



Cheers

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Flavor in Focus

Unique or unexpected flavor profiles abound in the selection of spirits sampled by Robert Plotkin this issue. Some of them hail from the more eclectic categories, but each can add a certain pizzazz to cocktails or deliver singular pleasure when enjoyed on its own. Either way, these spirits can set a drink menu—and an establishment—apart from the pack.

PLOTKIN'S PICKS

Handcrafted **Partida Elegante** is an exquisite tequila, a dramatic example of what can be achieved when patience and expertise meld with unbridled passion. Distilled entirely from estate-grown agaves and matured in oak for 36 to 40 months, this ultra-premium gem has a dark amber/golden hue and an enticing bouquet of caramel, baking spices and vanilla with light floral notes. Its aromatics alone are worth the price of admission. The satiny medium-weight body bathes the palate with waves of captivating spicy flavors that gradually subside into a memorable finish. A star is born. (Partida Tequila LLC)

Lillet Rouge is a rare drinking pleasure that has yet to be paraded about by the hip and fashionable elite. The venerable fortified wine (17 percent ABV) is made in Bordeaux from a proprietary blend of barrel-aged red wines, spices, quinine and various varieties of orange peel. While sublime in cocktails, Lillet is better known as a solo act. The ruby red, light-bodied aperitif is generously aromatic and has a layered palate of raspberries, ginger, cinnamon and ripe plums with subtle notes of bitter quinine. Its lingering finish is dreamy. (William Grant & Sons)

Describing ultra-premium **Tanteo Chocolate Jalapeño Tequila** as sensational would be to sell it short. The handmade, 100 percent agave silver tequila is blended with natural cocoa flavoring and a jalapeño infusion. It has a pale Champagne hue, a medium-weight body and a delectable

array of cocoa and fruit aromas with lightly peppered notes. The tequila generates little sizzle upon entry and then quickly fills the mouth with the irresistible flavor of creamy milk chocolate and a precise dose of peppery heat. The finish is long, warm and satisfying. Way too good to share with others. (Tanteo Spirits LLC)

Vya Sweet Vermouth is made at the Quady Winery in Madera, Calif. The highly sought-after vermouth is composed of a blend of orange muscat, French colombard and valdepeñas red wines that are infused with herbs, spices, flowers and citrus peels. It then is fortified to 16 percent ABV with Quady Port, an addition that imbues the aperitif with a beautiful tawny hue and a velvety texture. The vermouth has a medium-weight body, tantalizing semi-sweet bouquet and a broad palate of spicy and tangy citrus flavors. (Quady Winery)

Priced below \$250 per 750 ml., **Germain-Robin Perfection Two** is the epitome of affordable luxury. This memorable spirit was pot distilled entirely from California sémillon grapes, matured in oak for 16 years and bottled unblended. In short, the reserve brandy is deserving of its name. Its wafting bouquet is an aromatic triumph, a brilliant array of toasted oak, vanilla, leather, cinnamon and succulent fruit. The silky, lightweight brandy has a spicy, dry palate with delightful acidity and loads of fruit. A warm, elegant finish is accentuated by notes of toffee and smoky malt. An unqualified pleasure. (Craft Distillers)

Artisanal **4 Copas Añejo** tequila has the feel of a spirit handcrafted with exacting attention to detail by people passionate about their work. The small batch tequila is distilled entirely from organic agaves and aged up to three years in American white oak, during which it develops a deep amber hue along with a satiny, medium-weight body and a generous bouquet of honeyed, spicy, earthy aromas. The palate is a lavish affair, an enticing offering of delectable semisweet flavors with pronounced notes of black pepper on the lingering finish. Great buy! (4 Copas USA)

For those in search of a world-class rum at a bargain basement price, the end-all assuredly is **Tortuga Gold 12-Year**, a character-laden dark rum from the British West Indies. While somewhat hobbled by a painfully ordinary exterior, it is magnificent where it counts. The rum has a deep, rich, mahogany hue, a featherweight body and a voluminous bouquet—a sensuous assortment of citrus and floral aromas scented with exotic spice. Its affect is mesmerizing. The experience continues on an uninterrupted high through the lip-smacking finish. (Majestic Distilling Co.)

Robert Plotkin is a judge at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition and has recently authored his 16th book, Secrets Revealed of America's Greatest Cocktails. He is the recipient of the 2007 Cheers Raising the Bar Award and can be reached at www.BarMedia.com or robert@barmedia.com.