

FINE WINE & GOOD SPIRITS

Taste

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION • WINTER 2014

FREE

ALL-AMERICAN VODKA

WINE

Football Party
Pairings

ENTERTAINING

Mardi Gras Classics



Vodka Martini
See recipe on page 1.

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Taste

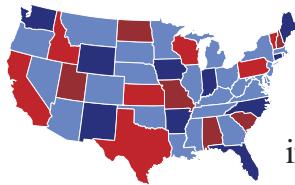
ON THE COVER

When it comes to making vodka, the U.S. is giving Vodka Belt countries stiff competition with brands like **Tito's Hand-made Vodka**, a corn-based vodka from Texas that helped pave the way for the craft spirits market. Enjoy Tito's in a vodka martini, made to your liking with a lemon or orange twist (pictured) or garnished with an olive.

Taste cover photograph by Brett Thomas.
Prop styling by Lisa Russell.

clearly
AMERiCAN

**TASTE THE HOMEGROWN
VODKAS THAT PUT THE
U.S. ON THE SPIRITS MAP**



BOTH RUSSIA AND POLAND MAY CLAIM TO HAVE invented vodka, but at John J. Jeffries restaurant in Lancaster, the spirit is all-American. Here, craft beer and cocktail manager Stephen Wood mixes up signature drinks like the Jeffries Mule—a twist on the classic using Boyd & Blair, a premium vodka distilled near Pittsburgh—and the Pennsylvania Vesper, made with Philadelphia's Penn 1681 Rye Vodka. And when a patron asks for a martini, he often suggests one made with Tito's Handmade Vodka, a corn-based brand from Texas that helped establish the market for American craft spirits. **BY ROBERT DIGIACOMO**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRETT THOMAS

STYLING BY LISA RUSSELL



Made with vodka distilled
in Pennsylvania

JEFFRIES MULE

From John J. Jeffries, Lancaster

2 oz. Boyd & Blair Vodka
1 oz. ginger-lime simple syrup
(see page 42)
1/2 oz. fresh lime juice
Club soda, to taste
Maine Root Ginger Brew
(or ginger beer), to taste
3 dashes Angostura bitters,
for garnish
Lime zest, for garnish

Combine vodka, syrup and lime
juice in a copper mug packed
with ice. Top with equal parts club
soda and ginger brew. Garnish
with bitters and lime zest.



The use of local and other American small-batch vodkas complements

the farm-to-table food menu at the upscale restaurant, which is located in the Lancaster Arts Hotel. “We sell more American vodka than imported vodka,” Wood says. “A lot of people are transitioning to local and regional spirits. It’s like the ‘buy fresh, buy local’ idea with food, but it’s ‘drink fresh, drink local.’”

A U.S. address isn’t the only thing distinguishing American vodkas from their European cousins. Under federal law, vodka made in the United States must be 80 proof—meaning it’s 40 percent alcohol—while the European standard is 75 proof, says Chandler Carranza, spirits category manager for Fine Wine & Good Spirits.

There’s also a purity test: European makers may add natural flavorings from the by-products of the distillation process, while domestic producers may not. “American vodka is held to a narrower definition of vodka—it is a pure alcohol,” Carranza says.

Beyond these shared distillation regulations, American vodkas diverge stylistically. There are small-batch brands that tout being organic (American Harvest), ones that are gluten-free (Blue Ice Handcrafted American Vodka) and others that are superpremium (CLIX Vodka, which retails online for \$299.99 for a 750 mL bottle).

SKYY, which is produced in Northern California, is Pennsylvania’s bestselling American vodka, while unique flavored options like Yazi Ginger Vodka, a ginger-infused vodka from Oregon, and OYO, a honey-vanilla vodka from Ohio, are quickly developing a following thanks to the craft cocktail trend.

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Made with vodka distilled in Texas

TITO'S SRIRACHA MOLE

From Derek's Restaurant, Philadelphia

Cocoa powder, to rim glass
1 1/2 oz. Tito's Handmade Vodka
1/2 oz. creme de cacao
1/2 oz. sriracha-agave syrup (see below)
6 dashes Fee Brothers bitter chocolate bitters

Rim a coupe glass with cocoa powder. Combine ingredients in a cocktail shaker half filled with ice.

Stir with a cocktail spoon using a circular motion to chill the drink without making it cloudy.

Strain into rimmed glass.

SRIRACHA-AGAVE SYRUP
Makes 1 cup

1/4 cup sriracha
1/4 cup agave syrup
1/2 cup water

Combine ingredients and mix well.



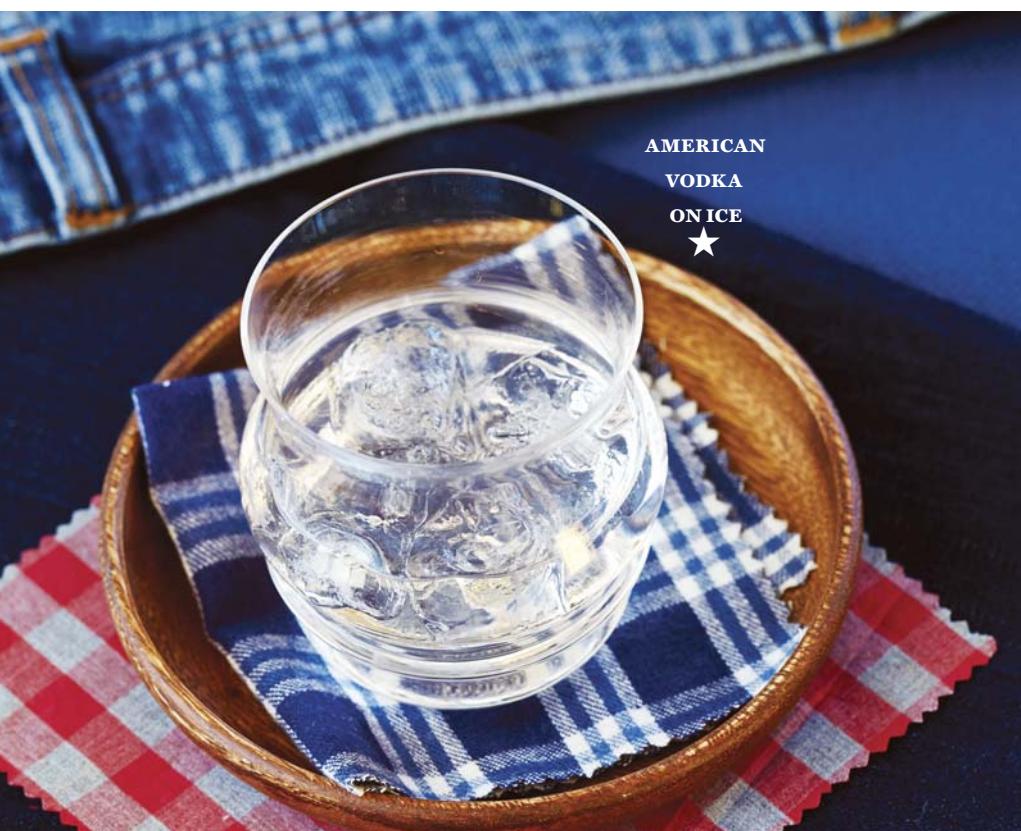
Made with vodka distilled in Pennsylvania

RAIN IN THE PARK

From Boyd & Blair Vodka

1 oz. Boyd & Blair Vodka
1/2 oz. St-Germain elderflower liqueur
1/2 oz. freshly squeezed lemon juice
Sparkling wine, to taste
Lemon peel, for garnish

Combine vodka, liqueur and lemon juice in a shaker with ice. Shake and strain into a martini glass and top with sparkling wine. Garnish with lemon peel.



RAIN
IN THE
PARK



TITO'S
SRIRACHA
MOLE



CLEARLY AMERICAN

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In the United States, vodka-making is still relatively young compared to the tradition of producing rye whiskey and bourbon, which both date back to the early American period. The clear spirit didn't make a splash with consumers here until after World War II, exploding in popularity by the end of the 20th century. Today, vodka is the state's best-selling spirits category, Carranza says. And American vodka is definitely gaining traction with vodka fans. "It hits every [price point], so every consumer can buy American," Carranza says.

Hitting particularly close to home is Boyd & Blair from Pennsylvania Pure Distilleries, which debuted five years ago and is now available in 32 states, according to its cocreator C. Prentiss Orr. The spirits start-up took its cues from the success of the craft-brewing movement and became one of the first licensed microdistilleries in the country. Orr and his partner, Barry Young, worked with graduate students at Penn State seven years ago to develop a best practice for fermentation. Both the bitter "heads" and musty "tails" are tossed, leaving only the naturally sweet "hearts" to be used in the bottle.

"We have a thickness, a mouthfeel that you just won't get with corn or wheat vodka," Orr says. "Because of its potato base and the distillation process, there isn't a back bite."

Of course, small-batch American vodkas were helped along the way by one Bert Butler "Tito" Beveridge II, whose determination helped pave their way. A Texas-based geologist and geophysicist by training, Beveridge was looking for a career change in the early '90s when he began experimenting with making his own flavor-infused vodkas.

Beveridge saw the potential for a small-batch, pot-still vodka made from yellow corn instead of the traditional wheat or potato. But first he had to overcome resistance from state regulators to get approval for his distillery as well as the skepticism of distributors who doubted a market existed for such a product. Launching in 1997 in Austin, Tito's gradually expanded beyond its home base to all 50 states and is now the top-selling craft vodka in Pennsylvania.

According to Beveridge himself,

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JEFFRIES MULE

GINGER-LIME SIMPLE SYRUP

Makes 2-3 cups

- 8 limes, zested
- 1 cup finely chopped ginger
- 2 T. whole black peppercorns
- 2½ cups cane sugar
- 1¾ cups water

Place zest in a nonreactive container. Bring ginger, peppercorns, sugar and water to a low boil in a heavy pot. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 30 minutes. Pour liquid through a fine-mesh sieve into the container with lime zest. Let sit at room temperature for 8 hours.

consumers facing uncertain economic times have embraced the brand for being authentic. "I still have the same label and bottle and package, but it's like society has come around," Beveridge says. "Consumers feel like they're getting a lot of quality for the money. It keeps growing and growing and growing beyond any expectation."

Years before Tito's existed, Philadelphia-based restaurateur Derek Davis was already a big believer in vodka. Starting in the early '90s, he began to develop a vodka list at his restaurant Derek's, located in Philadelphia's Manayunk neighborhood. The restaurant now boasts some 125 bottles, including many American brands.

Tito's is the most popular American vodka at Derek's, while other domestic craft brands like Penn 1681 and Koenig Potato Vodka are coming into their own. Despite offering a lengthy menu of specialty cocktails, bartenders don't have to do much to dress up this new generation of American vodkas—that's good news for the home mixologist, too.

"They're like premixed cocktails," Davis says, "you just pour them over ice and they make a nice cocktail."

RECIPES

*Made with vodka
distilled in Idaho*

HARVEST SPA SALAD

From Derek's Restaurant

- 1½ oz. American Harvest Vodka
- ¾ oz. basil-mint syrup (see below)
- 1 oz. cucumber puree (see below)
- 2 cucumber slices, for garnish
- 2 cherry tomatoes, for garnish
- Basil and mint, for garnish

Combine ingredients in a shaker and pour over ice into a 7-ounce rocks glass. Skewer cucumbers, mint, tomatoes and basil and lay on top of ice.

BASIL-MINT SYRUP

Makes 1¼ cups

- 1 cup water
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 T. mint leaves
- 2 T. basil

Boil sugar and water until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat. Add basil and mint and steep 30 minutes. Strain and discard solids.

CUCUMBER PUREE

Makes ½ cup

1 cucumber, peeled and seeded

In a blender, process cucumber until it's slushy. Strain through cheesecloth to extract liquid; discard pulp.

*Made with vodka
distilled in Pennsylvania*

PENNSYLVANIA VESPER

From John J. Jeffries

- Vieux Carré Absinthe, to rinse glass
- 2 oz. Bluecoat American Dry Gin
- 1 oz. Penn 1681 Rye Vodka
- ¾ oz. Lillet Blanc
- Dash Regans' Orange Bitters
- 3 drops Angostura Bitters
- Lemon peel, for garnish
- 4 drops Bittermans Hopped Grapefruit Bitters, for garnish

Rinse a chilled martini glass with absinthe; discard excess. Combine ingredients in a shaker with ice. Shake and strain into martini glass. Garnish with lemon peel and grapefruit bitters.

*Made with vodka
distilled in Pennsylvania*

ORANGE CRUSH

From Boyd & Blair

- 1 ½ oz. Boyd & Blair Vodka
- ½ oz. basil syrup (see below)
- ½ oz. freshly squeezed orange juice
- ¼ oz. sweet vermouth
- Basil leaf, for garnish

Combine ingredients in a shaker filled with ice and shake. Strain into a rocks glass filled with ice and garnish with basil.

BASIL SYRUP

- 1 cup water
- ½ cup sugar
- 8-10 basil leaves

Heat water to a boil and add sugar and stir until it dissolves. Add basil and steep for 5 minutes. Remove basil and let cool.