

VODKA

THE COMPLETE
GUIDE

FRÉDÉRIC DU BOIS & ISABEL BOONS

 LANNOO

FOREWORD	8
WHAT IS VODKA?	11
RAW MATERIALS	12
THE CHEMISTRY OF VODKA	20
HISTORY	24
POLUGAR... THE FIRST RUSSIAN VODKA	24
POLAND AFTER ALL?	26
FADING BORDERS	27
A RUSSIAN MONK	27
VODKA TODAY	29
PRODUCTION PROCESS	44
FERMENTATION	45
DISTILLATION	45
FILTRATION	48
QUALITY TEST	50
TYPES OF VODKA	52
RUSSIAN VODKA	52
POLISH VODKA	53
WESTERN VODKAS (EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA, SCANDINAVIA)	54
FLAVOURED OR INFUSED VODKAS	54
VODKA BRANDS	56
10 TO COLLECT	210
TASTE, DRINK & EAT	233
TASTING	233
The taste experience	233
Smell	234
Taste	234
The Vodka Hexagon®	235

DRINKING: STRAIGHT OR MIXED?	238
Pure enjoyment	238
Light mix	239
All the way	239
EAT: NA ZDROVIYA AND ZAKUSKI	240
Zakuski, the Russian tapas	241
Bring in the vodka	242
Do it yourself?	242
WELL-KNOWN VODKA COCKTAILS	247
TIPS, TRICKS & FUN FACTS	265
WHEN VODKA ISN'T IN A GLASS...	265
FUN FACTS	268
THE MOST EXPENSIVE VODKAS IN THE WORLD	273
10 VODKA QUOTES YOU'LL NEVER FORGET	275
6 MUST-VISIT BARS	276
ALPHABETICAL INDEX	284

FOREWORD



Vodka is... a drink imbued with paradoxes! The result of mixing two colourless liquids, alcohol and water. Not exactly something to wax lyrical about. And there's a saying that a tasteless and odourless drink means there's not much magic in the glass. Still, this spirit managed to grow into one of the best-known and widely consumed distillates in the world, well ahead of rum, whisky and all the other alcoholic spirits – perhaps because of its greatest asset: that it can be mixed with just about anything. Naturally, this 'noble water' has existed for centuries, but its global spread really only started in the second half of the last century. And that for a distillate that, according to some at least, has barely any flavour or colour and offers little in the way of a consumer experience... Yet love and passion for vodka are still growing. It went a bit out of fashion every now and again, but we're firmly convinced that this spirit will withstand the test of time.

Vodka is... back! But was it ever entirely out of fashion? Vodka seems to have had nine lives – from easy

moonshine during the Prohibition, trendy cocktails in the eighties and the alcopop rage of the late 1990s to the craft revival today... Or perhaps we should say it has lived in nine guises. Even today, many enthusiasts love the distillate for a variety of reasons: old-school bartenders swear by the real stuff from the ‘vodka belt’ countries, cocktail fans and home mixologists praise the versatility of the spirit, gourmets and food pairing adepts crave variants of this pure distillate based on a variety of ingredients, American millennials are crazy about the wide range of exotic flavours, Brazilians are keen on a vodka-style twist on their very own caipirinha...

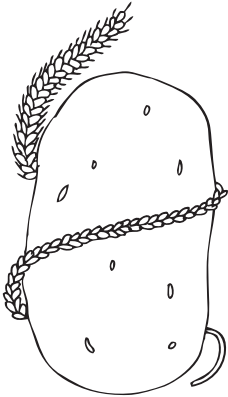
Some argue that the focus is too broad and that it sometimes threatens to go the wrong way. Clever marketers send design lovers into raptures with beautiful bottle designs, or link their brand to world stars. But what about the quality of vodka? Yes, sometimes the packaging surpasses the content of the actual bottle, but there’s a counter-movement that offers an appropriate answer. The recent craft trend – which can be seen in almost every sector, from beer to gin and from clothing to chocolate – is giving vodka that extra boost in terms of quality and innovation. The new generation of distillers and entrepreneurs have something for everyone. And yes, these different vodkas are all covered in *Vodka, the complete guide*.

Vodka is... a neutral distillate that doesn’t really fire the imagination? Forget about that, this book is here to convince you of the opposite. We hope you enjoy reading it!

Frédéric and Isabel

WHAT IS VODKA?

Legally* vodka is a spirit containing ethyl alcohol distilled from potatoes, grain or other agricultural raw ingredients and combinations thereof. The spirit can be made from any fermented raw ingredient, though there is a condition that when vodka is not made from potatoes or grain, that must be stated on the label. Vodka is distilled to a maximum strength of 95% and then diluted with water. The alcohol percentage is then between 37.5% and 70%.



American legislature has adopted a slightly different standard: the liquor must also be filtered through charcoal (or another component) and contain at least 40% alcohol. In Canada, vodka may only be produced from grain or potatoes and it must also undergo charcoal treatment.

Technically vodka is not much more than a mixture of water and ethanol. Yet vodka is so much more...

* Regulation (EC) 110/2008 of the European Parliament and the Council of 15 January 2008

RAW MATERIALS

The most commonly used raw ingredients for vodka are grains, potatoes and molasses. Although vodka is often deemed to be odourless and tasteless, there are some noticeable nuances. The raw ingredients used have a considerable effect on the taste and the aroma of the distillate. The United Kingdom, Western Europe and the United States produce traditional neutral vodkas that are intended for mixing. The characteristics of the raw ingredients that were used can be found more in Polish, Russian, Scandinavian and Baltic vodkas. Additionally, some crops grow better in certain climates and distillers inevitably often fall back on what is available in their surrounding area.

GRAIN

Grain is (and to this day remains) one of the most important ingredients of vodka. The grain is allowed to germinate, resulting in sugars that are then fermented with water. As well as those that use one type of grain, *single grain vodkas*, there are also vodka brands that use a mix of grains for a more complex finish. Sometimes the term *single estate vodka* is used when the producer uses only grain types that are sourced locally, from their own estate or region.



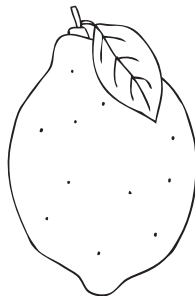
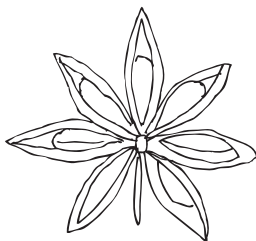
RYE

Rye is mainly used for producing vodka in Eastern Europe and it adds a nutty sweetness. The crop has very robust grains and demands little from its environment. That is why this type of grain is mainly used in Northern European countries where winters are long and summers short. Even temperatures down to -25°C cause little damage to this grain type.

In Russia in particular, rye is popular and it is still the main ingredient of the best Russian vodkas. Poland also favours rye. This crop is often also combined with small quantities of other grains. Rye then adds a robust and spicy character. A full rye vodka has a rich grain flavour.

WHEAT

Wheat and its variant spelt are cheaper and easier to obtain than rye, so that type of grain dominates vodka production. In addition, wheat can be processed faster because the starch can be converted to fermentable sugars very easily.



VODKA BRANDS

LEGEND

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

40
%

Alcohol percentage

The following symbols give the principal ingredient.



Potatoes



Sugar beet



Grapes



Grain



Barley



Cows' milk



Maize



Malt



Pears



Quinoa



Wormwood

Widely available: The vodka brand is easily obtainable throughout the world and/or available from retail outlets.

Continent-wide: The vodka brand is only easy to obtain on the continent where it is produced (America, Europe, Asia).

Specialist: The vodka brand is primarily available from specialists or specialty webshops.



This logo means that it is possible to visit the vodka distillery.



1836 EIGHTEEN-THIRTYSIX VODKA



ORIGINS

1836 Organic Vodka was the first Belgian certified organic vodka. It is produced by the Radermacher distillery, which is hidden deep in the German-speaking part of the country (in Raeren). The distillery was founded in 1836 (hence the name of the vodka) and it is one of the oldest distilleries in Belgium. Radermacher aims for the highest level of quality and remains faithful to its own family tradition and its old recipes. The distillery aims to use only natural raw materials and eschews artificial flavourings and colourings. 1836 Vodka is produced using the best grain from organic agriculture and water from the natural springs in the Belgian Hoge Venen region. Thanks to the careful selection of raw materials, no filtration (with activated carbon or charcoal is in fact needed, meaning that this distillery and its vodka can claim an exceptionally small CO₂ footprint.

BRAND OWNER

Distillerie Radermacher

WEBSITE

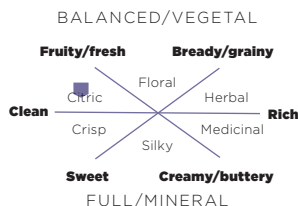
www.distillerie.biz

AVAILABILITY

Specialist

FLAVOUR AND AROMA

A clean, light vodka with sweet undertones.



EIGHTEENTHIRTYSIX

1836

EIGHTEENTHIRTYSIX

VODKA

- BELGIAN ORGANIC VODKA -



Radermacher[®]
DISTILLERS SINCE 1836

40% vol

70 cl



42
BELOW

**MADE IN
NEW ZEALAND**

42 degrees below the equator
which the locals call Aoraroa or
'Land of the Long White Cloud'

VODKA
40% vol 700ml / 70cl e

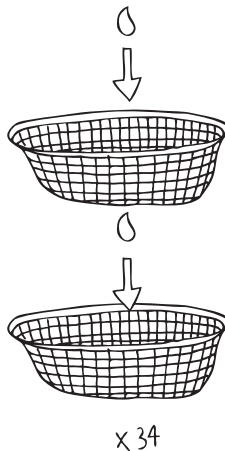


42BELOW VODKA

ORIGINS

42Below was founded in 1999 in New Zealand by Geoff Ross. This impassioned amateur began selling locally to friends and other interested people. The vodka rapidly became extremely popular and barely five years later, he decided to devote himself entirely to the production and sale of his distillate. He sold the brand to Bacardi in 2008 and 42Below has been doing a roaring trade worldwide ever since. This young vodka brand is winning quite a few awards – too many to list – and everyone is praising it for its pure taste. The brand claims to be the purest vodka on the planet, thanks among other things to the natural spring water from a dormant volcanic zone that is added to it.

The spirit is made from natural grains and it is distilled three times at a latitude of 42° south of the equator, hence the vodka's name. During the final distillation step, the spirit goes through no less than 35 different filters.



BRAND OWNER

Bacardi

WEBSITE

www.42below.com

AVAILABILITY

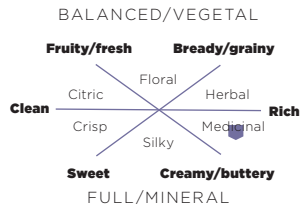
Widely available

FLAVOUR AND AROMA

Soft vodka with a pure taste and a controlled aftertaste.

OTHER VARIANTS

- 42Below Feijoa-40%
- 42Below Honey-40%
- 42Below Kiwi-40%
- 42Below Passion-40%





ABSOLUT
Country of Sweden
VODKA



ABSOLUT VODKA

ORIGINS

Absolut Vodka comes from Åhus in southern Sweden. This spirit, which contains no sugar, is made from wonderful winter wheat and water from their own spring. The vodka was first marketed in 1879 by Lars Olsson Smit as a spirit with an extremely pure taste, produced using the very latest distillation techniques. Lars had introduced fractional distillation two years later, making his *Tiodubbelt Renadt Brännvin* (*brännvin* literally means 'burned wine'; the term 'vodka' was only chosen in 1958, when Explorer Vodka appeared). A state monopoly on alcoholic drinks was introduced in Sweden in 1917

The name of Smit's creation was changed several times: *Tiodubbelt Renadt Brännvin* became *Absolut Rent Brännvin* and then *Absolutely Pure Vodka*. The nomenclature was modified a final time in 1979: the vodka was launched officially on the international market as Absolut. The French company Pernod Ricard took over Swedish Vin & Spirit (the state-owned body) in 2008, making the drinks giant the owner of Absolut. It has been doing well under the wing of the French and Absolut is now the most important international vodka brand, sold in over 130 countries.

So that it can reach the young and trendy night life (of New York), Absolut is positioned as a fashionable spirit. A perfect example of brand innovation with a dash of product differentiation. The New York advertising agency TBWA – which was still small at

BRAND OWNER

Pernod Ricard

WEBSITE

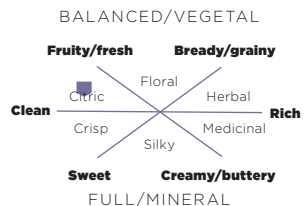
www.absolut.com

AVAILABILITY

Widely available

FLAVOUR AND AROMA

A soft vodka with hints of liquorice.



the time – really got the brand going on the American market in the early 1980s with the slogan ‘Absolut Perfection’. Later campaigns exhibit a subtle play of words and images, with the bottle and the brand embodying art, humour and a cosmopolitan lifestyle. When the bottle was then also depicted in works by Andy Warhol and Keith Haring and both artists popped up in publicity for Absolut, well, there was absolutely no stopping it. The brand also keeps managing to spring surprises and innovate in its brand communication. That created a hip image and growing popularity, not only for its own brand but for the product ‘vodka’ as a whole. *Limited editions* were released on the market with monotonous regularity, with the world’s major cities and special packaging playing a key role. The brand produced another surprise in 2003 in the piece of product placement that bordered on genius: an advertisement (Absolut Hunk), especially developed for a delivery of the popular TV series *Sex and the City*.

Absolut Vodka has become so immensely popular that well-known artistes are drawing inspiration from the bottle. Lenny Kravitz penned the number *Breathe* in which he was inspired by Absolut (or his cooperation with them), as well as artistes such as Wisin & Yandel, Nikko Patrelakis, Jazzanova, Ashley Beedle and Little Louie Vega, who have all written numbers based on the vodka bottle.

To respond to growing demand for super-premium vodkas, Absolut launched Elyx in 2011 (or in 2013 in the United States) as the replacement for Absolut Niveau – *lyx* means ‘luxury’ in Swedish. A single grain crop from a single domain (Råbelöf Estate) was used for the production of this high-quality single estate vodka. This concept, which was innovative at the time, is highly similar to the ‘terroir’ concept in the wine world. Unlike the regular Absolut, Elyx was produced in small volumes, using a labour-intensive manual process, in copper kettles dating back to 1929. Contact with the copper results in a

OTHER VARIANTS

Absolut 100-50%
Absolut Apeach-40%
Absolut Äpple-40%
Absolut Berri Açai-40%
Absolut Cherrys-40%
Absolut Cilantro-40%
Absolut Citron-40%
Absolut Extrakt-35%
Absolut Gräpe-40%
Absolut Hibiskus-40%
Absolut Kurant-40%
Absolut Lime-40%
Absolut Mandrin-40%
Absolut Mango-40%
Absolut Pears-40%
Absolut Peppar-40%
Absolut Rainbow-40%
Absolut Raspberri-40%
Absolut Raw-41.5%
Absolut Ruby Red-40%
Absolut Vanilia-40%
Absolut Wild Tea-40%
Oak by Absolut-40%

magnificent vodka with an elevated alcohol percentage of 42.3% for an even better taste experience. Elyx is best drunk neat or as a 'simple' long drink. This vodka has a floral and very elegant character. It is fresh, with a lot of fruity notes and herbal elements, and it has a smooth aftertaste.



A WORD OF THANKS

Producing a book is always a question of teamwork and so I would therefore like to thank all the project staff and producers for their efforts. I hope we're all equally pleased with the final result. In particular, I would like to thank my girlfriend and daughter for their endless patience. I hope that this, the end result, will be able to convert many readers on both sides of The Pond.

Frédéric

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

www.lannoo.com

Go to our website and sign up for our regular newsletter with news about new and forthcoming publications as well as exclusive offers.

Authors: Frédéric Du Bois & Isabel Boons

Translation: Tessera Translations (Mike Wilkinson and Mariëlle Kakebeen)

Editing: Asterisk*, Amsterdam

Photography: Thomas Vanhaute, except

p. 10 Artem Shadrin/Shutterstock, p. 22-23 itor/Shutterstock,

p. 42-43 Rybalchenko Nadezhda/Shutterstock, p. 232 Kira

Garmashova/Shutterstock, p. 244-245 5PH/Shutterstock,

p. 264 Vania Zhukevych/Shutterstock, p. 276 Pravda Vodka

Bar, p. 277 OUR/Vodka Berlin, p. 278 Dom Wodki Bar, p. 279

Ladies & Gents Bar, p. 280 Shutterstock/Brent Hofacker,

p. 281 Creative Entourage, p. 286 Vania Zhukevych/
Shutterstock

Illustrations: Emma Thyssen

Graphic design: KIET

Lay out: Asterisk*, Amsterdam

If you have any questions or comments about the material in this book, please do not hesitate to contact our editorial team: redactiestijl@lannoo.com.

If you have any questions about *Wodka - the complete guide*, send an email to info@miraflo.be.

© Lannoo Publishers, Tielt, Belgium, 2018

D/2018/45/532 – NUR 440/447

ISBN: 978 94 014 5155 0

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.