

Absinthe – A liqueur flavored with herbs and distilled from wormwood, which is very high in alcohol (68 % alcohol; 136 proof), once believed to cause mania and even death. After a long ban in the U.S. this aphrodisiac has recently been re-approved for sale here, under the close scrutiny of the FDA.

Age Statement – Gives the age of the youngest component of the whisky.

Aging – There are two different types of aging: Wood aging is the process of maturing wines or spirits in wood casks or barrels prior to bottling. The resulting flavors and aromas of wood aging depend on the kinds of barrels used, and how they may have been used before. Bottle aging is a plus in aging wines and ports, but does little to nothing at all to improve spirits.

Aguameil – Spanish word meaning “honey water” for the sweet sap-like juice that is extracted from the pina of the agave plant. It is fermented for several days and then double-distilled to produce tequila.

Akvavit (*Aquavit*) - A Scandinavian liquor distilled from grain or potatoes. It can be clear and colorless when distilled once, but is often distilled a second time to add flavors, usually dill, coriander or caraway. It is served cold and should be taken all at once, not sipped.

Amaretto – A sweet, almond flavored liqueur which originated in Italy.

Anejo – Means “aged tequila”. To be called anejo, it must have been aged for at least one year, though it is usually aged for between three and seven years. Most often the aging takes place in smaller oak casks, like the ones used for bourbon.

Angostura bitters – A very well-known bitters created by a German surgeon in the early 1900’s, which was used to help Army troops’ appetites and improve their health. It is still widely used as a digestif and as a flavoring in many popular cocktails, such as the Manhattan and the Old-fashioned.

Anisette – A liqueur made from aniseed that is sweet with herbal, licorice-like flavors and aromas.

Aperitif – A French term referring to a light alcoholic drink taken before a meal to stimulate appetite. (A few classic French aperitifs are Lillet and Dubonnet, to name only a few.)

Applejack – The American term for apple brandy, aged two years in wooden casks before bottling.

Apricot Brandy – Brandy distilled from apricots.

Armagnac – One of the world’s finest brandies, alongside Cognac. Armagnac comes from the region of Gascony. It is distilled only once at a relatively low temperature, leaving more flavoring elements and resulting in a very full-flavored spirit. Armagnacs are aged in black oak, which imparts more flavor in a shorter period of time than the Limousin oak used for Cognac.

Barrel proof – Whiskey bottled at the desired proof while aging in the barrel. Little to no water is added before bottling, making these bourbons higher in proof than others.

Bitters – An infusion of roots, barks, herbs and other botanicals combined in special proportions. Bitters are classified for different uses as aromatic, flavoring or laxative.

Blended Scotch – Such a whisky contains a variable proportion of blended malt and grain whiskies, usually about 40% malt : 60% grain. A high quality blend may contain more than 40% grain, while lower quality blends contain much less.

Blended Whiskey – Combines straight whiskey with neutral grain spirits. Straight whiskey dominates the blend by 20%, resulting in an 80 proof whiskey.

Bottled-in-bond Whiskey – Straight whiskey, usually bourbon or rye, produced under government control and supervision. Bonded whiskey must be at least four years old, bottled at 100 proof and produced in one distilling by the same distiller. It must be sorted and bottled at a bonding warehouse.

Bourbon – An American whiskey named for Bourbon County, Kentucky where the whiskey was first produced in the late 1700's. All Bourbons are made from the fermented mash of corn, rye and barley malts. By law these whiskies must contain at least 51% corn and must not exceed 160 proof. They must be aged in unused, charred white oak barrels; this aging process usually lasts for 6 to 8 years. Straight Bourbons have been aged for at least two years.

Brandy – A liquor distilled from grapes or other fermented fruit juice. Brandies are aged in oak casks for a variety of periods of time. The finest brandies are Cognacs and Armagnacs.

Cachaca – Brazilian brandy made from sugarcane. It is the primary ingredient in the Caipirinha.

Calvados – A dry apple brandy from France's Normandy region, considered to be the finest apple brandy in the world. It is distilled twice in a pot still, then aged in Limousin oak casks for at least one year, though it can age for as long as 40 years.

Campari – An Italian bitter aperitif created in Milan in the 1800's by a restaurateur by the same name. This spirit is bright red in color and made with a variety of fruits and herbs, then aged in oak. It is a main ingredient in the classic Italian cocktail the Negroni, but is usually enjoyed on the rocks with club soda.

Canadian Whisky – A blended whiskey distilled from corn, rye and barley and produced in Canada under government control. These whiskys are aged in wood for at least 3 years and are generally lighter and smoother than American whiskey.

Cask Strength –

Chambord – A French liqueur which is intensely black-purple in color with very concentrated black-raspberry flavors.

Chartreuse – An aromatic liqueur created by French monks in the 16th century. It is made from a formula of 130 different herbs and spices, then aged in oak. Green Chartreuse is quite potent at 110 proof and has a very intense flavor profile. Yellow Chartreuse is lower in alcohol (86 proof) and is lighter and sweeter than its green counterpart.

Cognac – Considered the finest of all brandies, and comes from the town of Cognac in southwestern France. It is distilled from grapes (primarily the Trebbiano grape) and is distilled twice immediately following fermentation. Cognacs are aged in Limousin oak casks, which both mellows and enhances the flavors and aromas.

Cointreau – Orange liqueur produced by France's Cointreau family. Considered to be the world's finest Curacao.

Cordial – See Liqueur.

Crème de Cacao – A chocolate liqueur made from cacao and vanilla beans; can be either white (clear) or brown.

Crème de Cassis – A liqueur made from black currants.

Crème de Menthe – A mint-flavored liqueur which can be either green or white (clear). It is the main ingredient in a Grasshopper.

Crème de Noyaux – A sweet pink-to-red liqueur with a nutty flavor not unlike almonds.

Curacao – A generic term for orange liqueurs made from the dried peels of bitter oranges from the Caribbean island of Curacao.

Digestif – A French term used to describe a spirit taken after a meal to aid in digestion; also called “after dinner drinks”. Some popular digestifs are B & B, Brandy Alexander, Grasshopper, Amaretto, along with most other liqueurs.

Dirty – A term used to indicate that a martini contains olive juice.

Distillation – The process of separating a liquid’s components by heating it to the point of vaporization and collecting the cooled condensate in order to obtain a purified and/or concentrated form. The apparatus that performs distillation is called a “still”. The two different kinds of stills are pot stills and continuous stills.

Drambuie – A Scottish liqueur based with scotch and sweetened with honey.

Egg Nog – A creamy, egg-rich concoction spiked with rum, brandy, or bourbon (or a combination of liquors). Considered to be a holiday cocktail.

Fizz – the addition of club soda (“fizzy water”) to a cocktail after shaking all other ingredients. There are countless fizz cocktail recipes to choose from.

Float – To slowly pour a liqueur or cream over another liquid so that it floats on top of it; also called “layering”. Some popular floated cocktails are the B-52, Beam me up Scottie and Kahlua& Cream.

Frangelico – An Italian liqueur flavored from hazelnuts.

Galliano – An Italian herbal liqueur that is bright yellow in color and which tastes not unlike licorice. This spirit gained popularity in the U.S. with the Harvey Wallbanger cocktail.

Gibson – A martini that is garnished with cocktail onions instead of olives.

Gimlet – A cocktail made using gin (or vodka or tequila) and sweetened lime juice.

Gin – A liquor distilled from grain and flavored with juniper berries and other aromatic herbs. The two primary styles of gin are Dutch and Dry.

Grain neutral spirits – Alcohol distilled from grain at 190 proof. (Everclear)

Grand Marnier – French liqueur based from Cognac and flavored with bitter Haitian orange peels, vanilla and spices.

Grappa – Italian Brandy distilled from the pulpy residue of the wine press (the skins, stems and seeds). Grappas are generally very high in alcohol and can be aged for added depth and character.

Grenadine – A sweet, red pomegranate-flavored syrup.

Infusion – Infusions result when fresh ingredients (fruit, herbs, vegetables) are placed inside a container of liquor (usually vodka because it has the most neutral taste, but rum, gin or tequila can also be used) for a long enough period of time that the liquor picks up the flavors of the ingredients.

Irish Whiskey – A blend that contains barley malt whiskeys and grain whiskeys. These whiskeys are triple-distilled and aged for 4-8 years in casks which have usually been used before to age sherry, bourbon or rum, which imparts added character to the flavor of the whiskey.

Jagermeister – A German liqueur made from 56 different herbs, along with fruit, spice, bark, resin and seeds.

Jalisco – The central Mexican state in which the town of Tequila is located and where the vast majority of the agave used for tequila is harvested and distilled.

Jamaican Rum – A full-bodied, dark rum that is produced in pot stills.

Jigger – A small container, also called a “shot glass”, used to measure liquor.

Julep – A cocktail which contains sugar syrup, liquor and herbs; most common julep is the Mint Julep.

Kahlua – A Mexican coffee-flavored liquor.

Kirsch; *Kirschwasser* – A dry, clear brandy distilled from cherries, pits included.

Lillet – A French aperitif which is a medley of wine, brandy, fruit and herbs. It comes in two styles: Lilletblanc, which is dry, and Lillet rouge, which has some sweetness.

Liqueur – A sweetened spirit flavored with fruits, herbs, spices, seeds, flowers, nuts, spices, etc., which can be based on anything from brandy to rum to whiskey; also called cordials.

Liquor – Any alcoholic beverage produced by distillation.

Mai Tai – A potent, exotic cocktail said to have been created by Victor Bergeron of Trader Vic’s.

Malibu – A clear, rum-based liqueur with intense coconut flavor.

Malt Whiskey – A whiskey made from no less than 51% malted barley.

Maraschino liqueur – A clear, somewhat dry liqueur made from Marasca cherries, pits included, with a subtle bitter almond flavor.

Margarita – A Mexican cocktail dating back to the 1930’s, the creation of which has been claimed by many. The basic recipe is a combination of tequila, lime juice and orange liqueur, though there are many, many different interpretations and additions to the old classic.

Martini – Said to be the most popular cocktail of all time. It is quite simple, though very fiery, composed of only two ingredients: vermouth and gin (or vodka). A variety of garnishes can be used, though sometimes this can change the name of the drink (i.e. a cocktail onion garnish makes a Gibson).

Metaxa – A sweetened Greek brandy based on red wine and flavored with herbs and spices.

Mist – A drink in which any undiluted spirits are poured into a glass over crushed ice (i.e. Scotch over crushed ice would be called a Scotch Mist).

Mixer – Any non-alcoholic liquid which is added to a drink containing alcohol, such as club soda, tonic or cola.

Mocktail – Term used for a non-alcoholic “cocktail”, such as a Shirley Temple or a Virgin Daiquiri.

Moonshine – Unlawfully distilled American whiskey, usually made from corn.

Muddle – To mash or crush ingredients with a muddler, which is usually a wooden rod with a flat end. Some popular cocktails which require muddling are the Old Fashioned, Julep and Caipirinha.

Mull – A warm drink or punch flavored with spices, fruit and sugar, usually based on wine or cider.

Neat – Term meaning that a liquor is drunk straight without ice, water or other mixers.

Nocello – An Italian walnut-flavored liqueur.

On the rocks – Term describing a drink served over ice.

Orgeat – A non-alcoholic almond-flavored syrup; one of the important ingredients in the famous Mai Tai.

Ouzo – A clear, licorice-flavored liqueur from Greece which gets its flavor from aniseed.

Peach brandy – A generic name for any brandy distilled from peaches.

Perfect – A bar term meaning that a cocktail is made with equal parts of sweet and dry vermouth. For instance, a Manhattan usually contains only sweet vermouth, but a Perfect Manhattan would contain both.

Pernod – A French yellow-green liqueur with an intense licorice flavor. It was the original substitute for Absinthe after it was banned.

Pimm's No.1 – An English bittersweet liqueur flavored with herbs, spices and fruit. Most often used in the popular cocktail the Pimm's Cup.

Pisco – South American brandy made from grapes and aged briefly in clay jars.

Plata – Refers to a white or clear, unaged tequila; translates to "silver".

Proof – The strength of alcohol by volume. The proof number is twice the percentage of alcohol (i.e. 40% alcohol means 80 proof).

Reposado – Tequila that has been aged in oak barrels for 6 months to a year.

Rose's Lime Juice – A sweetened lime-flavored syrup.

Rum – Liquor distilled from the fermented juice of sugar cane.

Rye whiskey – These whiskeys are very similar to Bourbon, but with a much more assertive and spicy flavor. By law in the U.S. Rye whiskey must be made from 51% rye, but usually wheat and barley are also used.

Sambucca – A clear, Italian anise-flavored liqueur.

Schnapps – Refers to various flavored liqueurs made from grains or potatoes and flavored with everything from fruits, spices, seeds, and herbs and can be dry or sweet.

Scotch whisky – A whisky that must be distilled and aged for at least 3 years in Scotland, but can be bottled elsewhere. "Blended Scotch" is a combination of up to 50 different malt whiskies and blended to have a more uniform aroma and flavor. "Single Malt Scotch" is produced and bottled by a single distillery without being blended with any other Scotch whiskies.

Seltzer – carbonated water or club soda.

Shooter – A drink that is meant to be taken in one gulp. Can be a mixed concoction or a straight shot of one type of alcohol.

Simple syrup – sugar syrup.

Sloe gin – A gin-based liqueur that is red in color and aged in wood; flavored from the sloe plum.

Sour – Sours are a classic cocktail in which a liquor is mixed with sweetened lemon juice.

Spritzer – A refreshing cocktail made from half wine and half club soda.

Straight up – Means that a cocktail or liquor is served without ice, but can be chilled with ice and strained into a glass.

Tequila – A liquor from the town of Tequila in Mexico’s Jalisco province. To be called tequila the liquor must be made from at least 51% blue agave. The four categories of tequila are: blanco, jovenabocado (also called “gold”), reposado and anejo.

Toddy – Refers to a drink with a hot water base.

Tonic – Carbonated water flavored with fruit extracts, quinine and sweeteners; a very popular mixer.

Triple Sec – A clear orange liqueur flavored from the peels of both sweet and bitter oranges. An important ingredient in the famous Margarita cocktail.

Tuaca – A brandy-based liqueur from Italy’s Tuscany region, flavored with citrus fruits and spices, and which tastes not unlike vanilla or butterscotch.

Twist – A small piece of citrus peel (lemon, lime or orange) that is “twisted” over a cocktail, thus releasing the oils of the zest and imparting subtle citrus flavors into the drink.

Vermouth – Fortified wine flavored with herbs, flowers, spices and seeds. The two styles of vermouth are sweet and dry. All vermouth is made from white wine, but sweet vermouth is a reddish color with a slightly sweet taste due to the addition of caramel. Dry vermouth is one of the two ingredients in a Martini.

Virgin – Refers to a cocktail made without alcohol.

Vodka – A neutral spirit (usually made from grain or potatoes) that is clear and lacks any distinctive aromas or flavors. It is believed that vodka dates back to the twelfth century, though there is still some argument as to whether it originated in Poland or Russia.

Whiskey – Made from the fermented mash of grains such as barley, corn, oats, rye and wheat. “Straight whiskey” must be made from at least 51% of one grain, must not exceed 160 proof, must be aged in oak barrels for 2 years, and must not be diluted to less than 80 proof. “Blended whiskey” is a combination of two or more 100 proof straight whiskies blended with neutral spirits, light whiskies or grain spirits.