

Protocols for ADI International Spirits Competition

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Mission

The American Distilling Institute is dedicated to running a rigorous and professional spirits competition that strives to provide distillers, blenders, and brands valuable, unbiased, third-party feedback on the quality of their products and to help promote those who are making the finest quality artisan spirits. To that end we have developed the following protocols that we believe allow us to meet these goals. We make our protocols publicly available so that all interested parties can know the process by which each spirit is evaluated and the high standard by which medals are awarded.

Pre-Competition

Before the competition, all entries are received by Preiss Imports and put in a secure area. Boxes remain sealed upon arrival until the week prior to the competition. Once the boxes are delivered to the competition venue, a team of staff and stewards will open the boxes and sort the spirits by class and category.

Classification of Spirits and Flighting

Entries are pre-sorted based how they are registered and then our team of stewards will taste every entry and create the flight orders. Unlike most other competitions, ADI uses professionals from the spirits industry that have deep knowledge of the classes and categories they oversee. Our detailed registration form paired with our stewards' experience allows us to group similarly categorized spirits which are then delivered to the judges.

Organization of the Flights

The judging day is divided into a morning and afternoon session. During each session, flights are organized and delivered to begin with lighter spirits (i.e. clear spirits with lighter aromas and tastes), and proceed to heavier spirits (i.e. oak-matured, flavored, spiced, heavily smoked, hopped or sweetened spirits) which can linger on the palate.

Individual Organization of Each Flight

Each individual flight of spirits is generally sorted with the lower proof spirits going first, and the higher proof spirits following. Each flight is tasted blind with only enough basic information provided to the judges (i.e. spirit category and ABV range), so they may be evaluated fairly, without making any spirit individually identifiable.

Panels and Judges

Each panel has at least four judges, and it is our aim that each panel have a mix of distillers, wholesalers, importers, retailers, bartenders, educators, and journalists/writers. We believe that using expert judges with different backgrounds and experiences in the spirits industry allow us to provide better feedback to our entrants. Judges are asked to avoid smoking during the competition or using fragrant cosmetics and toiletries on judging days, and we provide filtered water and neutral crackers, as palate cleansers.

The Judging Process

It is recommended the judge nose through the flight at least once before beginning to taste. Judges are expected to be professionals and use their experience as they evaluate the spirits in each flight which includes nosing, tasting, and spitting each sample. As each spirit is evaluated, judges individually write their feedback and determine a score based on the overall quality of the spirit.

Electronic Score Sheets

The scoring of spirits is based on a 100-point system and each judge assigns an overall score which is correlated to a medal recommendation or no medal recommendation for each spirit. Below 70 no medal is recommended, 70-79 for a bronze, 80-89 for silver, and 90-100 for gold. The score sheet asks the judges for feedback regarding the best qualities of the spirit, and how the spirit can be improved. This feedback is of primary use to the producers so rude, sarcastic, or unconstructive comments by judges are not acceptable.

Awards

After all the spirits in a flight have been scored the entire panel will award double gold, gold, silver, and bronze medals for spirits judged worthy of recognition. Each spirit's average score serves as a starting point for the panel's discussion for what medal, if any, should be awarded. If all the judges in a panel recommend a gold medal and the panel believes the spirit to be exemplary, they may choose to award the spirit a double gold medal as an outstanding example of its class and category.

It is not uncommon for no spirit in a flight to receive a medal. Neither is it uncommon for several spirits within the same category to receive gold medals or silver or bronze. In the case where no spirit in a category is awarded a medal, neither will Best of Category be awarded.

Best of Category

Once all the spirits in a particular spirit category have been judged, the "Best of Category" designation will be awarded to a spirit the judges identified as the best example of that category entered into the entire competition. For example, the Best Classic Gin, the Best Blended Bourbon, the Best Citrus Liqueur, etc.

Best of Class

Once all the spirits for a particular class have been judged, the "Best of Class" designation will be awarded for both US and International spirits in a particular spirit class, such as Best US Whiskey, Best International Brandy etc. To be eligible for a Best of Class award, a spirit must have been awarded BOTH a gold or double-gold medal AND "Best of Category."

Excellence in Packaging Awards

Without any additional cost to the entrant, ADI will award bottles with innovative and/or outstanding packaging awards for Excellence in Packaging. Bottles will be judged on overall originality, creativity, graphic design, integration of bottle design to label style, and aesthetic appeal. Producers who wish to enter products for whom there is no category, such as box sets, Advent Calendars etc. may enter bottles for only the packaging award.