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WINE ENTHUSIAST

M A G A Z I N E





Our Spirits Tasting Director Selects the Best Distillates of the Year.

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PHOTO JON VAN GORDER

The last decade has been a boom period for spirits consumption in the U.S. In 1998, 140.6 million cases of distilled spirits were sold. In 2007, the total jumped to 181.6 million cases. With thousands of whiskeys, liqueurs, gins, vodkas, brandies, Tequilas and rums to choose from, there's an embarrassment of riches.

Yet like all massive troves of gleaming treasures, some gems shine brighter than others. With a price range from \$20 to \$700, this roster is a veritable who's who list of classic brands, most notably, Frapin Cognac, The Macallan Single Malt Scotch Whisky, Absolut Vodka, Remy Martin Cognac, Benedictine Liqueur, Drambuie Liqueur, Chivas Regal Blended Scotch Whisky, Bushmills Irish Whiskey and Wild Turkey Bourbon as well as a number of small-production distillers.

This type of all-encompassing mix reflects what's occurring in distilled spirits in 2008. As the drive for product excellence reaches fever pitch, both large and small distillers are supplying the marketplace with the best spirits in history. It is against this background, then, that I present for your pleasure, the *Wine Enthusiast* Top 50 Spirits for 2008.

TEQUILA & MEZCAL

CLASSIC (96–100)/ HIGHEST RECOMMENDATION



Chinaco Extra Añejo Lot 71 100% de Agave Tequila (Mexico; Preiss Imports, Ramona, CA); 43% abv, \$251. The nosing passes find zesty scents of jalapeños with deeper aromas of dill pickle, relish, textile, oaky vanillin, salt and brine. Entry is sweet, salty, peppery and oily; midpalate features creamy, oily and tangy flavors that coat the tongue. Ends earthy, sweet, satiny, concentrated and oily. A classic extra Añejo.

Gran Centenario Leyenda Extra Añejo 100% de Agave Tequila (Mexico; Proximo Spirits, New York, NY); 40% abv, \$250. The aromas include old oak, hemp beeswax, asparagus, pepper and pine. The palate entry is smooth, sap-like and sweet; at midpalate the flavors integrate in an ideal display of maturity, grace and vigor. Ends up lip-smacking sweet, fiber-like, oaky, honeyed and a touch salty. An exciting addition to the growing Extra Añejo category.

Partida Elegante Extra Añejo 100% de Agave Tequila NOM 1454 CRT (Mexico; Partida Tequila, San Francisco, CA); 40% abv, \$350. Smells of mint, light toffee, summer vegetation and gum with subtle scents of cookie batter, tapioca, brown rice and a touch of honey. At midpalate the taste turns peppery, honeyed, oaky, slightly toasty and spicy. Finishes elegantly, moderately sweet and inte-

grated.

Trago Añejo 100% de Agave Tequila NOM 1474 CRT (Mexico; Trago International, San Juan Capistrano, CA); 40% abv, \$60. Nosing finds green pepper spiciness and hints of leather, malted milk, rubber pencil eraser, textile fiber and delicate honey. Entry is smooth with semisweet tastes of honey, orange peel, dry soil and vanilla; the midpalate is sweeter, saline and citrusy. Finishes sweet, creamy and spicy.

SUPERB (90–95)/ HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Los Danzantes Reposado Mezcal (Mexico; Craft Distillers, Ukiah, CA); 42% abv, \$70. The nosing passes find fragrances of rubber tire, burnt matchstick, road tar and intriguing scents of limestone, charcoal and cigar ash. The palate entry is sweet and creosote-like, medicinal and ashy; the midpalate stage is long, burnt marshmallow sweet, and very pleasant in its rustic manner. Finishes smoky and with hints of rubber tire.