

Tasting Room Spirits Training

First: Spirits are generally classified by what they are made from or how they are made.

- Whiskey- Spirits produced from grains. What grains are used determines the type of whiskey for the most part. So, rye whiskey, for example, is produced from a mash bill of at least 51% RYE grains. This would include- Rye Whiskey, Bourbon, White Rye, Corn, Manhattan Moonshine.
- Brandy- Any spirit produced from the distillation of a fermented fruit. That fermented fruit can be in the form of a whole fruit mash (the EDVs, Grappa) or a wine (Limoncello, fortification spirit in the Forte).
- Vodka- Can be produced from just about anything that will ferment. Defined as being a spirit that is as tasteless and odorless as possible because it is distilled to at least 95% purity before being diluted and bottled. This is the Three Hunters vodka, which is made from a Catawba grape base wine.
- Gin- Can be produced from any base. Defined as being a spirit with the dominant flavor being derived from juniper berries but can include many other “botanicals” that will impart other flavors.

Second: Whiskeys have their own special classifications or types based on several factors, including the grains used and the method/length of aging.

- Bourbon- An American style whiskey produced from a grain bill of at least 51% corn and aged in new, charred American white oak barrels.

Ours-

- Rye Whiskey- Produced from a grain bill of at least 51% rye grain and aged in new, charred American white oak barrels.

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- White/”Unaged” Whiskeys- Technically must touch a barrel to have the word “whiskey” on the label. Still must conform to the idea that there must be at least 51% of a certain grain used in the grain bill if mentioned on the label.

Ours-

FAQs and their Answers

What makes bourbon different than whiskey?

- Short answer- Bourbon is a TYPE or CLASS of whiskey.
- Longer answer- Bourbon is a specific kind of whiskey made within certain guidelines. The government stipulates that it must have been made from at least 51% corn and must have aged in new charred American oak barrels.

Doesn't it have to be from Kentucky to be called Bourbon? Doesn't it have to age for at least "x" years to be Bourbon?

- Shortest answer- No and No. But don't use this answer with Customers!
- Short answer- Bourbon made in Kentucky would be called Kentucky Bourbon, so technically ours could be called NY Bourbon. There are no minimum ages attributed by the government for bourbon as a whole.
- Longer answer- As long as it uses at least 51% corn and new oak barrels it is a bourbon. The government further splits this type into "Straight Bourbon" and a few blends as well. Straight Bourbon is specifically aged at least 2 years in the same oak barrels before bottling. Our bourbon, being at least 24 months old is technically a straight bourbon, we just decided not to use that name for it.

What would I mix this with?

- The tech sheets are your best bet for this information. The spirits have cocktail recipes at the bottom that you can tell the customer about. Also, the obvious direct substitution of similar spirits (vodka for vodka, gin for gin, etc.)
- Some interesting examples:
 - "I like Gin and Tonics"- Try the Bierschnapps and Tonic instead. Similar profiles with herbal and floral aromas and flavors.
 - "I like tequila"- Try the Grappa. It has a similar fruity nature with a slight mineral "tang."

I like 'x,' so what would be like that?

- This is a tougher question to answer. It really depends on the product the customer is referring to in the question. Ask them to give you more details if they can. If it is a whiskey, what type of whiskey? If it is a vodka, what is the spirit made from? Listen to their answers and you might be surprised what you pick up. This may help you determine where to go from there.

Overall Outline

- General Process of Whiskey Production
 - Mashing- mixing grains and water to convert because yeasts are lazy
 - Cooling
 - Fermentation
 - Distillation- the 3 “cuts,” the difference between distillation techniques for large/small cooperage
 - Why we use smaller bbls, differences in aging