

# WINE ENTHUSIAST TOP 100 SPIRITS of 2021



From apple brandy to single malts galore, these are the bottles to pour, store and explore.

**For many, 2021 was a year of cautious return:** Bars and restaurants slowly re-opened, long-delayed family gatherings and weddings were held, travel resumed in fits and starts. Often, that included special pours to celebrate those moments, from limited-edition whiskeys and brandies to fun, ultraportable canned cocktails.

This list represents the most memorable spirits we've had the opportunity to review over the past 12 months. It spans a broad range of categories and price points, from a pair of lively \$20 lemon liqueurs to a rare—but spectacular—Irish whiskey finished in Cognac casks, priced at a stratospheric \$500. You'll find a range of vodkas, both flavored and neutral, that will liven up your cocktail game, and a slew of brandies—from Armagnac to Calvados and more—that will serve as the perfect cold-weather sippers.

While spirits were selected for this list based on their quality, it's also satisfying to zoom out and note the broadening diversity of the people behind the bottles. Whatever you're looking to celebrate, even if it's just making it through another challenging year, grab a glass, because this list is full of exciting bottles to try.

## BOURBON

**96 Barrell Private Release A01A Bourbon (USA; Barrell Craft Spirits, Louisville, KY).** Concentrated toffee aromas entice on the nose. While this cask-strength beast opens fiery, adding just enough water brings out a bright and fruity side: Dried cherry, orange and lemon peel slide into vanilla and caramel. The spicy finish is tinged with fleeting espresso and campfire smoke, too. This is a limited-edition micro blend of bourbons aged five to 15 years, with 70% of the blend 15 years old.  
**abv:** 53.99% **Price:** \$110

**95 18th Street Distillery Spirit Thief Selection Bourbon (USA; 18th Street Distillery, Hammond, IN).** Complex aromas include dried fig, dried cherry and vanilla. The palate opens with spice and dark fruit, similar to Port or PX Sherry. Adding water melds everything together into rich fruitcake studded with raisin, dried cherry and candied orange peel, finishing long with nutmeg and cinnamon accents. Each sip warms all the way down. Single Barrel #17-0037.  
**abv:** 62% **Price:** \$100

**95 Angel's Envy Finished in Japanese Mizunara Oak Casks Bourbon (USA; Angel's Envy, Louisville, KY).** This was released in September 2020 to celebrate the brand's 10th anniversary. Look for a copper penny hue and rich caramel and toffee aromas. The bold palate opens with espresso, clove and a drying hint of plum skin. Adding water softens the heat and brings more oak forward, along with accents of mocha and vanilla, finishing long with black pepper heat. Available only at distillery.  
**abv:** 48.9% **Price:** \$350

**95 Old Fitzgerald Bottled-in-Bond Spring 2020 Edition (USA; Heaven Hill, Bardstown, KY).** The mild caramel aroma is just a preview for what is to come. The palate is deep and bold, showing toffee and espresso flavors that lighten to a mocha character. Lemony brightness and mouthwatering clove mark the finish.  
**abv:** 50% **Price:** \$90



**94 Kuiper Belt Aged 8 Years Straight Kentucky Bourbon (USA; Wine and Spirits Spoken Here, Napa, CA).** Named for a ring of icy bodies that orbit the sun, this small-batch whiskey is aged, as the producer says, "eight earth orbits around the sun." Look for a gentle cinnamon scent and a spicy-sweet palate. Adding water plays up the caramel note and layers on succulent toffee richness. It's robust enough to enjoy with a big cube of ice or mixed into an Old Fashioned.  
**abv:** 45% **Price:** \$85

**94 Redwood Empire Pipe Dream Bourbon (USA; Redwood Empire, Sonoma County, CA).** Mild oak and vanilla aromas lead the nose. The robust palate opens with a dusting of cocoa. Adding water transforms that into milk chocolate and vanilla richness. Each sip exits with black pepper and a lemony zing. Aged at least four years.  
**abv:** 45% **Price:** \$45



**94 Winchester Double Oak Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey Finished With Sherry Cask Staves (USA; Green River Distilling, Owensboro, KY).** This bourbon finished with Sherry cask staves drinks almost like a rum. Brown butter mingles with banana breadlike tropical fruit, nutmeg, maple and cinnamon, plus a lip-smacking lemon peel hint in the finish. *Best Buy.*  
**abv:** 45% **Price:** \$30



**93 Blue Note Juke Joint Bourbon (USA; B.R. Distilling, Memphis, TN).** Butterscotch and maple aromas meet with candied orange peel on the nose. The palate is similarly bold and rich, with creamy caramel and a smoky hint winding into ginger and lemon peel on the exit. Sip or mix. Distilled in Kentucky, bottled in Tennessee. Aged a minimum of three years. *Best Buy.*  
**abv:** 46.5% **Price:** \$30

**93 Four Roses 2020 Limited Edition Small Batch Barrel Strength (USA; Four Roses, Lawrenceburg, KY).** A blend of whiskeys aged 12, 16 and 19 years, this bourbon has a rich toffee aroma. Add plenty of water to this overproof bottling, which tames the considerable alcohol heat and releases soft vanilla and caramel tones plus a fleeting bright cherry note. The elongated finish eases into mellow baking spice.  
**abv:** 55.65% **Price:** \$150

**93 George Remus Bourbon (USA; MGP, Lawrenceburg, IN).** Bold oak and vanilla aromas lead the nose. The bright palate sizzles with cinnamon spice around a caramel core. Adding water brings out a sarsaparilla note alongside more cinnamon, cayenne heat and a nutty tone. It warms all the way down.  
**abv:** 47% **Price:** \$40

**93 Milam & Greene Single Barrel Straight Bourbon (USA; Milam & Greene, Blanco, TX).** Expect a light honey hue, with maple and almond aromas. The palate echoes that maple note, alongside clove and espresso, anchored by oak. Adding water unleashes mouthwatering butterscotch and unsweetened chocolate. A faint glimmer of clove heat leads into the gentle finish.  
**abv:** 43% **Price:** \$55



**93 Navigator Straight Bourbon (USA; Precision Wine and Spirit, Sonoma, CA).** This is a Kentucky bourbon aged three years in American oak, then finished in Cabernet Sauvignon casks from Napa Valley's Navigator. The end result is a mellow sipper, with bright aromas that suggest golden raisin and peach nectar. The palate has a Sherry-like quality, showing dried fruit and a floral hint, finishing long on almond and lemon.

**abv:** 43.3% **Price:** \$40

**92 Peerless Small Batch Kentucky Straight Bourbon (USA; Peerless Distilling, Louisville, KY).** The bold, slightly smoky aroma teases the nose. The palate opens with ribbons of toffee sweetness intertwined with clove, cardamom and black pepper. Adding water amps up the spice, layering on cinnamon and cayenne heat. The long finish surprises with an orange peel note.

**abv:** 53.55% **Price:** \$70

## BRANDY



**98 Germain Robin California Alambic Brandy Aged 7 Years (USA; Germain Robin, Modesto, CA).** This is made with California grapes, distilled and aged in the style of Cognac. It's stunning from start to finish. Vanilla and baked apple richness give way to lots of deep, dusty cocoa and a hint of walnut, finishing lightly with a lively flurry of baking spice and a faint note of dried apricot.

**abv:** 40% **Price:** \$75

**97 Claque-Pepin Vieille Reserve Organic Calvados (France; Heavenly Spirits, Lakeville, MA).** Hitting all the right notes, this shows fresh apple and vanilla aromas that lead into a rich butterscotch and honey palate. The feather-light finish shows salted caramel, roasted nuts, cinnamon and clove.

**abv:** 40% **Price:** \$45



**96 Laird's 10th Generation Bottled in Bond Aged 5 Years Apple Brandy (USA; Laird & Company, Scobeyville, NJ).** This substantial sipper has a copper hue and a baked apple aroma. The plush palate opens with lots of caramel and spice. A splash of water brings out hints of tobacco and cigar wrapper, finishing with baked apple, cinnamon and clove. Aged five years and bottled in bond, this bottling commemorates the 10th generation of Laird's making apple spirits.

**abv:** 50% **Price:** \$42

**94 Catoctin Creek Quarter Branch Virginia Apple Brandy (USA; Catoctin Creek, Purcellville, VA).** Look for a bright topaz hue and a velvety caramel tone on nose and palate. Lush toffee leads into mouthwatering flickers of cocoa and tropical fruit, finishing long with clove and black pepper heat. Blue Bee Cider made the base then Catoctin distilled and aged the liquid.

**abv:** 40% **Price:** \$30/375 ml

**93 Chateau de Laubade 21 Years Old Bas Armagnac (France; Baron Francois, New York, NY).** Maple and caramel aromas lead the nose. The first spicy sips smolder with cayenne and cinnamon, smoothed by vanilla and orange peel tones. The long finish offers mouthwatering hints of plum, ripe peach and a final echo of spice.

**abv:** 45.3% **Price:** \$100

**93 Larressingle XO Armagnac (France; Kobrand, Purchase, NY).** Look for a notably deep amber hue and caramel aroma. The lively palate opens with caramel, spice, cocoa and plenty of oomph, finishing gracefully and long with ribbons of cocoa and vanilla intertwined with nutmeg and allspice sparks.

**abv:** 43% **Price:** \$80

**93 Traverse City Whiskey Co. Experimental Series Apple Brandy (USA; Traverse City Whiskey Co., Traverse City, MI).** Made with Michigan apples and aged in used bourbon barrels, this brandy has a mild red fruit and vanilla scent but is bold and mouthfilling at first sip. Vanilla bean and maple layer with cinnamon spice. A much-needed splash of water brings out mocha tones. Bottled in bond at 100 proof.

**abv:** 50% **Price:** \$40

**91 Barking Irons Applejack (USA; Black Dirt Distillery, Pine Island, NY).** This was made with New York State apples and aged at Brooklyn's Van Brunt Stillhouse for a minimum of three months. Vanilla and fresh pear aromas lead into a vanilla wafer palate tinged with coconut and lightened with a minty tingle. Recommended to mix.

**abv:** 50% **Price:** \$45



**91 Bhakta 50 Armagnac (France; Bhakta Farms, Shoreham, VT).** From the founder of WhistlePig, what's in the bottle is a blend of old Armagnacs—the youngest is 50 years old, the oldest was distilled in 1868—finished in Islay whisky casks. The nose is all luscious crème brûlée, but the palate shows little of that. Cinnamon and black pepper are followed by surprising mesquite and bacon fat notes. The finish is more delicate, with hints of dried apricot, chamomile tea and cigar wrapper leading into a lightly smoky and spicy exhale.

**abv:** 46.3% **Price:** \$399

**91 Daron Fine Calvados (France; WJ Deutsch & Sons, Stamford, CT).** A mix of apple and pear plus a hint of funk defines the nose. The mild palate leans toward fresh and baked apple slicked with honey, finishing drying and brisk with ginger and clove heat. Sip or mix.

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

**91 Tattersall Apple Brandy (USA; Tattersall Distilling, Minneapolis, MN).** Made with organic apples from Minnesota orchards and aged in new oak barrels, the end result is a golden hue and woody aroma, with just a hint of fruit. The palate is light and custardy, suggesting vanilla cream and lemon cream pie, finishing brisk with nutmeg, cedar, ginger and clove.

abv: 45%

Price: \$29

**90 St. George California Reserve Apple Brandy (USA; St. George Spirits, Alameda, CA).** Made with Mendocino County apples, this was aged in a mix of used American whiskey casks and used American and French wine casks. The bulk of the blend is between six and seven years old. The finished brandy has a tawny hue and distinctly floral character. Apple blossom and carnation entwine with mild almond and cream soda on nose and palate, enhanced by mulling spices and baked apple. Lot 2020.

abv: 43%

Price: \$60

## GIN

**95 Salcombe Gin Rosé Sainte Marie (England; Park Street Imports, Miami, FL).** The bottle is tinted blush pink, but the liquid inside is crystal clear. Grapefruit peel and juniper lead the nose. The brisk, citrusy palate offers lemon and grapefruit peel, plus fleeting berry sweetness midpalate, finishing with a floral exhale. Of note, this gin is inspired by rosé, but is not distilled from wine nor does it contain rosé wine. Martini-worthy.

abv: 41.4%

Price: \$40

**94 Listoke 1777 Irish Gin (Ireland; Preiss Imports, Ramona, CA).** Comforting gingerbread-like aromas channel allspice, anise and a hint of molasses. The palate is a bit brighter, opening with lemon verbena and pine forest leading to hints of anise, sandalwood and shortbread cookie on the warming exhale.

abv: 43.3%

Price: \$39

**93 Lifted Spirits Bold Gin (USA; Lifted Spirits, Kansas City, MO).** Sprightly juniper leads this London dry-style gin on nose and palate, followed by licorice, fennel and a hint of berry sweetness. The lingering finish is laced with black pepper.

abv: 45%

Price: \$35

**93 Nolet's Silver Gin (Holland; Nolet's, Aliso Viejo, CA).** Look for a pale straw hue and floral aromas intertwined with a hint of fruity sweetness. The palate opens with bold violet and rose petal interlaced with anise and juicy berry, finishing with black pepper punch.

abv: 47.6%

Price: \$49

**93 Ranch Road Barrel Gin (USA; Chankaska Spirits, Kasota, MN).** Look for a burnished gold hue and citrus and butterscotch aromas. The palate is bright, with loads of lemon peel and ginger sparkle, while a lick of brown butter adds richness.

abv: 47%

Price: \$20/375 ml



**92 135 East Hyōgo Dry Gin (Japan; Marussia USA, Cedar Knolls, NJ).** A lemongrass aroma leads into a lightly sweet, faintly herbaceous palate that finishes with a lingering pink-peppercorn zing. This London dry-style gin is made with Japanese botanicals, including sansho pepper, shiso, yuzu and ume.

*Best Buy.*

abv: 42%

Price: \$30

**92 North Shore Gin No. 6 (USA; North Shore Distillery, Green Oaks, IL).** This craft gin was reformulated in 2020. It's still spicy, citrusy and bright, though the proof has been nudged slightly higher. Each sip opens with brisk lemon and candied grapefruit peel plus a faint raspberry note, and lands on cubeb pepper and grains of paradise.

*Best Buy.*

abv: 47%

Price: \$30

**91 Gentilly Gin (USA; Seven Three Distilling, New Orleans, LA).** Zingy, savory aromas include green olive and dried oregano. The palate opens with fresh thyme, rosemary and sweet mint, evolving into dried herb notes and finishing assertively with lemon pucker and cracked black pepper.

abv: 43.5%

Price: \$34

**91 North Oak Barrel Rested Gin (Hardshore Distilling, Portland, ME).** Expect a honey hue with bold vanilla and allspice aromas. The palate shows oak and hints of red fruit and cocoa powder. The long, mouthwatering finish is dusted with cinnamon, nutmeg and clove.

abv: 46%

Price: \$42

**91 Telluride Gin (USA; Telluride Distilling, Telluride, CO).** Mild citrusy aromas lead into a light, spiced palate. Look for a warming mix of aniseed, coriander and cedar moving into a mouthwatering salt-and-white pepper finish. Mix into Negronis. Distilled from cane sugar, with botanicals including Rocky Mountain juniper.

abv: 40%

Price: \$35



**91 The Aimsir Distilling Co. Aitil House Gin (USA; The Aimsir Distilling Co., Portland, OR).**

Aitil means juniper in Gaelic. Look for a slightly vegetal aroma, with a hint of star anise. Juniper and pine emerge on the bracing palate. The tingly finish spotlights citrusy notes of lemon, lemon verbena and lemongrass.

abv: 45%

Price: \$35

## IRISH WHISKEY



**98 Bushmills The Rare Casks 28 Years Limited Release No. 01 Cognac Cask Irish Whiskey (Ireland; Proximo Spirits, Jersey City, NJ).** This is a single malt distilled in 1992, matured in bourbon and Sherry casks, and finished in Cognac casks. It's a delicious, nuanced dram, with vanilla and fresh-cut red apple on nose and palate and a superlight, almost effervescent texture. A splash of water teases out lemon mousse and a puff of smoke on the exhale.

abv: 46.7%

Price: \$500



**95 Drumshanbo Single Pot Still Irish Whiskey** (Ireland; Palm Bay International, Port Washington, NY). Richly spiced aromas lead into a smooth, luxurious palate that sinks into flavors of vanilla, dried apricot and dried date. Adding water unlocks more vanilla and sweet spices like clove, cinnamon and nutmeg. This is a big, mouthfilling whiskey to sip with a cube of ice or consider as a dessert pairing. **abv:** 43% **Price:** \$63



**94 The Busker Irish Whiskey** (Ireland; Disaronno International, Somerset, NJ). Billed as a triple cask whiskey, the liquid was finished in barrels that previously held Sherry, bourbon and Marsala. The result is a cinnamon and faint floral aroma, and a palate that sizzles with baking spice. It eventually mellows into flavors of vanilla wafer, cocoa and dried fig, finishing with gingery zing. **Best Buy.** **abv:** 40% **Price:** \$25

**94 The Whistler Oloroso Sherry Cask Finish Irish Whiskey** (Ireland; Prestige Beverage, Princeton, MN). The sweet, enticing aroma bursts with dried fruit. Those notes are echoed on the robust palate, showing dried apricot, booze-soaked golden raisins and vanilla flavors that lead into a gentle nutty, gingery finish. **Best Buy.** **abv:** 43% **Price:** \$35

**93 Kilbeggan Single Pot Still Irish Whiskey** (Ireland; Beam Suntory, Chicago, IL). Fresh cut apple and a hint of smoke lead the nose. The robust, flavorful palate offers a surprising plummy note, finishing long and drying with cayenne and clove heat. Altogether, the pleasing effect is like spice cake doused in whiskey. **abv:** 43% **Price:** \$45

**93 McCabe's Irish Whiskey** (Ireland; Hard Truth Distilling, Nashville, IN). Look for a pale gold hue and toasty aroma. The palate shows dusty nutmeg and cayenne spice, coupled with a meaty, umami note. Adding water enhances the spice and brings forward toasted grain, oatmeal cookie and malted milk notes, finishing drying and astringent. This is blended Irish whiskey pot-distilled in Ireland, proofed and bottled in Indiana. **Best Buy.** **abv:** 40% **Price:** \$30

## LIQUEUR

**95 Letterpress Limoncello** (USA; Letterpress Distilling, Seattle, WA). Richer than a typical limoncello, this golden liqueur offers roasted pineapple and toasted banana bread aromas. An intriguing butterscotch note opens the palate, rounding into a long, honeyed finish enlivened with nutmeg, cayenne and lemon pepper. Mix with rum or stir into cake batter. This is a honey-sweetened homage to the distiller's grandmother's village in the mountains outside of Rome. **abv:** 28% **Price:** \$36

**93 Fabrizia Limoncello Cream Liqueur** (USA; Fabrizia Spirits, Salem, NH). A refreshing palate cleanser of a cream liqueur, look for a light yellow hue and mild lemon curd aroma. Plush and palate coating, moderately sweet lemon sorbet and lemon cream notes lead into a light finish braced up with ginger. **Best Buy.** **abv:** 26% **Price:** \$20

**93 LS Cream Liqueur** (USA; L.S. Cream, Jacksonville, FL). Inspired by Haiti's tradition of cremas, typically made with condensed milk, coconut cream and spices, this liqueur has a creamy chocolate milk appearance and enticing vanilla buttercream scent. Each palate-coating sip is creamy and soothing, with hints of brown butter, vanilla and baking spice. Dessert sipper. **abv:** 17% **Price:** \$27

**92 Chelly Limon Liqueur** (USA; Chelly, Tempe, AZ). At 80 proof, this is a bit stronger than most limoncellos. The pale straw hue and pleasing candied lemon peel aroma leads into a clean, snappy palate showing lemon peel and white pepper, finishing surprisingly long. Sip with a cube of ice or lengthen with sparkling water. **Best Buy.** **abv:** 40% **Price:** \$20

**92 Jovis Limoncello** (Italy; Originals Imports, Stamford, CT). Cloudy, sunny yellow appearance and bright lemon peel aroma. The palate opens sweet and finishes brisk and mouthwatering. In between, candied lemon-peel and lemon lollipop flavors mingle with white pepper and ginger heat. Made with Sorrento lemon peels, no preservatives or colorants. **abv:** 32% **Price:** \$34

**92 Ver Liqueur** (USA; Elixir, Eugene, OR). An American-made take on herbal liqueurs like absinthe or pastis, expect a pale olive hue and anise and fennel-seed aromas. Add water to take the edge off this 100-proof spirit. The result is hypnotic haziness and amped-up licorice and anise, accented with hints of tarragon and fresh fennel, winding into peppery sting. Sip, mix or use as a glass rinse. **abv:** 50% **Price:** \$35

**91 Bumbu Crème** (Panama; Bumbu Rum, New York, NY). Velvety and palate-coating, this rum-based liqueur has a coffee-with-cream appearance and rich dulce de leche aroma. Vanilla, crème caramel and almond mingle on the palate, finishing with nutmeg and cardamom. The overall combination is reminiscent of chai tea with cream. Consider this easy sipper as a dessert pairing. **abv:** 15% **Price:** \$35

**91 Hotel Tango Lemoncello** (USA; Hotel Tango, Indianapolis, IN). Expect a cloudy, pale yellow appearance and mild lemon aroma with a savory tinge. Overall, this drinks like vodka mixed with lemonade: it's light on the palate, mild and not overly lemony, with the faintest tinge of sweetness and finishing with an appropriate amount of citric pucker. **abv:** 35% **Price:** \$30



**91 Martini & Rossi Fiero** (Italy; Bacardi, Miami, FL). Made with a blend of white wines and botanicals including sweet Spanish oranges, this aperitif spirit has a bright orange-red hue and a candied grapefruit aroma. The palate is juicy and moderately sweet, mixing orange-peel and grapefruit-peel bitterness with a sweeter berry hint on the finish. **abv:** 15% **Price:** \$18



**90 Amaricano (USA; Fast Penny Spirits, Seattle, WA).** This American amaro is distilled from West Coast grapes and flavored with more than 40 organic botanicals. The aroma suggests dried cherries and a whiff of menthol. The palate opens mildly bitter. A hint of cocoa nib leads into a medicinal midpalate edged with dried cranberry tartness. The bitter finish is faintly reminiscent of fernet.

abv: 30%

Price: \$65

**90 Nixta Licor de Elote (Mexico; Casa Lumbre Spirits, Melville, NY).** This is a full-on corn liqueur: corn blended with a corn-based spirit. Look for a light honey hue and distinctly corn-y aroma reminiscent of some moonshines. The concentrated palate is mildly nutty and sweet, finishing with a grind of black pepper. Mix with agave spirits. The ear of corn-shaped bottle is an eye-catcher. Made from non-GMO corn.

abv: 30%

Price: \$32

## RUM

**96 Holmes Cay Guyana Uitvlugt 2003 Single Cask Rum (Guyana; Windside Spirits, Irvington, NY).** A particularly plush and delicious pour, this is a single-cask rum distilled at Demerara Distillers in 2003, aged two years in Guyana, then 16 more in the UK, and bottled in 2021 at barrel proof. Savory baking spices lead the nose, while the palate combines concentrated brown sugar, maple and vanilla. Flashes of milk chocolate, dark fruit and warming, gingery spice grace the finish.

abv: 51%

Price: \$159

**94 Ten to One Caribbean White Rum (Jamaica & Dominican Republic; Ten to One Rum, New York, NY).** A blend of unaged, “extra-proof” rums, this is clear in the glass with bright ripe banana aromas. The lively palate sings out with bold banana and lychee, finishing clean with white and black pepper heat.

abv: 45%

Price: \$32

**93 Equiano Rum (Mauritius/Barbados; Park Street Imports, Miami, FL).** Distilled and aged a minimum of eight years in Africa and the Carib-

bean, then finished in Cognac and ex-bourbon casks, this rum is on the sweeter side of the spectrum. The amber hue and mild brown sugar aroma lead into a bold palate, with mocha, fudge and toffee slicked with brown butter. Marmalade lingers on the long, cinnamon-spiced finish.

abv: 43%

Price: \$60



**93 Exodus Rum (Jamaica; Proof and Wood Ventures, Bardstown, KY).** Look for a bright golden hue and toasty tropical fruit aromas. The palate is distinctively funky, channeling ripe banana, buttered brioche and roasted pineapple. A splash of water adds nutty richness, clove heat and lip-smacking lemon as-tringency. Sip or mix into tropical cocktails. *Best Buy.*

abv: 42%

Price: \$30



**92 Denizen Vatted Dark Rum (Guyana and Martinique; Hotaling & Co., San Francisco, CA).** This is a blend of 80% dark rum produced in Guyana and 20% unaged rum agricole from Martinique. The end result is a deep copper hue and rich, toasty aromas of browned butter and toffee. The palate opens with cinnamon, cayenne, mesquite and hint of tropical fruit, then slides into a long mocha finish with lemon and orange peel. *Best Buy.*

abv: 50%

Price: \$30

**92 Koloa Kauai Coffee Rum (USA; Kōloa Rum Company, Kauai, HI).** The producer describes this bottling as “a rum blend,” made with white rum, cold-brew coffee and sugar, all of Hawaiian provenance, but it drinks like a liqueur. The silky liquid has a dark brown hue and bold, sweet coffee bean and vanilla aromas. Overall, it sips like spiked cappuccino with cream and sugar, finishing with a warming cinnamon glow.

abv: 34%

Price: \$33

**92 Saison Rum Triple Cask (Trinidad; The Craft Spirits Cooperative, San Mateo, CA).** Expect a burnished gold hue and light, rootsy aroma that suggests sarsaparilla and vanilla. The palate feels light and tingy, leading with brown sugar and maple sugar candy, wafting into a gentle, smooth finish tinged with almond and ginger sting. The “triple cask” name refers to a seven-year aging process that progresses through five years in Trinidad, in ex-bourbon American oak casks; 18 months in France’s Cognac region in medium-grain French oak; and six months in fine-grain French oak.

abv: 48%

Price: \$65

**91 Ron Izalco 10 Year Rum (Central America; Phenomenal Spirits, Virginia Beach, VA).** The mellow oak aroma includes a smoky hint. Vanilla sweetness leads the surprisingly robust palate, followed by hints of fudge, cocoa powder and a nutty hint. Cinnamon-clove tingle winds into a gentle, mouth-watering finish. Named after a volcano in El Salvador, this blend incorporates rums from Central America including Nicaragua, Panama, and Guatemala.

abv: 43%

Price: \$55

## SINGLE MALT WHISKY

**97 Aberfeldy 18 Years in Oak Highland Single Malt Scotch Whisky (Scotland; Baccardi, Coral Gables, FL).** This starts off with earthy, oaky aromas. The palate opens dry in tones of cedar and a hint of tingy spice. Adding water brings mouthwatering vanilla forward, along with coconut and a nutty tone reminiscent of pecan pie. The finish is long and drying, with plenty of baking spice and ginger tingles. Finished in Côte-Rôtie red wine casks.

abv: 43%

Price: \$120

**97 Port Charlotte PAC: 01 2011 Heavily Peated Islay Single Malt (Scotland; Rémy Cointreau USA, New York, NY).** Look for a tawny hue and a distinctly coconut-driven aroma. Add water to tame the alcohol intensity and the reward is orange and dark chocolate flavors, with hints of chipotle, charred oak and saline. The finish is long, complex and delicious. It was aged eight years and finished in red wine casks from Bordeaux.

abv: 56.1%

Price: \$130

**96 Benriach The Twelve Speyside Single Malt Scotch Whisky (Scotland; Brown-Forman, Louisville, KY).** What's in the bottle is a 12-year-old single malt aged in a combination of Sherry, bourbon and Port barrels. Expect a tawny hue and almond and fresh red apple aromas. The palate opens brisk and bold, showing caramel and baked apple flavors. A splash of water brings out mocha tones alongside cinnamon and ginger. Overall, this is a lightly sweet sipper, warming and delicious.

abv: 46%

Price: \$60

**96 Courage & Conviction American Single Malt Whiskey (USA; Virginia Distillery, Lovington, VA).** The second edition of Courage & Conviction is dedicated to Dr. Jim Swan, who passed away in 2017 following a 40-year career supporting the science of distilling. It's a fitting tribute, redolent of grilled pineapple, citrus and coconut on nose and palate, finishing with warming gingery tingle and a hint of rancio-like funk.

abv: 46%

Price: \$75



**95 Kangakoi 7 Year Single Grain Whisky (Japan; Aiko Importers, Peachtree Corners, GA).** Aged for seven years in ex-Sherry casks, this is a rich and elegant fruitcake of a whiskey. Look for a burnished gold hue and pear and spice aromas. The soft palate is loaded with figs, dates and cherries drizzled with maple syrup. This is a dessert-worthy, beautiful sipper.

abv: 40%

Price: \$99



**95 The Glen Grant 18 Year Old Single Malt Scotch Whisky (Scotland; Campari America, New York, NY).** Coconut and pineapple aromas lead into a flavorful palate brushed with tropical fruit and caramelized brown sugar. Adding water unleashes crème brûlée and a darker plum tone, finishing with a moderately smoky exhale.

abv: 43%

Price: \$135

**95 The Macallan Double Cask 18 Years Old Highland Single Malt Scotch Whisky (Scotland; Edrington Americas, New York, NY).** Assertive caramel and toffee aromas lead the nose. On the palate, vanilla and creamy caramel are enlivened by a hint of orange peel. Adding water creates an even bigger and richer effect, bringing more caramel center stage, finishing long with a sprinkle of cinnamon and cocoa powder. This easy sipper is a 18-year-old single malt rested in ex-Sherry casks.

abv: 43%

Price: \$350



**94 Glen Moray Heritage 12 Year Old Speyside Single Malt Scotch Whisky (Scotland; 375 Park Avenue Spirits, Louisville, KY).** Light, brisk aromas suggest fresh-cut red apple and a white floral breeze. The palate wraps light smoke around a core of juicy fruit, finishing with perky, peppery spice. It's easy drinking and approachable. *Best Buy.*

abv: 40%

Price: \$40

**94 Rampur Double Cask Indian Single Malt Whisky (India; SG Worldwide, Edison, NJ).** This single-malt whisky is matured in former bourbon and Sherry casks, hence the double cask name. Look for a tawny hue and a bold orange-peel fragrance. The palate is soft and smoky, leading into candied orange peel, vanilla and spice box, winding into a smoky finish.

abv: 45%

Price: \$90

**93 Glenfarclas 17 Year Old Highland Single Malt Scotch Whisky (Scotland; Sazerac, Louisville, KY).** Baking spice aromas lead the nose. The palate opens with lemon peel acidity and Granny Smith apple tartness. Adding water pulls out mild nutty tones, finishing long with nutmeg, cinnamon and vanilla.

abv: 43%

Price: \$94

**93 Kanosuke New Born 2019 Whisky (Japan; High Road Spirits, Santa Barbara, CA).** It's hard to believe this single-malt whisky is aged a mere 16 months. The flavor is light and bright in citrus, pineapple and tropical fruit that mingle with mellow hints of smoke and spice. The finish is drying and brisk, with mouthwatering citrus, oak and spice.

abv: 57%

Price: \$75

**93 The Dalmore Aged 15 Years Highland Single Malt Scotch Whisky (Scotland; Whyte & Mackay, New York, NY).** This is a 12-year-old Scotch finished in Sherry casks for an additional three years. The result is a deep amber hue and dried cherry and cinnamon aromas. The palate opens with oak and dried fruit, finishing with dark cinnamon, cocoa, clove and a lively hint of lemon peel.

abv: 40%

Price: \$140

**93 Westland American Oak Single Malt Whiskey (USA; Westland Distillery, Seattle, WA).** Westland's flagship single malt opens with oak tones on the nose and palate. With time and maybe a splash of water, vanilla and cocoa come forward, finishing drying with lemon-pepper heat.

abv: 46%

Price: \$70



**93 Whiskey Del Bac Classic Single Malt Whiskey (USA; Hamilton Distillers, Tucson, AZ).** Look for a topaz hue and rich, bold aromas of sarsaparilla, vanilla bean and orange peel. The palate opens with sweet smoke, cocoa and espresso, finishing with juicy orange and clove heat. Adding water unlocks more spice, yielding a dark gingerbread or spice cake character. A complex and interesting sipper. **abv: 45%** **Price: \$54**

**91 Ardbeg Wee Beastie 5 Years Old Islay Single Malt Scotch Whisky (Scotland; Moët Hennessy, New York, NY).** A distinct mesquite smoke note leads the nose of this Islay single malt. The ferocious palate opens with almond, spicy honey and peat smoke, plus a hint of barbecue sauce twang. Each savory sip finishes warming and intense, laced with eucalyptus, sea salt and cayenne. Released in 2020, this is a permanent addition to the Ardbeg core range. **Best Buy.** **abv: 47.4%** **Price: \$50**

## TEQUILA



**96 Ocho Single Estate Reposado Tequila (Mexico; Samson & Surrey, Miami, FL).** This lively, bright tequila will please purists. A light hand with the oak means a straw hue and brisk aromas of jalapeño and citrus. The palate melds flavors of bell pepper, fresh rosemary and roasted jalapeño that lead into mild coconut and graphite notes on the midpalate, finishing with a fresh herb exhale. **abv: 40%** **Price: \$55**

**95 La Gritona Reposado (Mexico; T. Edward, New York, NY).** Look for a pale straw hue and fruity/funky aromas. The palate offers distinct tropical fruit notes, opening with lychee and a faint floral hint, plus a faint waft of ripe-banana funk midpalate. The finish is long and drying, showing grapefruit peel and pink peppercorn. Sip or mix into Palomas. **Best Buy.** **abv: 40%** **Price: \$31**



**94 El Gran Jubileo Reposado Tequila (Mexico; Capita Spirits, Highland Beach, FL).** Vibrant yellow in the glass, this Tequila takes a minute to open, morphing from mild almond to a deeper vanilla scent. The palate feels light, almost slick, and echoes that almond and vanilla profile at first, before growing more complex in lemon verbena, lemongrass and hints of pine and tarragon. A drying, elongated finish is accented by a white pepper tingle. Aged 11 months. **Best Buy.** **abv: 40%** **Price: \$34**

**94 Partida Reposado Tequila (Mexico; Partida, Oakland, CA).** The citrusy, zesty aroma suggests grilled lemon and dried oregano. The palate opens lightly with coconut and almond, leading into a verdant finish laced with tarragon, sage and lemon-grass. A faint jalapeño sizzle and lemony acidity yield a mouthwatering finish. **abv: 40%** **Price: \$44**

**93 Antaño Reposado Tequila (Mexico; Distiller Sales, Princeton, MN).** Zesty jalapeño tickles the nose. The palate opens with a pleasant rush of vanilla and tropical fruit, giving way to a fleetingly sweet and slightly numbing finish that suggests cubeb peppers, pink peppercorns and jalapeño. **abv: 40%** **Price: \$40**

**93 PaQui Reposado Tequila (Mexico; Tequila Holdings, New York, NY).** This Tequila drinks like a blanco, with just the mildest mellowing influence from the oak. It's savory and fresh, faintly perfumed like tomatoes and bell peppers ripening in the sun. The palate echoes the bell pepper hint, layering accents of fresh herbs and jalapeño against a flicker of nuttiness on the midpalate. Each sip ends drying, brisk and citrusy. **abv: 40%** **Price: \$65**

**93 Solento Organic Reposado Tequila (Mexico; Solento, Encinitas, CA).** Look for vanilla and coconut aromas, plus a hint of savory edge. The palate is distinctly herbaceous, like bunches of mint and tarragon surrounded by a halo of coconut and vanilla. The finish shows graphite, menthol and mouthwatering white and black pepper. **abv: 40%** **Price: \$64**

**93 Tapatio Reposado Tequila (Mexico; Charbay Distillery, Ukiah, CA).** This is a lean take on reposado, with a light straw hue and a perky fresh jalapeño aroma. The mineral palate opens with hints of citrus and sage, leading into white pepper, a faint whisper of vanilla and mouthwatering salinity. It's lively, with just enough oak to mellow this into a sipping tequila. **abv: 40%** **Price: \$45/1L**

**92 Corralejo Reposado Tequila (Mexico; Infinium Spirits, Aliso Viejo, CA).** Coconut and pineapple play lightly on the nose and palate, interwoven with richer hints of vanilla sweetness. The brisk, mouthwatering finish adds peppery, citrusy zing. **Best Buy.** **abv: 40%** **Price: \$34**

**92 El Sativo Reposado Tequila (Mexico; El Sativo, Reno, NV).** Expect assertive dried herbs and honey on the nose. The bold, rich palate echoes that honeyed character, then the zesty dried herb notes come into play. Each sip finishes with citrusy acidity, brushed with vanilla and allspice. Aged nine months. **abv: 40%** **Price: \$45**

**91 Penta Reposado Tequila (Mexico; MD Imports, Carlsbad, CA).** A tequila made with a blend of agave from locales in all five states in Mexico where tequila can be legally produced, this is distinctly bold and sweet. Look for concentrated coconut and vanilla right off the bat, reading like vanilla wafers or pound cake, leading into a spicier finish: Cinnamon, clove and black pepper heat resound into a citrusy exhale. **abv: 40%** **Price: \$125**

**91 Vikera Reposado Tequila (Mexico; San Gabriel Beverage Group, Rosemead, CA).** This tequila is named for Owner/Master Distiller Melly Barajas and her "vikerás," the women "Vikings" who are the primary operators of the distillery. Look for mild vanilla and earthy cocoa on nose and palate. Agave nectar opens to warming hints of maple, cinnamon bark and gingerbread, brightened by a final lemon peel note. Aged in white oak for a minimum of six months. **abv: 40%** **Price: \$50**

**91 Villa One Reposado Tequila (Mexico; Stoli Group, New York, NY).** This rich version of reposado embraces all the flavors oak can impart. Look for a burnished gold hue and lots of vanilla on nose and palate. Maple, sarsaparilla, and cocoa all take their turns, leading into clove and allspice on the long finish. Aged six months. **abv: 40%** **Price: \$50**



- 90** **ArteNOM Selección de 1414 Reposado Tequila** (Mexico; Haas Brothers, Oakland, CA). Look for a pale straw hue and aromas that mingle dried oregano with a touch of honey. The palate is light and relatively restrained. An initial savory note opens to mild almond and vanilla sweetness, plus fleeting tropical fruit juiciness in the back, exiting with peppery tingle. Aged four months in used American oak. **abv:** 40% **Price:** \$55

## VODKA

- 96** **Gold Apricot Vodka (USA; Black Infusions, Wellesley, MA)**. Look for a golden hue and an aroma that's like inhaling a bag of dried apricots in this vodka infused with California apricots. The tart palate opens with puckery lemon and closes with a concentrated dried-apricot exhale. **abv:** 30% **Price:** \$32

- 96** **Prairie Organic Cucumber Flavored Vodka (USA; Ed Phillips & Sons, Princeton, MN)**. This vodka smells like cucumber and tomato water, making it both bold and savory on the nose. The palate is more subtle and lightly sweet, with a juicy cucumber note and finishing with a hint of celery salt. Mix into Bloody Marys. **Best Buy.** **abv:** 35% **Price:** \$20



- 95** **Purity Vodka Connoisseur 51 Reserve Organic** (Sweden; Purity Vodka, Manhasset, NY). What sets this vodka apart is the markedly light, almost frothy texture. The aroma and palate are neutral, finishing with a whisper of almond sweetness and white pepper and lemony acidity on the tip of the tongue. Sip or mix into Martinis. **abv:** 40% **Price:** \$32

- 94** **Airem Organic Vodka (Spain; Seaman's Imports, Clifton, NJ)**. Light, crisp and complex, this is an ideal vodka to mix into Bloody Marys, thanks to echoes of celery leaf and fennel seed. It finishes on a grapefruit peel note. Made from wheat. **abv:** 40% **Price:** \$36



- 94** **Beluga Gold Line Vodka (Russia; MHW, Manhasset, NY)**. For those seeking absolute neutrality in a vodka, this comes as close as you can get. Look for a silky feel and the barest gossamer almond note on the palate, finishing with cinnamon flicker. **abv:** 40% **Price:** \$100

- 94** **Belvedere Heritage 176 Vodka Mixed with Malted Rye Spirit (Poland; Moët Hennessy, New York, NY)**. Technically this is classified as a "spirit drink," but it drinks like an excellent vodka. What's in the bottle is vodka mixed with a malted rye spirit, yielding a brisk, spicy sip. It's a winner mixed into a dry Martini. **abv:** 40% **Price:** \$40

- 90** **Good Liquorworks Vodka (USA; Finger Lakes Distilling, Burdett, NY)**. A sustainable-minded newcomer designed to reduce waste and support farms, this vodka is distilled from discarded coffee fruit sourced in Colombia, though the product is distilled and bottled in New York State. The warm aroma suggests cocoa and tropical fruit. Those notes are echoed on the robust palate, which finishes with a fruity tang and a white pepper tingle. **abv:** 40% **Price:** \$30

- 90** **Kastra Elion Vodka (Greece; CMC Wine & Spirits, Los Angeles, CA)**. A mix of Greek olives and grains are distilled into this smooth, slightly buttery vodka. Each sip opens with mild almond sweetness and winds into a faint, mouthwatering touch of salinity. **abv:** 40% **Price:** \$57

- 90** **Live Proud Vodka (USA; Live Proud Spirits, Carmel, IN)**. Distilled from corn, this vodka has a neutral aroma and relatively sweet palate. Mild vanilla and almond tones segue into a brisk, citrusy finish, bright with peppery spice and a hint of lemon peel. For every bottle sold, \$1 benefits nationally recognized civil rights charities. **abv:** 40% **Price:** \$25

- 90** **Supergay Craft Vodka (USA; Supergay Spirits, North Bergen, NJ)**. A percentage of profits from this "farm to disco" vodka benefits LGBTQ+ organizations. Distilled from corn, look for mellow butterscotch sweetness on nose and palate. A mouthwatering saline hint on the finish fleetingly evokes salted caramel. Mix into White Russians and other rich drinks. **abv:** 40% **Price:** \$29