

WHAT IS WHISKEY: a type of distilled alcoholic beverage made from fermented grain mash.

- Different grains are used including: *barley, malted barley, rye, malted rye, wheat, and corn.*
- Whiskey is typically *aged in wooden casks, made generally of charred white oak.*
- Whiskies *do not mature in the bottle, only in the cask, so the "age" of a whisky is only the time between distillation and bottling.* After a decade or two, additional aging in a barrel will also not necessarily make a whisky "better".
- Whisky is often "*chill filtered*": chilled to precipitate out fatty acid esters and then filtered to remove them. *Most whiskies are bottled this way, unless specified as unchillfiltered or non chill filtered.* This is done *primarily for cosmetic reasons.* Unchillfiltered whiskies will often turn cloudy when stored at cool temperatures or when cool water is added to them.

American whiskey is:

- distilled from a *fermented mash of cereal grain,*
- to *no more than 80% alcohol by volume.*
- *No coloring or flavoring is allowed.*
- *must be aged at least 2 years* in new charred-oak containers (except corn whiskey)
- whiskey aged beyond 2 years is additionally designated as "straight" whiskey
- must have the taste, aroma, and other characteristics commonly attributed to whiskey.

Some types of American Whiskey are:

- **Bourbon whiskey,** made from mash that consists of at least 51% corn (in reality 70-80% is usually used),
 - cannot be distilled higher than 80% alcohol,
 - has to be aged in new charred oak barrels for a minimum of 2 years
 - is typically flavored with other grains such as rye, malted barley or wheat.
- **Corn whiskey,** made from mash that consists of at least 80% corn.
- **Malt whiskey,** made from mash that consists of at least 51% malted barley
- **Rye whiskey,** made from mash that consists of at least 51% rye.
- **Rye malt whiskey,** made from mash that consists of at least 51% malted rye.
- **Wheat whiskey,** which is made from mash that consists of at least 51% wheat.
- **Tennessee Whiskey,** which is straight bourbon whiskey produced in Tennessee, and typically undergoes an additional filtering stage called the Lincoln County Process, in which the whiskey is filtered through a thick layer of maple charcoal before it is put into charred new oak barrels for aging.

Canadian whiskies must be:

- produced and aged in Canada,
- distilled from a fermented mash of cereal grain,
- aged in wood barrels with a capacity limit of 700 litres for not less than 3 years,
- possess the aroma, taste and character generally attributed to Canadian whisky.
- contain no more than 9.09% imported spirits
- "Canadian Whisky", "Rye Whisky", and "Canadian Rye Whisky" are legally indistinguishable in Canada and do not require any specific grain in their production making the Canadian Ryes typically much less bold than the American Ryes.
- Canadian whiskies may contain caramel and flavoring in addition to the distilled mash spirits, and there is no maximum limit on the alcohol level of the distillation,
- Typically the lightest example from major distilling countries

Irish whiskeys are normally distilled three times. By law, Irish whiskey must be produced in Ireland and aged in wooden casks for a period of no less than 3 years, although in practice it is usually 9 to 12 years. Unpeated malt is almost always used. There are several types of whiskey common to Ireland: single malt, single grain, blended whiskey and pure pot still whiskey.

Scotch whiskies are generally distilled twice; although some are distilled a third time and others even up to twenty times. Scotch Whisky Regulations require anything bearing the label "Scotch" to be distilled in Scotland and matured for a minimum of 3 years in oak casks, among other, more specific criteria. The basic types of Scotch are malt and grain, which are combined to create blends. Scotch malt whiskies are divided into five main regions: Highland, Lowland, Islay, Speyside and Campbeltown.

HOW TO TASTE WHISKEY:

Look at the color in the glass or bottle: Generally speaking, the darker the whiskey, the older it is, because whiskey gets its color from being in contact with the oak barrel during aging. The type and previous usage of the barrel also matters. A barrel that has been used several times over, lends less color from the barrel, and a cask that contained sherry or port wine, will lend some of the colors of the wine.

Smell the aroma of the whiskey: You can smell more from your whiskey than you will ever be able to taste. All the master blenders work primarily by nosing, not by tasting. Don't thrust your nose into the glass, because the alcohol will be too dominant. Gently raise the whiskey up to your nose until you begin capturing its aroma. A whiskey's aroma will be a good indication of how it will taste.

Taste last: Make sure you coat your entire tongue and let it linger on the palate for a little while before swallowing. Is it thick on your palate or thin? What flavors do you taste? Does the whiskey taste the same way it smells? Do the flavors evolve on the palate or just stay the same? After you swallow, does the flavor fade away quickly or does it linger on the palate? Most importantly, did you like it?

NOTE: If the alcohol is too intense to fully appreciate the whiskey, feel free to add a few drops of water to your whiskey, then nose and taste the whiskey again, Add more drops as needed until you find your comfort zone. Adding water brings out more of the whiskey's aroma. It also lowers the alcohol level, reducing its numbing effect on the palate.

READING THE LABEL:

What type of whiskey is it? The first thing to look at is the type of whiskey you're about to taste and its origin (KY Bourbon, Straight American Rye). Most designations carry strict regulations that have been met to warrant the label.

What's its strength? All whiskeys must contain at least 40% alcohol by volume (ABV), or 80 proof (proof is twice the alcohol level.) Usually, after whiskey is taken from the barrel, water is added to bring it down to the strength that the producer wants to sell it at. Sometimes a whiskey is bottled at the same strength it came out of the barrel. This is often referred to on the label as Barrel Proof or Natural Cask Strength.

What is "finishing"? Many whiskeys spend most of their lives in one cask or barrel, but then are put into a different type of cask for a brief time before bottling. This practice is known as "finishing," and you will often see this identified on the whiskey's label.

Is it from a single barrel? When a distiller bottles a whiskey, it generally comes from a marriage of casks produced at that distillery. This ensures consistency of flavors. Only a small percentage of whiskeys are bottled one cask at a time, and they are usually identified on the label as such. Since each barrel of whiskey tastes different (even when from the same distillery), single cask or barrel bottlings are the most individualistic.

Is it from a "small batch"? Distillers often marries multiple barrels, which may have various mash bills and finishes, to produce one "small batch" of highly specialized whiskey. These small batch recipes vary from batch to batch depending on the barrels selected.

How old is it? If a whiskey has an age statement on the label, then all the whiskey in that bottle must be at least that old. Remember: whiskey only ages in the barrel, not in the bottle.

Is it chill-filtered? Those components that are removed during chilling (known as congeners) also contribute to a whiskey's flavor. Some producers bottle the whiskey without chill-filtering, and this is usually identified and explained on the label.