

# OKAY, CHECK IT OUT.

A FOOD AND COOKING BLOG WITH A FOCUS ON INTERESTING INGREDIENTS.

Thursday, November 18, 2010

## vermont spirits

Now let's talk about *good* vodka.

Let's talk about *great* vodka.

Most vodka has no taste at all. It's industrially produced neutral grain spirit. The more times it's distilled, the less flavor it has - which is marketed as "smoothness." Smoothness is somebody taking the filling out of your sandwich and charging you extra for premium emptiness. There are a lot of expensive vodkas out there that come from industrial rectifiers converting corn sugar into flavorless spirit. Why do you think the major vodka producers spend *so* much money on their brand identity? I buy that stuff as ingredients - for vodka sauce, for infusions, things like that, and they'd be fine in a Vesper, but that's as far as I'd go.

There are a small number of vodkas distinguishing themselves and, of those, Vermont Spirits makes the best I've tried. The common thread to all of the excellent vodkas I've had is that they start by fermenting and distilling something *interesting*, and that remains true with Vermont Spirits' Gold and White. Neither is made from fermented grains.

Vermont Gold is made with 100% maple sap. Now, this is near and dear to my heart, because when I was growing up, we tapped our own sugar maples. If you're not from New England or Canada - and maybe even if you are - you might not grok this: every spring and fall when the temperature difference between day and night is at its greatest, the sap of maple trees moves through the trunk, and if you hammer a tap into the side, it'll drip out into a bucket all day. Maple sap tastes sweet - I've seen it sold as a beverage at farmers markets and Atkins Farms in Amherst Mass - but needs to be boiled down to one-fortieth or so of its initial volume in order to become maple syrup.

Using maple sap to make vodka ... is really really cool. The nose is maple sap - not syrup, but sap. Not artificial maple flavoring, but sap. Something real, something natural. There's a distinctly sweet taste and a sort of warm woodiness that I'm not sure I would think of as "woodiness" if I weren't familiar with maple sap - but I don't know what else to call it. My main point is that this vodka has flavor. It isn't *flavored*, it has flavor. It's born with it.

It actually makes a decent Old-Fashioned (using maple syrup instead of sugar), and a better sour - but even vodka with flavor isn't as strongly flavored as whiskey or rum (or gin, for that matter), and I think this is a better choice for sipping. It would be my choice for a vodka martini, too. I tried making a sort of appletini by combining this with Tuthilltown's apple vodka - but ultimately, although it was good, there wasn't enough apple flavor to justify calling it an appletini. I do recommend the combination, however - a splash of maple syrup, a splash of unfiltered apple cider, but not enough to cover up the vodkas.

Vermont White is made from 100% milk sugar, which reminded me of reading about qumiz when I was a kid - fermented mare's milk. Very little to the nose - a good clean alcohol smell. It's sweet but not nearly as sweet as Vermont Gold. There's something I'm having trouble describing here, which is obvious when you compare it - smell or taste - to a standard vodka. I guess it's not something that Vermont White has, it's something it's missing - the fermented-grain flavor of other vodkas. I'd swear there's even less alcohol burn, but I'm willing to admit that could be my imagination. In any case, the overall effect is of a vodka with a creamier mouth feel than the mouthwash/engine degreaser made by Absolut, Stoli, etc.

I'm resistant to mixing Vermont White. It has a much more subtle flavor than Vermont Gold, and I'd hate to see someone making Lemon Drops with it or something. A little sugar and a little bitters, sure - but even a White Russian covers up the nuance. On the other hand, if you love White Russians, this is probably a better choice than whatever you're using.

They're both great, fascinating spirits - the Vermont Gold really hit me where I live, so I'm biased there.

Source: <http://okaycheckitout.blogspot.com/2010/11/vermont-spirits.html#links>