake production also began around that time, we don’t see recorded evidence of sake until 300 C.E. Much sake was produced by and for individual families, but eventually the production became far

more intricate and far-reaching. By the time the thirteenth century rolled around, sake was being mass-produced and consumed not just by peasants, but by the inhabitants of the Imperial Palace. Today, with changes and modernization of equipment, sake is produced in mass quantities all over Japan (and lately, it seems to be catching on here, too!).

Affordable	Mid-Range	Bank Breaker
Hakutsuru, \$10	Tentak Kuni, “Hawk of the Heavens” (Junmai), \$30	Nanbu Bijin, “Ancient Pillars” (Junmai Daiginjo), \$75
Fukunishiki, \$18	Sato No Homare, “Pride the Village” (Junmai), \$50 Wakatake Onikoroshi (Ginjo), \$30 Rihaku, “Wandering Poet” (Junmai Ginjo), \$35	Otokoyama (Junmai of Daiginjo), \$125

Prices given for 750 milliliter bottles.

The Least You Need to Know

- ◆ When you understand how a beverage is made, it’s easier to distinguish why—and which examples of it—you like best.
- ◆ From pioneers to pirates, every spirit has its own fascinating story. Behind each bottle are hundreds—sometimes thousands!—of years of history, travel, and travails before it gets to your shelf.
- ◆ Even though prices vary from reasonable to very expensive, price does not necessarily dictate quality. Discern what your price point is and go from there.