

Whiskey & Spirits
FOR
DUMMIES®

by Perry Luntz



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

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Whiskey & Spirits For Dummies®

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About the Author

Perry Luntz has been involved in one way or another with the beverage alcohol business most of his adult life. For more than 20 years he has been publisher and editor of *Beverage Alcohol Market Report*, an international e-letter for marketing executives in beer, wine, and spirits. He served as Director of Marketing Communications for Seagram Distillers for a decade, worked on the creative side of several advertising agencies, including a spell as a creative director of a Young & Rubicam division, and for several years headed his own marketing communications agency.

A consultant, lecturer, teacher, and news media source, Perry is frequently interviewed in newspapers, radio, and television, including the BBC. He is chairman emeritus of the Wine Media Guild, proving he knows his way around vineyards and breweries, as well as distilleries.

Like many native New Yorkers, Perry is a political junky. He served several years as president of a highly regarded NYC political club.

For the past decade, Perry has been Senior Editor of the Beverage Media Group, a network of trade magazines read by 140,000 licensed retailers. He also writes a weekly column for the group's B-to-B Internet site.

He lives with his wife Carol Ann Rinzler in the Center of the Known Universe — Midtown Manhattan — occasionally visiting his home town of Brooklyn, where his son Russell lives with wife Lisa Di Gennaro. In the winter, he and Carol often become “snow birds” to descend on the rest of their family, Ira, Jacky, and grandsons Ari and Eli, who live in Sarasota, Florida.

Dedication

For Lloyd, whose light is gone but whose spirit is always with us.

Acknowledgments

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It was a long time coming, but I hope all who contributed to it enjoy reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it.

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Introduction

For thousands of years man and womankind celebrated major events — religious and secular — by having a taste or even two of a fermented beverage that contained alcohol. Things got even tastier around 800 CE — the height of development of the Moorish culture. That’s when a brilliant alchemist in the perpetual search for a way to turn lead into gold attempted to urge the release of the “essence” of various fruits and grains. The result was not only better than anything ever enjoyed before, but it also could be repeated over and over again.

That brilliant alchemist had found distillation. The art of making the most noble of beverages was created by nature and perfected by men and women. This book is dedicated to giving you a full explanation of distillation from the simplest and most popular spirit (vodka) to the most complicated (whiskey and brandy).

No, *Whiskey & Spirits For Dummies* definitely won’t tell you how to set up your very own still in the basement (or bathtub) so that you can whip up a batch of your very own whiskey, gin, vodka, Tequila, rum, cordial, or Cognac.

Instead, this book aims to increase your appreciation of the qualities in fine distilled spirits, enabling you to make wise choices from the myriad products on the shelves in your local liquor store or in the literally hundreds of cocktails available for serving or drinking on social occasions. Drinking alcohol beverages is indeed a social thing to do. It’s also part of religious services, and its use as a psychic benefit is unquestioned. There are other sides to these noble beverages as well.

This book also presents some ways in which a measured drink or two a day can create a more healthful way to live. I also talk about how to avoid any of the unpleasant results that can come from drinking too much.

For those readers who know absolutely nothing about distilled spirits other than that these beverages enhance a social setting and dining experience, this book is a good place to start to pick up the basics.

More experienced connoisseurs will find this a refresher course that can confirm their own good taste, introduce them to a few new types and brands of distilled spirits, and provide the kind of odds and ends — for example, why whiskey is spelled *whiskey* in Ireland and *whisky* in Scotland — that enliven cocktail conversation. And, yes, I give you several classic cocktail recipes in here, too.

Conventions Used in This Book

To make the text consistent and easier to read, *Whiskey & Spirits For Dummies* follows the usual Dummies style. For example:

- ✓ All Web addresses are printed in `monofont`.
- ✓ When this book was printed, some Web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that I didn't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So, when using one of these Web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending that the line break doesn't exist.
- ✓ New terms appear in *italic* type and are followed by an easy-to-understand definition.
- ✓ **Bold** type is used to highlight the action parts of numbered steps.

What You're Not to Read

Imagine: An author telling you that you don't have to read every word that appears in his book. The truth is that some small parts of this book are fun or provide information that you may not find anywhere else, but they aren't absolutely essential to your understanding of the basic facts about distilled spirits. For example:

- ✓ **The text in sidebars:** These shaded boxes are exactly that — sidebars to the main event — a little anecdote here, a special factoid there. Fascinating, but not essential.

- ✔ **The text next to a Technical Stuff icon:** Readers who want to know every single fact about how things work will find these paragraphs a delight. Readers who can do without the technical details can surf on by.
- ✔ **The text on the copyright page:** Really. This page is for publishers and libraries. If my editor put the dedication there to save space, I think you should read about the people who helped make this book possible, but the publisher's address? The number of editions? The Library of Congress identification number? Nah.

Foolish Assumptions

If an author clicks the computer, hits typewriter keys, or pushes a quill pen across the page, what's in front of him or her is an image of the person for whom the book is being written. These are some of the assumptions I made about you:

- ✔ You know the names of the different types of distilled spirits, but you may not be totally familiar with the characteristics that differentiate a whiskey from a Tequila (you may even know why Tequila is spelled with a capital letter and whiskey is not).
- ✔ You've read conflicting reports about the risks and benefits of spirits (and other kinds of alcohol beverages), and you want to pin down the real facts.
- ✔ You want the basic information about these products and how they're made, but you have no intention of opening your own distillery. That's good, because a few paragraphs back you were told that this book isn't designed to tell you how to do that.
- ✔ Most important, you enjoy the flavor, aroma, and panache of distilled spirits — but only and always in moderation.

How This Book Is Organized

The following is a brief summary of each part of *Whiskey & Spirits For Dummies*. You can use this as a fast guide to check out the stuff you want to go to first, because the best thing about a *For Dummies* book is that no one expects you to start at Chapter 1 and work your way straight through to the end. Each chapter here is a whole little book of its own, which means that you can start anywhere and still come out with a wealth of new information about distilled spirits.

Part I: Entering the Spirits World

Chapter 1 is (what else?) a general introduction to the universe of distilled spirits. Chapter 2 is more technical: A detailed description of the distillation process in all its traditional glory. Chapter 3 tells you how to serve, evaluate, and enjoy the products produced in Chapter 2.

Part II: Whiskeys from Around the World

Chapter 4 is all about how the Irish introduced the first whiskeys. Chapter 5 explains how the Scots adopted the Irish spirits — and changed the spelling to “whisky,” thus confusing generation after generation of whiskey (or is it whisky?) drinkers.

Chapter 6 salutes two quintessential Americans — Bourbon and Tennessee whiskey. Chapter 7 describes the other great American innovation, American blended whiskey, and tells you all about upstarts from India, Japan, and New Zealand. Chapter 8 goes north to talk about a Canadian contribution to New World whisky choices.

Part III: Surfing the White Waters: A Guide to “Clear” Spirits

Chapter 9 focuses on gin, from its birth in the Netherlands, toward its perfection in London, through its Prohibition adolescence, to its present presence. Chapter 10 is about vodka, the clear Russian spirit now often enjoyed in totally unexpected flavors. Chapter 11 is all about Tequila, the Aztec contribution to your drinking pleasure. Chapter 12 focuses on rum, the spirit made from sugar cane first carried to the Western hemisphere by Christopher Columbus. Yes, *that* Christopher Columbus.

Part IV: Enjoying the “After Dinner” Specials

The subject of Chapter 13 is Winston Churchill’s favorite spirit, brandy. Chapter 14 rewards the sweet tooth with info about the sweet stuff: cordials and liqueurs.

Part V: The Part of Tens

This is the part of the book regular *For Dummies* readers never skip. Chapter 15 pours recipes for ten classic cocktails (with an extra from the bartender). Chapter 16 dishes out menu choices — entrees, main dishes, veggies, and desserts — whose ingredients include at least one type of spirit. Chapter 17 tells what nutrients (!) are in one serving of each type of distilled spirits. Chapter 18 concludes with the actual health benefits of moderate spirits consumption.

Icons Used in This Book



This icon points out general good ideas, such as serving suggestions, buying advice, and so forth.



I use this icon to highlight important concepts that you shouldn't forget.



This icon flags nonessential information that may be too technical or detailed for some readers. You can skip it if you want.

Where to Go from Here

Now the question is where to begin reading. The real answer is anywhere your curiosity takes you in the Table of Contents. However, one good starting point is Chapter 2, the one that explains how distilled spirits are made. A second good starting point is Chapter 3, the one that shows you how to enjoy distilled products. Both chapters have information that applies to all types of spirits.

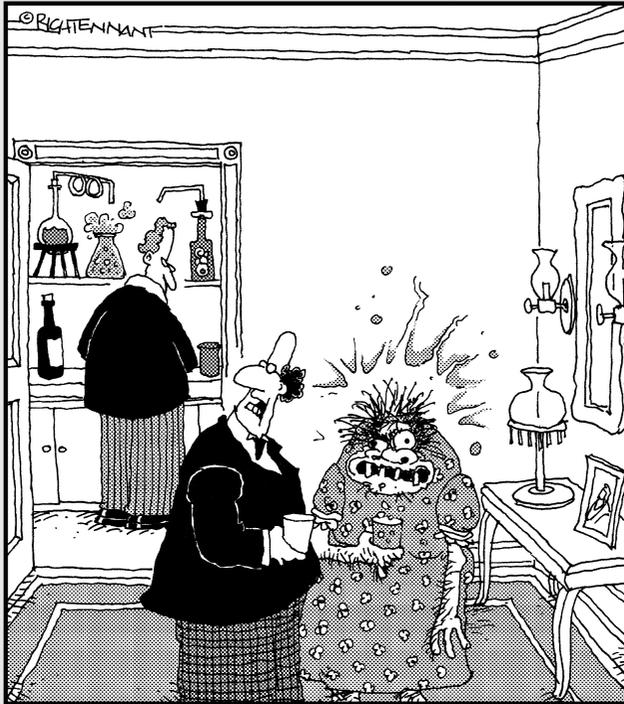
Wherever you start, hopefully it will be a trip you'll remember for a long time. Good traveling.

Part I

Entering the Spirits World

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"Jekyll, old man-I think you've made my wife's drink a bit too strong."

In this part . . .

Just like that first sip of your favorite spirit, this part is pure pleasure. Here I trace the history of distilled spirits, right from the beginning in the 11th century. I also explain the distillation process, and I offer tips on how to serve and enjoy distilled spirits. I recommend reading the chapters in this part if you're new to the spirits world; this information is bound to whet your appetite for the various alcohol beverages you can read about in the rest of the book. Pour yourself a glass of whiskey, settle into your most comfortable chair, and start reading.

Chapter 1

Discovering Distilled Spirits

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In This Chapter

- ▶ How distilled spirits were invented
 - ▶ How distilled spirits became popular
 - ▶ The foods from which spirits are made
 - ▶ The varieties of distilled spirits
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This chapter is called “Discovering Distilled Spirits,” but “Distilled Spirits 101” would also do nicely because this is a down-to-earth basic guide to the multicultural history of the wonderful beverages human beings produce via distillation.

Naturally, the chapter includes some spirits history, starting with a graceful bow to other types of alcohol beverages and how they differ from the distilled varieties. The different types of spirits are listed here, as are the foods from which they’re made. And just for kicks, I give you a quiz about famous spirits (okay, famous ghosts) in classic movies.

A Brief History of Distilled Spirits

The road to distilled spirits begins with those *other* beverages, wine and beer.

The story starts one day back in the dim, distant past at a point that most anthropologists peg between 5000 and 6000 BCE. A goatherd in the Tigris-Euphrates valley (now Iraq), where human beings created their first agricultural communities, noticed that his flock was friskier than usual.

Looking closely, he saw the goats feasting on rotting grapes fallen from a nearby vine. Being a curious goatherd, he tasted a few grapes himself. Then he tried a few more, and maybe another handful after that, and soon goats and goatherd ambled happily back to their village to share their discovery with others.

Of course, you know what that anonymous goatherd didn't: Those "rotten" grapes had fermented.

In other words, naturally occurring microorganisms in the air had landed on the grapes and started feeding on the fruit, digesting the grape sugars, and turning them into gas (carbon dioxide) and liquid ethanol/ethyl alcohol, which is the same alcohol used in all modern alcohol beverages.

Eureka! Wine! Beer!

Very quickly, the goatherd's friends, neighbors, and acquaintances far and near grasped the idea that squeezing rotten, sorry, *fermented*, fruit released a pleasantly intoxicating beverage called wine (from the Greek *vinos*, the Latin *vinum*, the Old English *win*, and the Germanic *winam*).

And then they discovered that fermenting grains released an equally pleasant intoxicating beverage called beer (from the Latin *bibere* [to drink], the German *bier*, and the Old English *beor*, pronounced *beer*).

After that, a jolly good time was had pretty much everywhere fruits and grains were grown. And it was a profitable time, as well: The oldest known Sumerian tablet is a receipt for a shipment of beer from Mesopotamia to some lucky merchant in Northern Greece. This tablet is a hunk of clay that made it possible for modern scholars to translate the language of Sumer, the nation of Middle Eastern city-states that was one of the world's earliest civilizations.

Advancing the art

At first, folks were content with wine and beer. But being human and naturally inquisitive, they began to experiment with ways to standardize the fermentation process because they wanted to manage the production and improve the quality of alcohol beverages.