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## The Hot List: Maple Syrup

Posted MONDAY NOVEMBER 01, 2010

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Forget pancakes and waffles; America's beloved breakfast sweetener has a new calling—the cocktail glass.

The robust flavor of maple syrup, which has long been a chef's staple, is now prized by bartenders across the country. Like agave nectar or honey, it packs more depth and complexity than sugar-based simple syrup. "It is rich and nutritious," explains Thad Vogler, co-owner of the newly opened Bar Agricole in San Francisco. "It feeds you in a way other sugars don't."

For even more richness, Vogler uses darker grade-B maple syrup. (Most syrup on supermarket shelves and in restaurants is the lighter grade-A.) Its complex sweetness shines

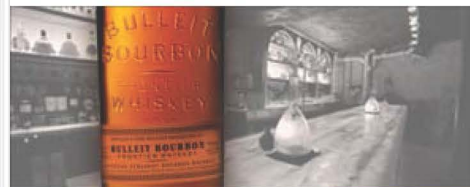
in his version of the Rattlesnake, a rye sour based on a classic from the 1930 *Savoy Cocktail Book* that Vogler created for popular Bay Area restaurant Beretta.

Maple is also making a subtler entrée into drinks via products like Vermont Gold Vodka (\$38). Made entirely from the tree's sap, it has distinctive toasty and delicately sweet maple flavors. Also in Vermont, Saxtons River Distillery crafts Sapling (\$35), a liqueur made with local grade-A maple syrup.

But it's also the maple tree itself that some distillers are using. This year's Woodford Reserve Master's Collection bottling (\$90), which was just released today, was finished in barrels made from sugar maple. The brand claims it's the first time the species has ever been used to age bourbon, and the spirit has notes of spice, coffee and, of course, a bit of sweet maple syrup.

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