

AD

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AMERICAN DISTILLER: A SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON THE DISTILLING PROCESS



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AD promotes an open discussion of column rectification and the pot distilling process. This includes Alambic distillers doing traditional eau de vie and brandy distilling. AD covers spirit wholesalers and liquor retailers and the important roll they play in the industry.

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Shaken, But Not Stirred: Bendistillery and its Martini Bar

by Alan Moen

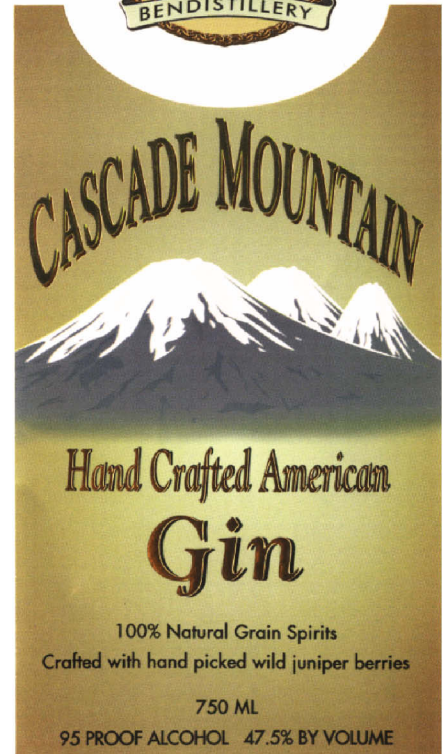
About a year ago, Jim Bendis, owner of the alliterative Bendistillery in Bend, Oregon, decided to open up a tasting room outside his distillery, since Oregon law allowed him to maintain tasting rooms both at his distillery and at one other location. Bendis thought that the best way to present his gins and vodkas was at a place that offered mixed drinks. So in downtown Bend, the Bendistillery Sampling Room was born, the first off-premise distillery "gin bar" in Oregon and maybe in the entire U.S.

Bendis makes four products: Desert Juniper Gin, Cascade Mountain Gin, Crater Lake Vodka, and Hazelnut Espresso Vodka. He drew up a list of some 30 different drinks for his new location. But the customer's overwhelming choice was the martini.

"We're a martini bar," Bendis says. "We sell 400 martinis a night on a busy weekend."

The sampling room's popularity may have been too much of a good thing. The Oregon Liquor Control Commission recently shook things up a bit by deciding that Bendis had to offer food at his downtown location as well. What's more, Oregon's Tied House laws mandated that by opening a full retail bar selling his own spirits, he could no longer operate a distillery as well.

Bendis was stirred to action, and discovered a way around that law, courtesy of Oregon's brewing industry. He found that state tied house laws don't apply to brewpubs. If he made a malt beverage product, he could continue to offer only his own spirits.



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ATF's Formula Process

by Marc E. Sorini*, July 2002

Federal law requires distillers to submit the formulas of some distilled spirits to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms ("ATF") for pre-approval. Somewhat analogous to ATF's label-approval process, formula applications generally take longer for ATF to approve than requests for label approval. In addition, any flavors and extracts added to a distilled spirit must have been analyzed and approved by ATF's laboratory in Rockville, Maryland. Only domestic distillers must submit formulas, but importers need to submit a manufacturer's statement and obtain a "pre-import analysis" from ATF in the same circumstances.

Not every distilled spirit requires the submission and approval of a formula, and ATF regulations do not clearly identify what spirits require formula approval. Instead, the regulations establish a general rule that distillers must obtain an approved formula if they add ingredients or use processes that would "change the character, composition, class or type" of a spirit. ATF has not applied this standard in an entirely consistent manner.

Despite uncertainty, some generalizations are possible. Thus, products of distillation alone (e.g., whiskey, brandy, vodka, rum) do not require a formula. On the other hand, current ATF policy requires the pre-approval of formulas for the following distilled spirit classes and types:

- Liqueurs.
- Gin, if botanicals are added after distillation.
- Flavored spirits like flavored brandies, gins, rums, vodkas and whiskies.
- Any distilled spirit "specialty" product; e.g., one that does not fit into an ATF-recognized classification.

Obtaining a formula approval starts with the submission of a formula application on a specific form, ATF Form 5110.38, available from ATF's website at <http://www.atf.treas.gov/forms/pdfs/f511038.pdf>. The formula itself is a simplified recipe listing each ingredient used, giving a quantity or range of each ingredient in a particular batch, and briefly explaining the production process. The distiller must submit two completed copies of the executed formula form to ATF Headquarters in Washington, DC. If the product contains flavors, the application must include ATF-approval information, and providing flavor ingredient data ("FIDs") sheets from the flavor manufacturer can help speed formula review time. Similarly, if ATF previously approved the same formula (e.g., for the same product made at a different location), attaching any prior approvals can help speed the approval process.

ATF policy also permits distillers to supercede approved formulas to change ingredients and/or processes, as long as the changes can not affect the labeling of the product. For changes that can affect labeling (e.g., changing a product from one class to another), distillers must obtain a new formula approval, followed by new labels.

Formulation Specialists in ATF's Alcohol Labeling & Formulation Division ("ALFD") review each formula application for compliance with the law. Among the issues the specialists examine are whether: (1) a distiller can use listed ingredients and processes in the particular class and type of distilled spirit (as identified on the formula form); (2) ATF has approved the use of the particular ingredients and processes; and (3) listed ingredients are generally recognized as safe ("GRAS") under the standards of the Federal Food & Drug Administration. During regular business hours, ALFD's customer service team (tel: 202-927-8140) makes itself available for questions by industry members.

Like certificate of label approval applicants, formula applicants can file by mail, overnight delivery, in person, or through several trade associations, lawfirms and consultants that provide label "walkover" services. In-person delivery, either by the applicant or an agent, saves time by avoiding both the mails and ATF's internal mail-routing system.

The formula review and approval process generally takes longer than the average nine days ATF takes to process requests for label approval. In general, ATF takes three or four weeks to review and approve (or reject) a formula, but delays frequently arise. Indeed, a delay of several months is not uncommon. And of course, rejection of formula will cause further delay, as a distiller cannot produce a product requiring a formula until ATF has reviewed and approved the formula.

To avoid delays, distillers planning to produce liqueurs, flavored spirits, and other specialty products should research applicable class/type standards, confirm the GRAS status of unusual ingredients and review ATF policy towards particular processes and ingredients in order to avoid the substantial delay that results from a formula rejection. In addition, distillers must recognize that obtaining an approved formula takes time, and incorporate advance formula approval into their production and sales plans whenever a liqueur, flavored spirit or distilled spirit specialty product is involved.

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Grappa — Gracious and Potent

by Alan S. Dikty

While on a trip to attend Vinitaly (the annual Italian wine trade exposition in Verona) a restaurateur friend of mine and myself wandered into one of the innumerable coffee bars to have an espresso. Oddly, the barrista asked if we wanted our espressos " corrected ". We were surprised (it was 9 a m), but not shocked, since we knew that espresso can be " corrected " with a splash of grappa and other distillates.

Many Italians won't dream of gulping an espresso not " corrected " appropriately. Of course outside of Veneto, where well over 50 percent of all grappa in Italy originate, people are less inclined to promote it less blatantly.

Grappa used to be, and to a large extent, still is the distillate of vigneron. They enjoy a glass or two of grappa after a meal and blend it into their coffee with fellow professionals. Grappa is simply the un-aged and unrefined distillate of grape pomace. In France it is called marc and in German speaking countries, i.e Germany, German-speaking Switzerland, Austria *trester*. A few marc from Burgundy or Bordeaux find their way to our shores, but end up in the hands of connoisseurs in search of rare distillates.

Grape skin distillates have been around since the 14th century, a century later than the invention of distillation, but never really gained popularity, mostly because of its rough (rustic) taste and texture.

Over the past two decades , Italian distillers and a few wineries have been able to change the style, status and quality for the better. The key to grappa quality and taste lies in ingredients, equipment and technique.

While in the past distillers claimed grape variety to be unimportant, today, young, well-educated and ambitious professionals make and market varietal grappas successfully.

Equipment and technique play a very important role. The best use alembic-style small, steam-powered stills and batch distil. Continuous stills are much more efficient and less expensive but neutral grappas.

By law, grappa may be distilled out at max 86 percent alcohol by volume to capture varietal characteristics. The distillate is then diluted to 51 – 55 percent, some times 40 percent pending on the market. High alcohol concentrations block congeners from remaining in the distillate, hence a high octane grappa lacks characteristic aromas.

Distillates born from fermented grape juice cannot simply be called grappa; but must be labelled *aquavite d'uva*.

Climate and geography play an important role. Riesling, Muller-Thurgau, Gewurztraminer and Muscats yield more

aromatic grappas than Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and even Sangiovese.

Steam- distilled grappas have a much cleaner, smoother and pleasant taste (without scorched flavours), as grape skins are subjected to moist heat.

Another contributing factor is ingenious and artful packaging. Some distillers have even commissioned famous Murano glass-blowers to create unique bottle shapes and sizes in an attempt to attract attention.

Outside Italy, grappa was popularised by millions of Italian restaurateurs (North America, Argentina, Australia and northern Europe) plying their trades.

Many famous wineries, Mastroberardino, Ceretto, Ornellaia, Badia a Coltibuono just to name a few, market grappa but a few distillers specialize like Nonnino, Bottega and Jacopo Poli offering an impressive, tastefully packaged varietal products.

The L C B O (Liquor Control Board of Ontario), ever astute in spotting and satisfying market demand has started offering a large selection of grappas

(Grappa Bianca Finissima Carpena Malvolti, Grappa Sandro Bottega, Grappa 1999 Alexander Society, Grappa Chardonnay, Mazzetti d'Altavilla, Grappa Stravecchia Faled, Sarpa di Poli) but agencies in Toronto offer an even larger choice in their consignment portfolios.

Innvecchiata (aged), stravecchiata (very old), riserva (reserve) means that the product has been barrel-aged, but since there is no legislation they can be misleading at worst and confusing at best!

Grappa has never been barrel aged and tradition-bound producers just distil and bottle in an attempt to preserve " freshness ".

When it comes to grappa, it is freshness that counts!

Herb, fruit, and even truffle-flavours grappas are now increasingly common, but not necessarily more interesting.

In the US A grappatinis, grappa margaritas, and even grappa on the rocks with a little soda are being served in more fashionable bars. Of course neutral-tasting grappas can lend themselves quite well to mixing, but vodka, at much lower cost could do the job more efficiently.

Grappa, to my mind, tastes much better on its own or in an espresso, but you can try it in as many ways as you wish.



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Canadian Whisky

by Hrayr Berberoglu

Of the world's officially recognized and famous whiskies, Canadian or rye whisky (note spelling. While Irish and Americans spell whisky with an "e", Canadians and Scots omit it) is the lightest and most mixable.

Canadian whisky production started circa 1750 in Montreal and from there it spread to Ontario, where today the lion's share is distilled. By 1758 provincial governments were deriving a good portion of their revenue from whisky taxes. Since, then, taxes levied increased appreciably, yet rye whisky today is still reasonably priced, never exceeding that of vodka which costs much less to produce.

"Brown" spirits (rum, rye, bourbon, and brandy) consumption has levelled off for two decades now and distillers simply cannot afford to pass on additional costs to consumers.

Marketing efforts to reposition Canadian whisky have been partially successful in reversing the trend, but market share increases have been marginal at best, with the exception of high end, longer aged and smoother whiskies that are now enjoying unprecedented popularity among mature consumers. "Drink less, but better" seems to be the dictum for the over 45 year-old market segment.

By law, all Canadian whisky distillers must use exclusively cereal grain. The combination of grains, their treatment, special and rigid controls exercised by the distiller during production sets rye whisky apart from any other distillate.

All grain is thoroughly laboratory tested before acceptance. Needless to say all grains originate in Alberta or Saskatchewan two provinces that are world-famous for their high quality winter wheat, barley and rye. Most distillers use a blend of rye, corn and barley malt, the proportions of which are kept secret. All are milled into a fine meal or coarse flour to be mixed with hot water in huge stainless steel tanks where steam heats the mixture to convert starch to fermentable sugar.

After this step the liquid is cooled and inoculated with specially selected yeasts. Each distiller develops his/her own yeast strain imparts a unique taste to the end product

The fermentation lasts 48-72 hours at the end of which the now murky-looking contains 8-10ABV.

This faintly alcoholic liquid must be distilled to extract the spirit and concentrate it.

Canadian distillers use steam-powered and extremely efficient Coffey- or columnar stills. The three distillation towers

efficiently and consecutively triple-distil the worth to the desired strength ranging from 65-75 ABV. Higher concentrations yield more neutral tasting whiskies. The next major, some claim most important steps in Canadian whisky production, are aging and blending.

All Canadian whisky must be barrel-aged for a minimum of three years. Practically all distillers use barrels of 75% US gallon capacity, since the American government stipulated that Bourbon barrels may be used once only. Bourbon distillers sell all their barrels either to Scottish or Canadian distillers at very attractive prices just to recuperate some of the cost.

Today, most Canadian brands contain whiskies aged much longer than the required three years. The youngest whisky in the blend is generally five, more often seven years old. Canadian whisky labels sporting any age indication must state the age of the youngest in the blend.

After aging, the blender decides which barrels will constitute the components of the brand. Blends are thoroughly mixed in huge vats and diluted with distilled water to desired ABV (usually 40 ABV) to "marry" for a few more months.

There are a few Canadian whiskies marketed at 50ABV but represent a rarity.

Some distillers are one of their brands for 18 years and others up to 21 years and blend very smooth products. These high-end brands have been able to garner market share especially with well-to-do older consumers.

The largest and best known Canadian distillers are: J. Seagram, H. Walker, Schenley, Corby, Potter and Alberta Distillers. All produce several lines ranging from basic to super deluxe.

The best are: Century Reserve 21 year old, Adam's Antique 10 year old, Gibson's Finest. Crown Royal, Canadian Club, Canadian Club Classic, Canadian Club Classic reserve, 40 Creek Barrel Select, Seagram's V.O., Walker's Special Old.

Canadian whisky lends itself superbly to cocktails because of its lightness, and bartenders use it for all whisky based cocktails, whereas American bartenders prefer Bourbon and Scots Scottish whiskies with predictably different results for the same cocktail.

Canadian whisky enjoys a fine reputation amongst connoisseurs for its smooth, light and distinctly refined taste, and is exported to over 170 countries world-wide.

SHAKEN BUTNOTSTIRRED — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"We've had to do it backwards here," says Bendis, who once swore he would never return to the restaurant business. Now he's built a kitchen, hired a chef, and jokes about calling his beer-to-be "Regulation Ale."

"In a way, it's probably a good thing. It should help us sell more of our own stuff," Bendis muses. "We're blazing a trail here," adds Alan Dietrich, the distillery's sales man-

manager. "But nobody knows where it's going."

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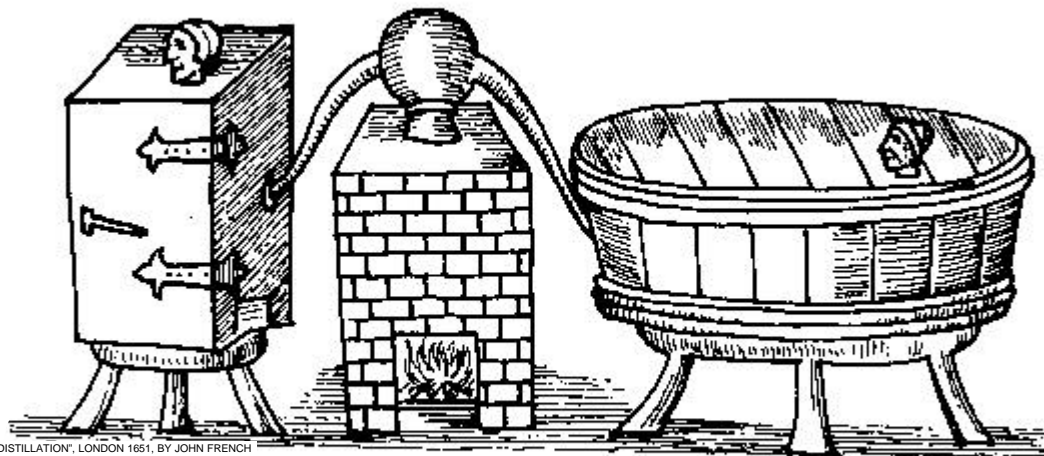


ILLUSTRATION FROM "THE ART OF DISTILLATION", LONDON 1651, BY JOHN FRENCH