



LIFE MAGAZINES

MONTHLY A5 LOCAL LIFESTYLE MAGAZINES

WINE & SPIRITS - **Vodka**

Both Russia and Poland claim to have invented vodka. It is well documented that vodka has been imbibed across Northern and Eastern Europe since the fourth century.

Originally vodka was probably made by fermenting grain and then distilling the product but other vegetable sources have also been used. Potatoes, grapes, soya beans or sugar cane are widely used now. The distillation process eliminates much of the original flavour of the source for the fermentation. The neutral vodka spirit is therefore now popular for making cocktails since it allows for flavours from other sources to be untainted by the spirit. Flavoured vodkas are made by adding flavours to the finished product. Thus there are peppered vodkas and ginger vodkas and various fruit flavours. There is even a honey vodka and a chocolate vodka. Bison grass is sometimes put into vodka and various herbs are also used, including St John's Wort. In the USA a bacon flavour vodka is sold!

Vodka did not become popular in Europe and the USA until the 1930's and its consumption outside northern and eastern Europe soared from the 1950's when it became a popular ingredient for cocktails because of its neutral flavour. To a large extent it replaced gin in cocktails. Today dry martinis are more often made with vodka rather than gin.

The lack of flavour of vodka is a result of the distillation process. There may be several distillations in the manufacture of vodka and not only does this remove any original flavours it also removes most of the esters, ethanol and higher alcohols. This results in a lesser hangover effect. This has been a marketing advantage for vodka and so is the lesser smell of alcohol on the breath. Vodka is now one of the most popular spirits worldwide. Traditionally vodka was made in Russia and Poland with an alcohol content of 40% (80% proof). In 1894 the great chemist Mendeleev (famous for the Periodic Table) claimed that 38% was the ideal strength for vodka. For convenience this was rounded up to 40%. In the European Union the minimum strength must be 37.5%.

The multiple distillations which increase the purity of vodka result in a very strong spirit which has to be diluted with water before bottling.

George Leslie