

BARTENDER ADVISORY GROUP

TYPES OF ALCOHOL

A full-service bar or restaurant can offer beer, wine, and hard liquor, and with an expert knowledge of all three, you become a better bartender. As a general rule... there's only one type of alcohol bartenders mix together like mad scientists... and that's hard liquor, especially now with the popularity of Mixology. Bartenders/Mixologists should have an intimate familiarity with the different types of liquor to be proficient at their job.

There are basically six different types of spirits, and the sections below will explain what base liquors are, and a little about the six primary types of alcohol bartenders need to know and should learn love. Do not be confused by bourbon and scotch, they are both classified as whiskey.

Base Liquor

A base liquor is one of the six primary types of hard liquor. They're called base liquors because they're often used as the base for cocktails, or they're enjoyed "neat" (straight up). They are vodka, whiskey, rum, gin, tequila, and brandy.

Vodka

Like gin, vodka is created from a neutral spirit; but that's where the similarities end. Vodka, unlike other spirits, is designed to be flavorless. The best vodkas are held up as pure, odorless, and with only a slight hint of clean grain; and some of the best spring cocktails rely on vodka to make them that way. As we continue with etymology, the word vodka is a version of the Russian word for water, *voda*. The added "k" turns it into a diminutive: "little water" or "cute water." Since 1970, vodka has become the most-consumed liquor type by volume in the U.S.

- *Flavor profile:* very subtle clean, bright grains
- *Styles:* potato, wheat, rye
- *Aging:* typically none
- *Alcohol content:* typically 40%, up to 95% (be careful)
- *Famous distillers:* Smirnoff, Grey Goose, Belvedere, Ketel One
- *Glassware:* martini glass, shot glass
- *In cocktails:* vodka martini, Bloody Mary, screwdriver, cosmopolitan, kamikaze

Whiskey

Whiskey is made from fermented (and sometimes malted) grain mash, typically using barley, corn, rye, or wheat. The first evidence of whiskey comes down to us from 15th-century Scotland. The word for whiskey comes from the Scottish Gaelic phrase *uisge beatha*, or "water of life." Scotland remains one of the epicenters of whiskey heritage in the world, along with the United States, Ireland, Canada and Japan. Whiskey excels in fall cocktails.

- *Flavor profile:* Roast, malt, grains, oak
- *Styles:* malt, grain, Scotch, rye, bourbon, Irish
- *Aging:* typically charred white oak, typically 3-20 years, though some Scotches are aged up to 50 years
- *Alcohol content:* typically 40%, up to 68%
- *Famous distillers:* Jameson, Maker's Mark, Johnnie Walker, Macallan
- *Glassware:* rocks glass, Glencairn glass, assorted whiskey tumblers
- *In cocktails:* whiskey sour, Rob Roy, Manhattan, Sazerac, Jack and Coke

Rum

It has been said that rum got its name from the Latin word for sugar, *saccharum*. Rum is made by fermenting and distilling sugarcane molasses or sugarcane juice. It became popular in the 18th century as colonialism landed on tropical shores with an abundance of sugarcane. Rum is known to add a cozy spice to cold weather cocktails.

- *Flavor profile:* sweet, toasty, sometimes spicy
- *Styles:* British rum, Spanish rum, English rum
- *Aging:* oak barrels, up to 10 years (the longer its aged, the darker it is)
- *Alcohol content:* Typically 40%, can go up to 75%
- *Famous distillers:* Bacardi, Captain Morgan, Havana Club
- *Glassware:* Rocks glass, grappa glass, snifter
- *In cocktails:* Rum and Coke, daiquiri, Mai Tai, piña colada

Gin

Gin is made by first creating a neutral spirit... then redistilling it with the addition of a combination of botanicals; (seeds, berries, spices, roots, and herbs). Juniper berries were the earliest and most popular botanical used to create gin. The English word gin comes from the French word for juniper, *genévrier*.

- *Flavor profile:* depends entirely on the botanicals, common flavors include juniper, anise, coriander, fennel, and citrus peel
- *Styles:* London dry, Genever, New American
- *Aging:* Sometimes oak barrels, up to six months
- *Alcohol content:* At least 40%
- *Famous distillers:* Beefeater, Tanqueray, Bombay Sapphire
- *Glassware:* martini glass, rocks glass, inward-curving stemmed glass
- *In cocktails:* gin and tonic, Negroni, gimlet, martini, Tom Collins

Tequila

Tequila is a type of mezcal, which is a distilled alcoholic beverage made from any type of the succulent agave. Specifically, tequila is made from the blue agave plant primarily in the region surrounding the Mexican city of Tequila.

Drinking tequila is typically associated with *tequila cruda*, or taking a shot of tequila with salt and lime. In recent years, there's been a bit of a tequila renaissance in the U.S. that takes tequila appreciation far beyond shots. Mezcal and tequila bars are popping up left and right. Drinkers and professionals are paying attention to the subtle differences in processes and terroirs that contribute to tequilas' diverse flavor profiles. Beware the "mixto," made with only 51% agave and the rest neutral sugarcane spirit; and focus on 100% agave tequilas.

- *Flavor profile:* bright green fruit, earthy tones, oak, spice
- *Styles:* blanco, joven, reposado, añejo, extra añejo
- *Aging:* oak barrels, 2 months to 3+ years
- *Alcohol content:* typically 40%, up to 55%
- *Famous distillers:* Patrón, Jose Cuervo, Don Julio, El Jimador
- *Glassware:* shot glass, rocks glass, snifter, Riedel Ouverture tequila glass
- *In cocktails:* margarita, Tequila Sunrise, paloma

Brandy

Basically, brandy is... *distilled wine*. The word brandy comes from the Dutch word *brandewijn*, which translates to "burnt wine." Brandy can also be made from the mash of any other fruit, and both apple and plum are popular choices. That type of brandy typically has the fruit called out on the label: "apple brandy," "plum brandy," etc.

- *Flavor profile:* fruit, primarily grape, but also apple, plum, pear, nuts, oak
- *Styles:* Cognac, grappa, American brandy, Spanish brandy, Armagnac, fruit brandy
- *Aging:* oak barrels, 3-20 years
- *Alcohol content:* typically 40%, can go up to 60%
- *Famous distillers:* Martell, Courvoisier, Remy Martin
- *Glassware:* snifter
- *In cocktails:* sidecar, brandy old fashioned, Brandy Alexander, Corpse Reviver

Of Note: Knowledge of the different types of hard liquor is good and is only the beginning to unlocking the “secrets” of mixology. You now have a better-than-average knowledge of the six different types of liquor that make up the base liquors... use this knowledge wisely.

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