MEDIA COVERAGE

in good spirits

Seaside Potatoes That You Can Drink

September 30th, 2011 in Blogs ShareThis Like
+1 0

comments (0)

Camper English, contributor

thumbs up!
no recommendations

The Poison Ivy Cocktail from Kiowa Bryan

Photo: Camper English

Add Comment
Print
ShareThis

The goal of most vodka-making is to achieve a completely neutral spirit. The law requires it in fact: vodka must be distilled to a nearly pure alcohol state before it is watered down, and be colorless, flavorless, and odorless. But in reality, there is a lot of leeway.

It would be half-correct to call Karlsson's the "meat and potatoes" of vodka. This brand from Sweden is a blend of the distillates from seven different heirloom potato varietals. And unlike most vodkas, the makers of Karlsson's try to keep as much of the robust flavor of the raw ingredient in the vodka as possible.

To me Karlsson's smells creamy, like when you first mush a skinned, boiled potato with a fork, and it tastes of cocoa, caramel, and pecan, with a hint of saltiness. It has a weighty texture that's terrific in a vodka martini (especially if you like them dirty with added olive brine) and is also noticeable even in drinks where vodka usually blends in unnoticed.

The Poison Ivy is a good example of that. Despite the honey and basil and lemon, you can still taste this distinct vodka through the cocktail. The drink's creator, Kiowa Bryan of Lexington Social in Los Angeles, garnishes the drink with cayenne pepper and smoked sea salt for a pleasant hot and smoky surprise to an otherwise light and friendly cocktail.

In the version of this drink that I made at home, instead of smoked salt I used a colorful sea salt that comes from the same region in Sweden as where Karlsson's potatoes are grown.

The Poison Ivy
Adapted from a recipe by Kiowa Bryan of Lexington Social in Los Angeles

2 fl. oz. Karlsson's Vodka
.75 fl. oz. Honey
.75 fl. oz. Lemon Juice
3 Basil Leaves
Smoked Sea Salt
Cayenne Pepper

Add liquids and basil leaves to cocktail shaker. Shake thoroughly and fine-strain (to remove the bits of basil) into a rocks glass with fresh ice. Add a pinch of smoked sea salt and cayenne pepper on top of the drink to taste.

BULLFROG & BAUM
MONTHLY VISITORS: 19,883
IMPRESSIONS: 19,883

HOT FIVES

5 Unusual Vodkas To Try Right Now

You got quinoa in my vodka — and it's delicious!

BY JENNY ADAMS

+1 Share Tweet 0

Aug 18, 2011 5:31 pm

Two years ago, the economy was horrid, my coffers looked like coffins, and I'd agreed begrudgingly to take on the story the other writers at a certain beverage magazine wouldn't touch. It was entitled "Vodka – Mixologists Love It Because It's Awesome."

Karlsson's Gold, made with raw Swedish potatoes, great to serve on the rocks with pepper + ENLARGE

Ok, that wasn't actually the title, but it wasn't taking E.S.P. to infer it was the angle my editor wanted. I figured he'd probably sold a full-page ad to Sorority Girl Sugar-Pop Vodka or Axe Body Spray Citrón and needed someone (i.e. me) to wax poetic about how America's most renowned mixologists were simply
these marketing-blowhard brands.
an email inquiry to my contacts be
and the first response from a certa
bartender summed up the state of

"I'm happy to tell you about vodka
"I clean my bar with it at the end
shift."

Such vehement distaste for vodka among

3. **Karlsson's Gold**
This is a spirit with such rich, earthy flavor, it stands up to a bleeding raw steak or within a 19-ingredient Bloody Mary. The flavor comes courtesy of seven varieties of raw, virgin new potatoes at the base, harvested before they even consider growing skins, in Sweden's southeast peninsula known as Cape Bjare. It's distilled but a single time to retain as much flavor as possible, giving imbibers a bit of cream, and a faint hint of butter and herbs that begs to be sprinkled with black pepper.

many craft bartenders was par for the course a few years ago. It was understandable, given that the average customer had fallen prey to marketing companies telling them they could get drunk easier if they didn't have to taste the spirit. Vodka, thus, became synonymous with something that's sole purpose was to taste like nothing.

Feel good about drinking FAIR's fair-trade certified quinoa vodka. + ENLARGE

Today, many spirit companies are working hard to change that image, and creating vodkas not only with exceptional taste, but unique base products that haven't been utilized before. This year at Tales of the Cocktail, one of the nation's largest beverage industry gatherings, things certainly looked "more appetizing" where vodka was concerned. Square One Organic vodka launched a new basil flavor at Tales this year, and Fair Trade Spirits arrived to showcase a vodka made from Bolivian quinoa. Many attendees also became acquainted with Zú Bison Grass vodka, flavored from the Bison grass that's native to Poland.

In 2012, expect to see a great number of vodka brands cropping up, with a food product at the heart, and a true sense of terroir on the palate.

"I think it's great that companies are now trying to make something where you can actually
ider, co-owner of Huckleberry
pples in Core vodka. If you
ed, you can get notes of grain,

s of your local liquor store, try
ooner whip up a Windex Gimlet

or hundreds of years. Bison
grass vodka, made from the indigenous wild sweet grass native to Poland, was produced

BULLFROG & BAUM
MONTHLY VISITORS: 195,967
IMPRESSIONS: 195,967

Jul 8, 2011

Friday Cocktails: The Dalmatian

By Helen Rosner

Like 272 Tweet 6 WRITE A COMMENT SAVE ARTICLE PRINT EMAIL SHARE

I left vodka behind after college. It was a self-conscious decision, one that was equal parts a recoil against too many plastic-cup screwdrivers, and an embrace of the thrillingly snobby anti-vodka trend that swept the spirits world in the later half of the last decade. For years I was a passionate crusader for gin and whiskey, happy to roundly dismiss the odorless, colorless vodka as nothing more than a vehicle for ethanol and marketing. But then, not too long ago, the French Culinary Institute's Alexis Kahn introduced the SAVEUR team to the wonders of American craft vodkas. That day, my resolve crumbled a little, but it took a trip to a potato field in rural Sweden to truly shepherd me back in to the vodka fold.

Photo: MacKenzie Smith

That potato field was a dark green strip beneath a cloudless June sky, dotted with bright white potato flowers nodding in the wind. It belongs to one of a dozen or so potato farmers who harvest their crop shockingly early in the growing season, while the potatoes are still "virgin," so new they have yet to form skins. Within hours of leaving the earth, they're sorted, scrubbed, and on their way to becoming bottles of the vodka that made me start to believe in vodka again: Karlsson's Gold, a relatively new Swedish spirit distilled from the products of a farmers' cooperative in the southeastern Bjare peninsula. I'd tried Karlsson's at dinner the night before and was mildly intrigued; that next afternoon, post-potato fields, I sipped it again and a door opened. Most vodkas go through multiple distillations to create smoothness and flavorlessness. This, distilled only once, had a loamy, vaguely alkaline flavor and a bright floral aroma; a liquid version of the farm where I'd stood just a few hours before.

Given its noticeable flavor, the folks at Karlsson's suggest drinking their vodka on the rocks with a grind of black pepper, the subtle heat an illuminating counterpoint to the spirit's clean notes. It's a lovely preparation, but I wanted to take the flavors even further, deepening the spice and picking up on some of the citrus notes in the vodka's finish. The result is the Dalmatian, a decidedly dark riff on the Salty Dog (that old college-party standby of vodka, grapefruit juice, and a salted rim). An ounce and a half of Karlsson's meets an equal part of fiery black pepper simple syrup; they're shaken with fresh grapefruit juice, and served over ice. Coral-pink and slightly opaque, the Dalmatian looks demure, but it packs serious heat: bitter and sweet, earthy and deep, with a slow, lingering burn from the vodka and pepper. It's one of those drinks that makes you look at the glass in wonderment after your first sip. The Dalmatian is a dog with bite.

See the recipe for the Dalmatian cocktail »

Recommend 272 people recommend this. Be the first of your friends.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. Digital Network | WSJ.com | MarketWatch | BARRON'S | All Things Digital. | FINS | SmartMoney

Saturday, April 16, 2011 New York 60° | 39°

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. | FOOD & DRINK

FOOD & DRINK | APRIL 16, 2011

HALF FULL: AVIARY

Raising the Bar

Deconstructed Moscow Mules. Rotary evaporators. Aromatic sod. Aviary isn't your typical cocktail spot

Article | Slideshow | Comments (11) | MORE IN FOOD & DRINK »

Cocktail Science

A behind the scenes look at the making of the Rooibos and Ginger cocktails at Grant Achatz's Aviary in Chicago, 2011's most anticipated new high-concept bar.

Print Slide

9/9 More Slideshows

The finished Ginger cocktail. A sidecar of Karlson's vodka and simple syrup is poured into the mixture and is then stirred with the stick of lemon grass. The cocktail is sipped from the narrow end of the glass. "This one is all about change over time," says Mr. Schoettler. "If I give you an 8-ounce

Christian Seel

Earn cash back to use towards anything you choose with the Citi® Dividend Card.

Start Earning

citi

The finished Ginger cocktail. A sidecar of Karlson's vodka and simple syrup is poured into the mixture and is then stirred with the stick of lemon grass. The cocktail is sipped from the narrow end of the glass. "This one is all about change over time," says Mr. Schoettler. "If I give you an 8-ounce cocktail, by the time you take three sips you palette's already dull. This way, you never get acclimated to one flavor profile."

BULLFROG & BAUM
MONTHLY VISITORS: 1,727,710
IMPRESSIONS: 1,727,710

the Atlantic
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2011

CLAY RISEN - Clay Risen is a New York City-based editor and writer. He is the author of *A Nation on Fire: America in the Wake of the King Assassination*.
BIO | ALL POSTS | BOOKS

Absolut Terroir: Liquor Moguls Finally Make Vodka With Soul

FEB 3 2011, 9:34 AM ET |

Recommend 2

Karlsson's Gold Vodka

Every year some 200 vodka brands hit the market worldwide. Most are gimmicks. There's one that comes bottled in a glass skull. There's one flavored with smoked salmon. There's one dyed black. Only two of those 200 live much beyond their first birthday. Can Karlsson's, an upstart brand from Sweden made from new potatoes, buck the trend?

Maybe. But only if it can buck another trend as well: the belief that good vodka has to be flavorless, colorless, and—to this whiskey fan, at least—soulless.

Underneath the marketing and food coloring, almost all vodkas are the same. They're made from grain, usually wheat or rye, and distilled until the taste and color are removed. Some are better than others, but there's no art to the process: the better the ingredients and the more thorough the distilling, the higher the premium. Partisans may swear there's a difference between Grey Goose and Ketel One, but really.

Karlsson's runs against the grain, so to speak, of vodka's obsession with purity. This is a dirty drink.

It wasn't always so. Before the 1960s very few people outside the "Vodka Belt"—Scandinavia, Russia, the Ukraine, Poland—drank the stuff at all, and regional differences predominated. In Sweden it was made mostly made from potatoes. Grains dominated in the steppes. And because purity wasn't as important, underlying flavors came through in the final product: vodka made outside Malmo tasted different from vodka made outside Stockholm, let alone Warsaw.

That all changed in the late 1970s, when Absolut, a state-owned brand from Sweden, got a makeover and started selling globally. Part of its marketing campaign, devised by the legendary Hans Brindfors (who later helped make IKEA a household name), was to emphasize purity over variety. The master blender, Borje Karlsson, switched the recipe from potatoes to winter wheat, which imparts a cleaner flavor. And Mr. Brindfors dressed it up in its now-iconic bottle, hiring artists to design ads that, within a few years, became de rigeur on the walls of college dorm rooms across America.

Absolut remained state-owned until 2008, when Sweden sold the brand to Pernod-Ricard for $9 billion. In the meantime, Absolut became one of the largest and most-recognized liquor brands in the world and the definition of high-quality vodka, averaging over 120 million bottles in worldwide annual sales. By then Mr. Brindfors and his marketing colleagues Olof Tranvik and Peter Ekelund were long gone. But a few years ago the trio got back together to give vodka-making another go. They're all obscenely wealthy men, and they could have spent a small fortune to bring out a wannabe Absolut—packaged, perhaps, in a bottle shaped like a half-naked Kim Kardashian.

Instead, in what can only be described as a rite of penance, they went local. Mr. Ekelund, who works for a private equity firm, also owns a farm in southern Sweden, and he understands what fluctuating food prices can do to small-time agriculture. So he approached his neighboring potato farmers with a plan: what about, instead of storing their excess produce, distilling it? They brought in Mr. Karlsson, the now-famous "father of Absolut," to develop a recipe, and a few years later—backed by Mr. Ekelund's fundraising, Mr. Tranvik's marketing skills, and Mr. Brindfors's branding genius—Karlsson's Gold was born.

MORE ON VODKA:
Chantal Martineau: Odorless No More
Clay Risen: Spike Lee's Absolut Sellout

Karlsson's is in many ways the opposite of Absolut. "Success for us," Ekelund says, "will be to sell 100,000 cases in five years"—or about 240,000 bottles a year, or about two-tenths of 1 percent of what their former brand sells annually. "We actually have real physical limitations," Ekelund says. "Our fields could produce a maximum of 400,000 bottles annually." Mr. Brindfors's bottle is short and stout, shaped something like an oversized glass hand grenade. And Karlsson's marketing is entirely word-of-mouth—no Andy Warhol ads this time. The company has just 15 employees, and the participating farmers are all shareholders.

More important, Karlsson's runs against the grain, so to speak, of vodka's obsession with purity. This is a dirty drink: Mr. Karlsson uses a blend of five potato varieties, chosen for their flavor as well as their terroir. Yes, terroir: like grapes, potatoes bear the imprint of soil, moisture, water quality, and temperature. Karlsson's even brags that the region where the potatoes are grown, Cape Bjäre, "is to potatoes what France's Bordeaux region is to grapes." Perhaps. In any case, the result is a vodka with flavor—and not mandarin orange or salmon, but pleasantly nutty, spicy notes derived from the potatoes themselves.

Karlsson's will never replace Absolut, a fact that the three backers seem to relish. Its distinct flavor makes it a poor base for most vodka-friendly cocktails, though Mr. Ekelund likes it in a Bloody Mary. The best way to drink it, says Mr. Tranvik, is like whiskey: at room temperature, on the rocks, or with water. A bit of fresh-cracked pepper compliments it nicely. And then do what perhaps no one in America has done with a glass of vodka in 30 years: sip.

That's not likely to win over the vodka-and-Red-Bull crowd any time soon, though Karlsson's isn't interested in the mass market—for now. "There's no illusion that we don't have a long road ahead of us," Mr. Ekelund says. "But then, we believe that vodka will move to craft products. Otherwise, it gets boring. People like different things. You see that in beer—so why would someone behave differently when it comes to his liquor?"

January 7, 2011

MONTHLY VISITORS: 37,865
IMPRESSIONS: 37,865

Liquor.com
Your expert guide to all things cocktails and spirits.

World-Saving Spirits

Posted FRIDAY JANUARY 07, 2011

Forward to a friend
Subscribe to Newsletter
Invite a Friend
Print Article

Spirits are generally judged by taste, smell and even price. But there's another important criterion: how they give back. A number of brands around the world not only produce fine alcohol but also have found a way to help their local communities. So start off the year by drinking for a good cause.

DEATH'S DOOR:

This Wisconsin-based craft distillery makes an acclaimed line of spirits, including a smooth vodka, a complex white whiskey and a London dry-style gin. Most of the ingredients are organic and grown in-state, plus one percent of all revenue goes to regional environmental groups.

FAIR:

In 2008, this French brand launched the world's first portfolio of Fair Trade Certified spirits, and it was exported to the US just last summer. So far, there's a vodka made from Bolivian quinoa, a goji liqueur that uses Himalayan berries and a coffee liqueur flavored with beans from Mexico.

KARLSSON'S GOLD VODKA:

At the heart of Karlsson's Gold are artisanal new potatoes from the Cape Bjäre region of southern Sweden. The brand's founders came up with the idea for the spirit as a way to support local farmers and stave off developers who were trying to buy their land.

BULLFROG & BAUM

GIFT GUIDE 2010

the Man with (Almost) Everything

Suede Anchor chukka sneakers, Keds for Gap, $65; gap.com.

Explorer Series 5.0 underwater mask with built-in camera, Liquid Image, $99; amazon.com.

Vapor snowboard by Paul Smith, Burton Snowboards, $1,200; burton.com.

Roc Nation Aviator headphones with volume control and a cell-phone-adaptable microphone, Skullcandy, $150; skullcandy.com.

Acrylic chronographic watch, Michael Michael Kors, $195; michaelkors.com.

Cotton denim Western shirt, Old Navy, $30; oldnavy.com.

Kinect for Xbox 360 bundle (includes 4GB Xbox 360 console, Kinect sensor, and *Kinect Adventures* game), $300; xbox.com.

Music powerhouse! Enough memory for up to 6,000 CDs

O4HD Music Server with wireless multiroom streaming and 2TB capacity, Olive, $2,499; olive.us.

Indulge His VICES

Charlie Vergos' Rendezvous Ribs & Shoulder package, $99 (includes 1 slab of ribs, 2 lbs. pulled pork, and sauce from the legendary Memphis restaurant); hogsfly.com.

Gold vodka (includes fresh pepper for a delicious combo), Karlsson's vodka, $40; parkaveliquor.com.

Tastes like tobacco but is smoke- and tar-free!

Electronic cigarette kit, Green Smoke, $139; 10 percent off for *InStyle* readers at greensmoke.com/instyle.

MORE GIFTS! Find the perfect present for everyone on your list at instyle.com/holiday

December 9, 2010

MONTHLY VISITORS: 126,044
IMPRESSIONS: 126,044

Nine Giftable Spirits

Make holidays more merry with beautiful bottles of booze

by Julie Wolfson in Food-Drink on 9 December 2010 Like 48 Tweet 37

With small batch spirits and one-of-a-kind bottles on the rise, an increasing number of producers are literally bringing something new to the table.

Joe Keeper at Silver Lake, CA's **Bar Keeper** recommends **Karlsson's Gold** Vodka, which is made from fingerling potatoes, as a gift. He loves the "nice viscosity" and the pepper grinder that comes with it adds a fresh-ground peppery zip. It sells from **Park Avenue Liquor Shop** for $36.

December 3, 2010

MONTHLY VISITORS: 12,889,300
IMPRESSIONS: 12,889,300

THE HUFFINGTON POST

Tony Sachs
Pop music know-it-all, spirits enthusiast, baseball obsessive, bon vivant

Posted: December 3, 2010 03:49 PM

A Gin Snob Repents: 9 Lesser-Known Vodkas To Convert The Unconverted

Like 13 people like this. Be the first of your friends.

5 SHARE

3 views retweet

Buzz

Get Food Alerts

SIGN UP

Email Comments 1

Several months ago, a publicist (who shall remain nameless) for a fairly popular brand of vodka (which will also remain nameless) lured me out to dinner at a swanky Japanese restaurant so she could sell me on some new and exciting flavored vodkas. I told her I'm not a big fan of vodka, but she was persistent, and who was I to say no to an expensive sushi dinner? About halfway through the meal, she described one of her favorite drinks -- which involved cream, crushed candy bars, chocolate sauce, and other ingredients that reminded me more of a sundae than a cocktail. "You can't taste the alcohol at all," she chirpily added. Aghast, I stammered, "But... but I *like* the taste of alcohol. That's why I write about it." She grimaced. "Euughh. I *hate* the taste of alcohol."

Later on, this same publicist also said, "I consider rice a vegetable. I mean, it's a side dish, nobody likes it... it's a vegetable." It was one of the more interesting dinner conversations I've had. And it also confirmed all my worst suspicions about vodka drinkers. They don't like the taste of alcohol. Their palates are unsophisticated. They only drink dirty martinis because of the name. They think rice is a vegetable. And so on.

I find vodka the least interesting of all spirits. It's designed to be flavorless, colorless, and odorless. If I want a neutral spirit, I go straight for gin, which is essentially vodka flavored with juniper and other botanicals. "Vodka is the bottled water of alcohol," I often scoff when I explain to friends why I don't care much about it.

But then again, don't bottled waters have their own distinct tastes? Most people can certainly tell the difference between, say, Poland Spring and Evian. So why not apply that kind of judgment to vodkas? I grew more intrigued, and finally decided to dive in and research the subject more thoroughly. Hell, if vodka is good enough for Josef Stalin AND Diddy, there's got to be something to it.

I decided straight off not to write about the brands everyone knows. Who wants an avowed vodka agnostic to hold forth on the flavor of say, Ketel One, a brand just about anyone who's had a cocktail in the last ten years has tried? (Although I must, for the record, say that I think Grey Goose is absolutely vile.) I also decided to not monkey around with mixology. I didn't want to taste these vodkas in any concoction that involved fruit juices, chocolate, bacon... anything that would mask the flavor, aroma and mouth feel of the vodka itself. I'd try each brand neat, chilled and on the rocks, and (with a couple of exceptions) that would be it.

At the end of my journey -- or is it end of the beginning? -- I've come to realize that there's much more to this stuff than I'd thought. The subtle nuances of a vodka may not jump out and whack your taste buds the way a good whiskey does, but they're still there. Put in the extra effort to really *taste* the vodka you're drinking, and you'll be rewarded. Here are nine vodkas that opened my eyes and educated my palate. As always, if I missed your favorite, feel free to tell me all about it in the Comments section. Just don't berate me too much for missing your brand of choice. I'm still learning.

Karlsson's Gold. Distilled from virgin new potatoes -- as opposed to the potatoes that sleep around? No, this means young potatoes which haven't had a chance to grow a skin yet. As you'd expect, it's got a pleasant, starchy, slightly sweet, very potato-ey nose, with a flavor to match. The good folks at Karlsson recommend trying it with some ground pepper straight out of the grinder, which softened the more overbearing sweet notes very nicely. Heck, a potato is always better with a little fresh pepper, so why not a potato vodka? Inspired by the pepper, I tried it in a Bloody Mary, and sure enough, it blended in beautifully. The Bloody's powerful flavors ensure you don't taste a vodka's subtleties, but as a mixer that complements the other ingredients, Karlsson's is a good choice.

BULLFROG & BAUM
VISITORS: 228,145
IMPRESSIONS: 228,145

IN THE MAGAZINE / **slideshows**

Holiday Gift Guide 2010

Whether you're shopping for cocktail geeks or beauty queens we've got something in any price range for everyone on your list.

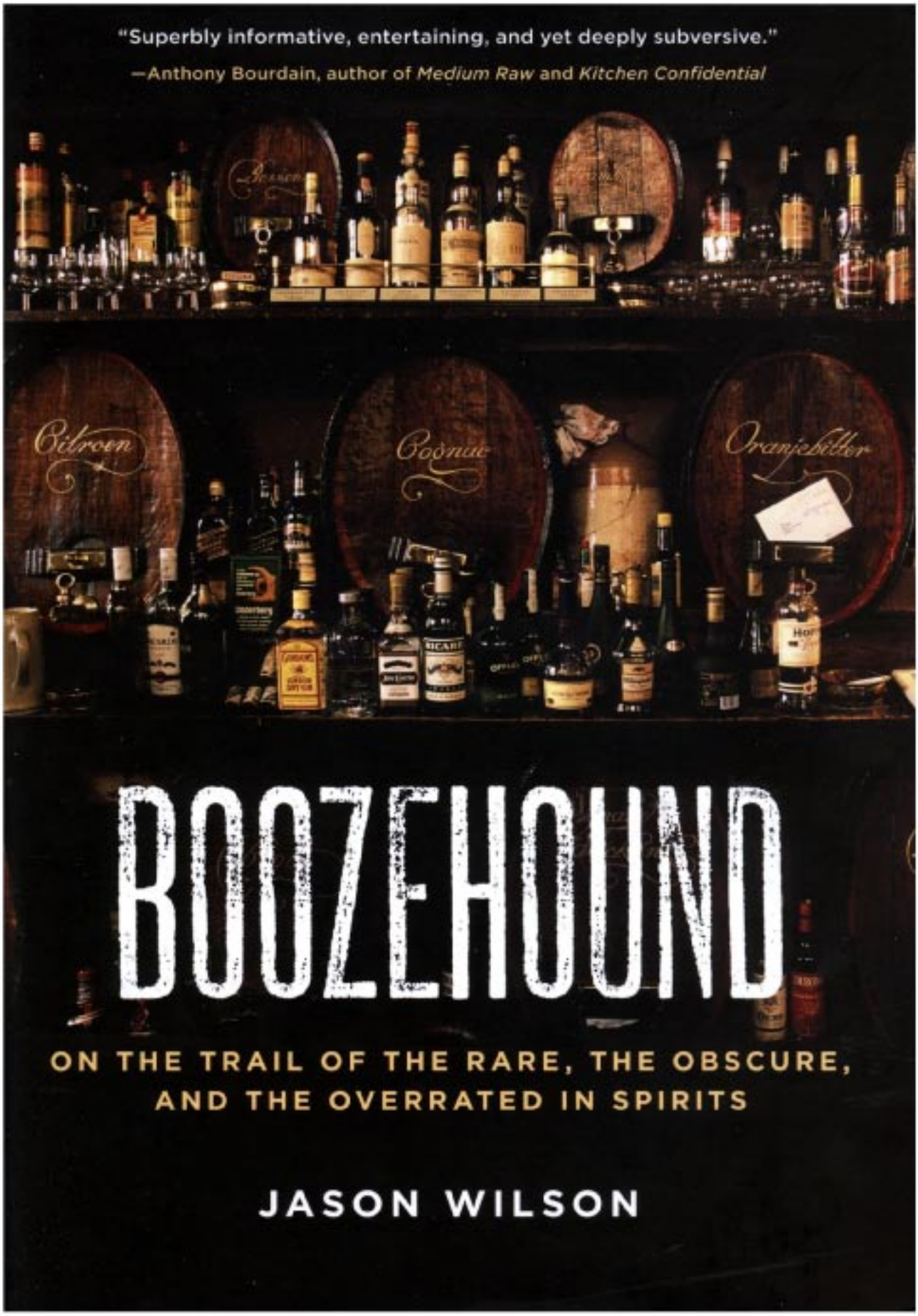
Written and produced by Julia Bainbridge

$ (center): Karlsson's Gold Vodka, $24

For the vodka lovers out there, this is a beautiful bottle to try. Drink it on the rocks with a twist or two of fresh-ground black pepper.

beltramos.com

BULLFROG & BAUM
CIRCULATION: N/A
IMPRESSIONS: N/A



CHAPTER 7

TERROIR-ISTS

. . . THIS THIRST FOR A KIND OF LIQUID WHICH NATURE HAS ENVELOPED IN VEILS, THIS STRANGE DESIRE THAT ASSAILS ALL RACES OF MANKIND, IN EVERY CLIMATE AND TEMPERATURE . . .

—Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

Famous Potatoes

It's a question I've posed before, and I will pose it again now: does the world need another vodka? Maybe that doesn't rank up there with life's great philosophical puzzles, such as "What is the nature of the universe?" or "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" or even "How many licks does it take to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop?" But it's the sort of question that people in the cocktails and spirits business—not to mention lifestyle journalism—think about. In April 2009, the *Wall Street Journal* officially declared, "Vodka is passé." A few weeks later, the *New York Times* countered, "Vodka Dead? Not So Fast." This level of debate probably explains why no one asked lifestyle journalists to help solve the financial crisis, stop the swine flu pandemic, or save the ailing newspaper industry.

Given that vodka producers keep coming up with new marketing angles, I was not particularly surprised to learn that the makers of a new Swedish vodka called Karlsson's Gold claimed to be "the first luxury vodka that can sincerely boast its own terroir." Nor did it surprise me that this vodka is made exclusively from new potatoes grown on Sweden's Cape Bjäre ("the region is to potatoes what France's Bordeaux region is to grapes," according to the company). Nor that these potatoes are so delicate that they must be washed and refrigerated within four hours of harvest. Nor that they are sought after by chefs in Scandinavia's finest restaurants. Nor that the creation of the vodka was motivated by its maker's altruistic desire to keep Cape Bjäre's potato farmers on their land. Ah yes, a terroir vodka! I was not surprised by any of it.

Potatoes, in particular, were the main part of my family business. So I was excited that summer to visit Cape Bjäre, on Sweden's southeastern coast, to meet the farmers who made terroir vodka. Håkan Paulsson, one of the farmers, greeted me and poured me a shot of vodka in coffee, a traditional eye-opener called *kaffegok*. Paulsson was a no-bullshit guy, and I liked him immediately. How did you get involved in the vodka business, I wanted to know. "Well do you want a story, or a true story?" Paulsson said, with a wink. Money seemed to be the main story. There appeared to be an awful lot of golf courses in Bjäre, which is sort of like a Swedish Hamptons. I'm guessing a lot of those golf courses were once potato farms.

He showed off the various local potatoes that grow only in Bjäre, varieties neither I nor my father nor my uncle had ever heard of: Solist, Minerva, Gammel Svensk Rod (Old Swedish Red). "How would you describe the taste of these potatoes?" I asked.

"Well, how about for you? It's very difficult to describe taste," Paulsson said. "Many Swedish people have grown up eating Old Swedish Red and herring. And then they moved to the United States!"

Later, over a boozy dinner at a fishing cottage by the sea, I met one of the founders of Karlsson's Gold, multimillionaire Peter Ekelund. As the midnight sun didn't set and the vodka flowed, I was a little surprised by Ekelund's rhetorical question. "Does the world need another vodka?" he asked. "The product has gotten so boring. It's gotten too big for its own good." His response to his own question was, of course, to create

another vodka that retails for forty dollars in the United States. "We wanted to do something contrarian," he said. The contrarian idea: Can a vodka actually have taste? Odd, really, how few of the dozens of vodka companies ponder that question. Most nonflavored vodkas chase some standard of purity and neutrality and boast of being thrice distilled, five times distilled, ten times distilled. Essentially, those vodkas are marketed based on their utter lack of flavor.

Karlsson's Gold, however, is an unfiltered blend of several potato varieties that's then distilled as little as possible—going through a continuous still only once and thus retaining some funky elements, some character. When I tasted with Ekelund, he brought out some experimental bottlings of single-variety, single-vintage, single-farmer potato vodka. Say, a June 2004 Minerva, or an August 2006 Solist. To say I was skeptical is an understatement. But when I tasted, the differences were significant and noteworthy. A 2004 Solist was sweet and starchy compared with a 2004 Minerva, which was redolent of apple peels, or a 2006 Gammel Svensk Rod, which was hot on the finish but full of herbal intensity.

The Karlsson's Gold approach, then, is to make a vodka that derives its taste from carefully chosen ingredients—in this case, gourmet potatoes—meaning that its gimmick is really no gimmick at all. It's almost like a potato eau-de-vie. The final blend is rich, creamy, and smooth, with notes of herbs and crisp fruit. It is a lovely spirit: vodka with flavor. "These are the ideas that change industries," Ekelund said. "The big ideas to solve problems."

That sounds like pretty grand talk from a small-potatoes vodka company that's now selling about 25,000 cases a year worldwide. Until you realize that, in the ultimate ironic twist, Ekelund and his colleagues at Karlsson's are actually the same people responsible for setting the premium vodka snowball rolling nearly three decades ago when they worked for another little Swedish company . . . called Absolut.

You remember Absolut, don't you? The brand that single-handedly reinvented vodka as a fashion accessory back in the 1980s? The one whose Andy Warhol–designed ads seem to have graced the back page of every magazine in America for decades? The one that sells eleven million cases annually worldwide and was sold to Pernod Ricard in 2008 for more than eight billion dollars? The one with the universally recognized bottle, the one whose flagship vodka tastes like . . . well, nothing? The one that opened Pandora's box by creating flavored vodkas such as Absolut Peppar, Absolut Pears, and, more recently, Absolut Mango?

In Stockholm, the day after our visit to Cape Bjäre, I met some of the other principals in Karlsson's. One was master blender Börje Karlsson, who is credited with being the father of Absolut. At a dinner where several American and Swedish bartenders were trying to mix cocktails using his vodka, Karlsson wasn't very happy. "I've spent my life making spirits to be enjoyed on their own," he said. "I make the spirit a certain way. I like to drink it that way."

"So you never drink cocktails?" I asked.

"No, never. To do so would be to destroy a good spirit. Cocktails destroy good spirits."

Karlsson added, "This way of drinking vodka is an American idea." That comment, of course, represents the familiar European whine about how Americans ruin what is good and pure in the world. Which is sometimes true, but not always. So I was pleased when one of Karlsson's Swedish colleagues pointed out the ridiculousness of that position by asking, "What about Absolut?" Yes, I told Karlsson, I think we Americans can take the blame for a lot of things, but not for, say, vodkas called Absolut Bling-Bling or Absolut Disco.

I had to agree with him about one thing. Karlsson's Gold, beautiful as it is, is not really a vodka to be mixed in a cocktail; rather, it should be chilled and sipped by itself. Or perhaps with a little cracked black pepper, or maybe a little club soda or ginger beer (though never tonic). The subtle flavors and the creaminess were lost in most of the cocktails I tried. Of course, I also really liked the kaffegok that I'd drunk with the potato farmer. According to one of the Karlsson's people, *gok* "either means 'a bird' or 'having sex'" in Swedish. Now, there's a real philosophical puzzle to ponder.

BULLFROG & BAUM

VEGAS seven®
October 7-13, 2010
THIS WEEK IN YOUR CITY

Drinking

Just a Sip

These sipping spirits are ready and waiting—no mixers need apply

By Xania Woodman

Please, set down that carafe of cranberry cocktail. Put down the soda gun that sips diet cola syrup concentrate from a bag-in-box somewhere deep within the bowels of the casino. Do not crack open another tiny bottle of tonic from the cubby beneath your bottle service and don't even look at a can of Red Bull.

Now that we have your attention, consider the spirit in your glass, the glass now devoid of a sugary, tart or faux-fruit distraction meant to mask its quality or lack thereof. Would you drink it straight? Perhaps not …

Look instead to these fine specimens—three "sipping spirits" of unparalleled quality, craftsmanship and taste. They invite your discretion and deserve your undivided, undiluted and uncarbonated attention.

Let There Be Flavor

Karlsson's Gold Vodka

Available by the glass throughout Mandalay Bay, $12, and by the bottle at Lee's Discount Liquors, $28.

The notion that vodka must be "without distinctive character, aroma or taste" is a relic and a too-literal adherence to the U.S. government's definition for most premium vodka connoisseurs. Distilling a spirit into utter submission yields a "pure" product certainly (sterile, really), but at the cost of its becoming devoid of any noteworthy and appreciable characteristics. And really, what fun is that? Intentionally giving up on the premium vodka market's race to neutrality is Karlsson's Gold Vodka, made from a blend of individual vintages of seven varieties of virgin new potatoes grown in Sweden's Cape Bjäre, and distilled but once at the Gripsholm Distillery by master blender Börje Karlsson, also known as the father of Absolut vodka. Potatoes hold a special place in Swedish hearts. Says Karlsson's area sales manager Gilby Olsen, "They're known throughout Europe for having the best boutique potatoes; they've been growing them for centuries." Grain distillation was not even legalized until 1980. Collectively, these Golden potatoes (18 pounds per bottle) give Karlsson's its distinctive and complex flavor: at once earthy and minerally with a touch of natural sweetness, silky on the palate with a long floral finish. Like *terroir* to wine, this vodka remembers where it came from. But while Karlsson's behaves itself in cocktails (especially savory and those with orange bitters, basil, tarragon or mint), it is best appreciated on the rocks with a touch of freshly cracked black pepper, a.k.a. Black Gold. KarlssonsVodka.com.

OCTOBER 2010 www.binonline.net
BIN
BEVERAGE INDUSTRY NEWS
SERVING CALIFORNIA'S BEER / WINE / SPIRITS INDUSTRY SINCE 1934

HOLIDAY HARMONY CREATED BY VODKA

Gift giving made easy when vodka is on the list

By Francine Cohen

It's been refreshing to see the cluttered vodka market take on some of the characteristics of its sister spirits categories, like whiskey, where an artisanal and small batch approach to distilling and bottling is on the rise. Spirits like Karlsson's Gold, Crater Lake, and Fair. Vodka are standing apart as just a few of the brands that embrace the independent spirit and have an interesting story to tell. Peter Ekelund, Chairman of Spirits of Gold and Founder of Karlsson's Gold comments, "Today the market is changing. Crafted spirits is the name of the game. A bar needs to have products that express its personality and uniqueness. Karlsson´s Gold Vodka is spearheading this new trend where the growth and margins will be for the trade in the future. The consumer is looking for even more choices of individuality and personal taste, just like he does for whiskey, beer or wine."

Karlsson's Gold

This is one of those special vodkas out there that your vodka connoisseur is going to appreciate, if they don't already know it and love it. A true sipping vodka, Karlsson's Gold offers up the rich, slightly sweet, creamy mouth feel you expect from a potato vodka. But, Karlsson's Gold isn't just about a potato – it's about seven potatoes. Says Peter Ekelund, Chairman of Spirits of Gold (Karlsson's parent company) and Founder of Karlsson's Gold, "Using the unique raw material of virgin new potatoes and blending seven variants of virgin new potato vodka also makes us more a meritage vodka as well as having all the potatoes come from the same terroir. In a way we are the wine vodka that is hand crafted in the same way. Karlsson's Gold Vodka has a connection with its roots and heritage which is quite unique, having the farmers engaged in the company that grow the crop and initiated the vodka makes us also be able to follow the process of our product from soil to mouth i.e. when the potatoes are planted, grown, harvested, distilled, bottled and made into drinks."

This holiday season Karlsson's offering a special gift with purchase; each bottle of Karlsson's purchased will be accompanied by a black pepper grinder for a quick turn of flavor that brings out the best in the vodka.

BULLFROG & BAUM

Time Out New York

SEPTEMBER 23–29, 2010 ISSUE 782 $4.99 TIMEOUTNEWYORK.COM

DUMBO ARTS GUIDE
What to see and do in Brooklyn

PLANS FOR EVERY NIGHT
Terrific ideas on every page

VODKA COCKTAILS
and where to drink them

The best vodka cocktails

The scorned spirit makes a comeback. By **Mari Uyehara** Illustration by **Pascal Dizin**

1917 — *1980* — *2010*

New York's cocktail cognoscenti have long snubbed vodka—decrying its lack of flavor, Goliath-like market share and tendency to fuel the antics of girls gone wild. But as mainstream drinking culture collides with studious mixology, the city's best bartenders are reconsidering the maligned hooch.

"Five or six years ago, [vodka] needed to be ceremoniously sacrificed in order for gin, rum, whiskey and tequila to take hold," says Jim Meehan of **PDT** *(113 St. Marks Pl between First Ave and Ave A, 212-614-0386)*. "[At this point] vodka has nothing to do with whether people will drink in our bars or try our drinks. It really used to stand in the way." Meehan recently debuted his bar's first vodka cocktail, a thoughtful and savory composition called the Gold Coast ($14), which takes its cues from the Swedish table—Karlsson's Gold (a potato vodka that retains the spud's funky, aromatic character) mixed with muddled dill, black-pepper essence and a sweet Scandinavian liqueur called Carlshamns Flaggpunsch.

Naren Young, head barkeep at **Locanda Verde** *(377 Greenwich St at North Moore St, 212-925-3797)*, brushes off the antivodka sentiment. "I think that whole movement is on its way out," he says. "If [a cocktail is] made well, it's made well no matter what the spirit is." One sip of his Splendido ($12) and you'll get the point. The tart aperitif—a combination of mouth-puckering passion-fruit vodka, bitter maraschino liqueur and fragrant tangerine set off by fizzy prosecco—has little in common with the neon-pink sugar bombs of ill repute.

Other bartenders are using vodka's clean profile as a starting point for creative and deeply flavorful drinks. At **Summit Bar** *(133 Ave C between 8th and 9th Sts, no phone)*, mixologist Greg Seider plays off the cucumber notes in Russian Standard Platinum vodka for his Charmane's Star ($11). The Far East–inspired drink combines muddled cucumber, lime juice, grassy *shiso* leaf and agave syrup infused with Vietnamese cinnamon to achieve its earthy, spicy backbone. Uptown at **Bar Pleiades** *(20 E 76th St between Fifth and Madison Aves, 212-772-2600)*, Cameron Bogue mixes corn-based Crop Organic Vodka with celery soda—made in-house by fermenting the vegetable's fresh juice with champagne yeast for 48 hours—in a nod to Dr. Brown's Cel-Ray ($15).

Even vodka classics are making a comeback, revived with superior ingredients and artisanal liquors. The Chi Chi ($14), a tasty piña colada at **Painkiller** *(49 Essex St between Grand and Hester Sts, 212-777-8454)*, is made with small-batch Polish U'luvka Vodka and fresh coconut cream, while at **Má Pêche** *(15 W 56th St between Sixth and Seventh Aves, 212-757-5878)*, a bracing rendition of the Moscow Mule ($14) blends Tito's vodka, lime and zippy house-made ginger beer.

Vodka tonics will surely remain verboten among serious swillers, but the clear stuff is slowly edging its way back into some of the city's finest bars. Sometimes, it just takes a slap on the wrist to bring out the best in a spirit.

Check out glamour shots of these drinks, plus thousands of bar listings, at timeoutnewyork.com/eatout.

ILLUSTRATION: PASCAL DIZIN

August 2010

know + tell

Numbers, nomenclature, and news for the conspicuously clued-in.

The Smoothest New Vodkas

Ignore the rumors about the spirit's demise. It's not only alive—it's more soulful than ever. As these brands attest, character trumps a splashy bottle every time. ***Rob Willey***

WÓDKA VODKA ($13)

For suckers who believe that fancy packaging equals superior vodka, here's proof—via Poland—that plain and cheap goes down just as easily.

COLD RIVER VODKA ($40)

Four kinds of potatoes travel 80 miles from dirt to distillery to make this full-bodied, copper-pot-brewed sipper from Maine.

KARLSSON'S GOLD VODKA ($30)

This creamy, minimally distilled, and uncommonly flavorful vodka from Sweden blends seven different heirloom potatoes that have such sturdy names as Solist and Gammel Svensk Rod.

DEATH'S DOOR VODKA ($35)

The Wisconsin producer uses wheat harvested from an island in Lake Michigan to craft a sweet, grassy spirit that outshines the imported stuff.

the Atlantic

Chantal Martineau - Chantal Martineau covers food, wine, and spirits for such titles as *Saveur*, *Imbibe*, and *The Village Voice*.
BIO | ALL POSTS | EMAIL MARTINEAU

« Previous Food | Next Food »

Vodka: Odorless and Flavorless No More

JUN 7 2010, 12:45 PM ET | Comment

whyld/flickr

A new trend is supposedly sweeping college campuses: "eyeballing" vodka. It consists of, much as you might dare to imagine, drinking a shot through your eyeball as a testament, presumably, to your tolerance to pain and alcohol and disregard for ocular and mental health. The trend is likely more of a media-hyped YouTube phenomenon than actual craze, but it still demonstrates how vodka is used these days: as not much more than a means to get drunk. Simply add it to any sugary juice or soda and—voila!—a relatively painless (until morning) way to get blitzed. According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), vodka is an odorless, colorless, tasteless spirit, and among cocktail enthusiasts it has earned a reputation as the de facto drink of choice for those who don't like the taste of alcohol.

But not every vodka falls into the odorless, flavorless category. And not every bartender worth his salt belongs to the vodka-bashing brigade.

One of the least likely supporters of vodka's removal from cocktail blacklists is Jim Meehan of bacon-infused bourbon-peddling PDT in New York's East Village. He recently added the first vodka drink to his cocktail menu since opening the bar in 2007. It's made with Karlsson's Gold Swedish vodka, Carlshamns Flaggpunsch (a Swedish arrack), simple syrup, fresh dill, and black pepper essence. Meehan says he came to change his mind about vodka after traveling to Scandinavia and seeing how it was consumed there: straight and with food. He says Karlsson's is among the few vodkas he would use at his bar. At a recent tasting of Karlsson's Gold in Lower Manhattan, I overheard another spirits journalist ask, after sipping the vodka chilled and neat, what else was in his glass besides vodka. The answer, of course, was nothing.

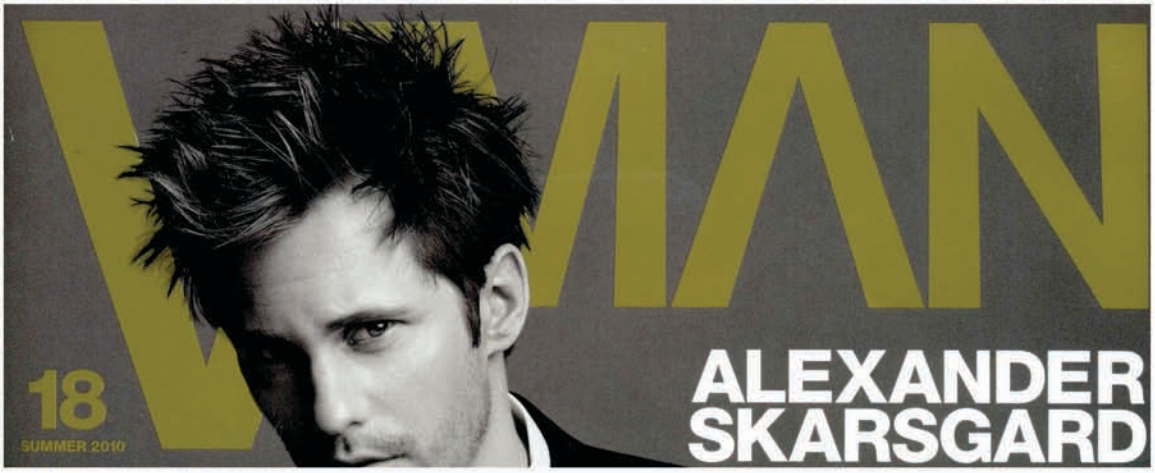
Börje Karlsson, the master distiller of Karlsson's Gold, is known as the "father of Absolut" for his role in the creation of the mega brand. At the tasting, he said he wanted to produce a vodka that made use of his country's best virgin potatoes, which can be found on Cape Bjäre, a peninsula in Sweden's southernmost province. The distillery's marketing agency has dubbed the spuds "Sweden's golden grapes of the soil."

He noted: "We asked ourselves, 'If you use different types of potato and ferment them, will you have a different type of product?' I said, 'I don't know.'" The master distiller drank red wine while the rest of us sipped his vodka.

Karlsson experimented with several different breeds of potato, he said, each picked green and leafy, some no bigger than a quail's egg. It takes 171 pounds of new potatoes to produce a single bottle of Karlsson's Gold, versus 31 pounds of wheat for a bottle of Absolut. Distilled just once, as opposed to the multiple times touted by other vodkas, Karlsson's is designed to retain the essence of its original ingredient. The result is a lightly sweet yet also savory liquid with notes of earth, grass, and ripe fruit, and a certain creamy viscosity rarely associated with a pure distillate. The best way to understand how this is achieved is by tasting the individual parts of the final product. Like Scotch, Karlsson's is blended, in this case from seven different potato distillates made from Solist, Gammel Svensk Röd, Princess, Marine, Sankta Thora, Hamlet, and Celine potato varieties. For the past few years, the distillery has been bottling single-variety, vintage editions of the vodka, in the hopes of one day releasing them for sale to the public.

To hear Swedes discuss their vodka in terms of terroir feels like granting them an undue indulgence, until you try a vertical (chronological, by year) tasting of it. Solist, the base for Karlsson's, was earthy and yeasty with a touch of vanilla in 2004, but showed more fruit and spice in 2005. In 2006, the fruit was leaner and citrus came through. The Gammel Svensk Röd 2006 had its own character (was that a note of lingonberry I detected?); the Minerva 2004 was the starchiest and most pungent, perhaps to add backbone to the blend; and the Frieslander 2004 was sweeter and softer in tone, suggesting it may be used for overall roundness.

The vintage vodkas were indeed colorless, but their aromas and flavors certainly knocked them out of the running for qualifying as vodka by the ATF's standards. In fact, this is precisely the problem with releasing the single-variety vintage bottlings: that they might not qualify as vodka. They would likely be considered potato eau-de-vie, and the word vodka would probably have to be struck from the label. But would that be such a bad thing? "Premium vodka" has come to be associated with hyper-marketed, hyper-distilled neutral spirits that come in such over-designed vessels that they've become nothing more than status symbols for those who frequent VIP rooms and order bottle service. Karlsson's Gold, in its short, squat bottle meant to recall a potato, has little to do with its fellow premium brands. Even though it may be more vodka than any of them.



DRINK LIKE A VIKING

THE 20+ HOURS OF SUMMER DAYLIGHT MEAN THAT MANY MORE HOURS OF INEBRIATION. LEARN TO DRINK THE NORDIC WAY

Photography Spencer Higgins
Text Jason Rowan

The spirits of Scandinavia reflect something essential about the land: they are restrained and disciplined, but strong. From the region's hallmark botanical-rich aquavit (caraway, cardamom, and anise are common infusions) to the vodkas of Sweden, these are grown-up liquors for grown-up-drinking. Which isn't to say you can't throw down. Vodka is perhaps the most versatile base for mixed drinks, and ice-cold aquavit can liven up any cocktail—in terms of both taste and aftermath. Afterall, this is the land of the Berserkers.

in refrigerator. Muddle 1 white sugar cube
stura, and a tiny splash of soda water. Add
o incorporate any undissolved sugar. Add
glass with lemon twist garnish.
-20 minutes.
BROOKLYN, NY

GRANITE TABLE BY FRITZ HANSEN (FRITZHANSEN.COM). ALL COCKTAIL GEAR COURTESY OF COCKTAIL KINGDOM

BULLFROG & BAUM

MAY/JUNE 2010

BOSTON COMMON

RAISING THE BAR

Anyone can stock a cabinet with the usual high-end liquors. To give yours an edge, pick up these seven artful designer bottles.

By Camille Hunt

Photograph by David Lewis Taylor

BLUECOAT AMERICAN DRY GIN's ($30) striking bottle pays tribute to the blue jackets and gold buttons of Revolutionary soldiers. The military coat of arms is etched into the glass, and the bottle's seal is a military lapel closure. *Charles Street Liquors, 143 Charles St.; bluecoatgin.com*

Blended and designed by the masterminds behind Absolut vodka, KARLSSON'S GOLD ($40) is packaged in a simple yet chic laboratory-inspired bottle, reflecting the scientific blending of the vodka inside (it's made from seven varieties of potatoes). *Brix Wine Shop, 1284 Washington St. or 105 Broad St.; karlssonsvodka.com*

MOUNT GAY 1703 OLD CASK SELECTION's ($100) cool appeal comes as much from the rum's refined taste as it does from the smooth lines and flask-like shape of its bottle. *Bauer Wine & Spirits, 330 Newbury St.; mountgayrum.com*

Blended and designed by the masterminds behind Absolut vodka, KARLSSON'S GOLD ($40) is packaged in a simple yet chic laboratory-inspired bottle, reflecting the scientific blending of the vodka inside (it's made from seven varieties of potatoes). *Brix Wine Shop, 1284 Washington St. or 105 Broad St.; karlssonsvodka.com*

BULLFROG & BAUM

TRAVEL ISSUE

Forbes Life

MAY 2010

The EYE

Drinks

Karlsson's Gold Vodka

Can this fine sipping beverage from the Swedish hinterlands actually be legal? Isn't vodka, by federal regulation, "without distinctive character, aroma, taste, or color"? Well, okay, it *is* pretty clear.... But the first whiff—something like rich, minerally, wet earth; fresh-peeled potato; and, I swear, chocolate—gives away the rest. Karlsson's produces this from seven varieties of "virgin" (one blushes) potatoes grown in what one gathers is the enviable potato patch of the Bjäre Peninsula. These are posh spuds, and Karlsson's retains their essence by distilling this vodka once and only once. It makes for a particularly flavorful martini, but frankly, any trimmings beyond solid glassware and a cube or two can seem like gilding the lily. —R.N.

$40. www.karlssonsvodka.com

Star Quality

Hollywood Glamour

BEFORE

Admit it: You want to be dolled up and fussed over and made to look stunning. The Peninsula Beverly Hills' Recapture Classic Hollywood Glamour experience gets you ready for your close-up. Photographer Roger G. James, whose work evokes black-and-white publicity portraits of Hollywood starlets from the 1930s and '40s, comes to your hotel room (but included in the price) laden with costumes, makeup, and props. An hour or two later, you'd pass for Lana Turner, and the flash starts popping. A week after that, you receive the proofs and pick an image for the ultimate L.A. souvenir: two 11-by-14-inch portraits of you at your most ravishing. —

$950. 310-551-2888, www.peninsula.com

AFTER

BULLFROG & BAUM

The Best in Bar Management

April/May 2010

$5.00

Nightclub & Bar®

www.nightcl

Marketing | Promotion

A Hearty Martini

At Cowboy Ciao, located in Scottsdale, Ariz., some guests are ordering their appetizer from the drink menu: the Meat & Potatoes Martini. Since placing the Martini on the menu, owner and beverage director Peter Kasperski says they have sold a few hundred of this unusual cocktail at $11 per drink. It's made from Karlsson's Gold vodka, Worcestershire sauce and bitters, and is finished with egg-washed, battered and deep-fried bacon. The vodka is potato based, and the bacon garnish adds the meat quotient.

"Karlsson's Gold vodka inspired this cocktail," Kasperski says. "It has a tactile impression and umami-like sense of deliciousness. **There's a sweetness to the vodka, so it's a yin/yang, contrast/complement with the saltiness of the fried bacon.**"

When an order for the cocktail is placed in the POS system, one ticket goes to the bar and another goes to the kitchen in order to deep fry a strip of bacon for the garnish. Kasperski admits it adds a minute or two to the wait for the consumer, but the guests don't seem to mind.

The drink joins Cowboy Ciao's already well-established 13-year-old brand, which is known for its beverage offerings, including a 2,500-bottle wine list, fresh cocktails and non-alcohol options like vintage sodas and bottled iced teas. As for the Meat & Potatoes Martini? It stays on the menu as long as it keeps selling.

"Say what you want about sex, bacon sells," laughs Kasperski.

BULLFROG & BAUM

STUFF MAGAZINE
WWW.STUFFBOSTON.COM

liquid

BARE-NAKED VODKA

Vodka could be called the chick lit of spirits. There seem to be far too many on the shelves, they're generally light and easy to get through, they tend to follow the same plotline but claim distinct characters, and you risk feeling like a zombie after you overindulge. Regardless, few among even the cognoscenti can deny they turn to it when it's time to kick back and give the inner geek a night off.

By definition, vodka is a neutral spirit. It's traditionally judged by its purity, its absence of taste and odor. The more it's distilled, the more character it loses — and the more it begs to be drowned in juice. Nevertheless, vodka outsells all other spirits in the States. The fact that celebs of all stripes have slapped their names on vodkas hasn't hurt. But then again, by the time admitted teetotaler Donald Trump launched his own vodka, the situation had clearly gotten out of hand. In recent years, however, a few alternative vodkas

have emerged from the crammed shelves, making an impression with their character, not some fancy label or genius marketing scheme. Call them renegade or artisanal or anti-. Just don't call them tasteless. So step away from the Red Bull! These standouts have nothing to hide, and you may find yourself pouring some to sip straight up.

Point of clarification: we are *not* talking about flavored vodkas here. We're talking about flavor derived from raw materials, and since there are no regulations regarding what vodkas can be made from, you'll find them distilled from potatoes, rye, wheat, even fruit. It's intuitive, then, that the various distillates would lead to different flavors and aromas.

"We wanted to create something that was clean and pure and still retained a certain amount of character," says Devin Wilson, a founder and VP of marketing of Double Cross. Made in Slovakia with winter wheat, his ultra-premium spirit has a silky texture and a straightforward citrus note that finishes with a white-pepper kick. He drinks his martini-style with a twist. "If you look at where vodka has gone in the last 10 years, I don't think people any longer expect it to be tasteless and odorless," says Wilson. "I think people want to talk about vodka the way they talk about wine."

"I only drink vodka with soda or with lemon and water, and Double Cross works really well like that," says Jacqui Berardi, lead bartender at the Liberty Hotel's perpetually busy **Lobby Bar** (215 Charles Street, Boston, 617.224.4004). "Some vodkas are metallic and rough. You can only drink them if you dress them up. With Double Cross, you really don't have to."

Other notable names include U'Luvka, Cold River Vodka, Tito's Handmade Vodka, Zubrowka Bison Grass Vodka, and Karlsson's Gold, a vodka that has garnered interest among barkeeps who favor aged spirits. It's made with seven varieties of potatoes grown in Sweden's Cape Bjäre, which is supposedly to tubers what Bordeaux is to grapes. Incidentally, years ago, its master blender had a hand in developing another Swedish vodka called Absolut, which you might want to try again if it has been a while. We guarantee you'll find a malty character that's lacking in some other super-visible brands, which makes us think of it as the original artisanal vodka. Who knew authenticity and genius marketing could go hand in hand?

Karlsson's is distilled once, resulting in an unusually earthy richness. Ben Rotolo, an owner and manager at the beer- and whiskey-centric **Atwood's Tavern** (877 Cambridge Street, Cambridge,

617.864.2792), says it made him reconsider the vodka shelf. "It's significantly more complex than any vodka I ever had," Rotolo says. My first impression was that it tastes like cocoa butter.... My thinking is that we don't need to embellish it at all. It works neat or on the rocks."

Melissa Wiersma, who bartends at **Christopher's** (1920 Mass Ave, Cambridge, 617.876.9180), draws a comparison to the foodies' obsession with heirloom products. "Like a lot of cooking these days, liquors are going back to their roots and how they were originally produced," she says. "This one, since it's made from young potatoes, has the flavor of those potatoes instead of being quadruple distilled and having no flavor whatsoever."

She finds it complex enough to warrant a cocktail as thoughtful as a bourbon-based drink. Orange juice? That's for breakfast. For her La Tierra Picante ($9), she infuses Karlsson's with dried serrano chiles, then muddles that with lime, cilantro, and sugar. So much for neutrality.

— Liza Weisstuch

FAIRMONT MAGAZINE, YOURS TO ENJOY
SPRING-SUMMER 2010

RAISE THE BAR

Searching for a little local flavor? Fairmont Royal York bartender Mike Astins distills the essence of five authentically regional spirits.

KARLSSON'S GOLD VODKA
CAPE BJÄRE, SWEDEN
On the tongue: A top-shelf vodka with a fresh, earthy nose. Sublimely smooth, even as it hits the back of your throat.
In the glass: Perfect for a gimlet, a classic martini or served straight and icy cold.

SUNTORY YAMAZAKI SINGLE MALT WHISKY, 18 YEARS
KYOTO, JAPAN
On the tongue: Notes of orange, chocolate and maple syrup. The finish is pleasant and fairly long with a bit of fire, ending in a notable impression of oak.
In the glass: Serve in a heated snifter or a rocks glass with a side of ice to be added as desired.

MARACAME AÑEJO TEQUILA
JALISCO, MEXICO
On the tongue: Hints of brown sugar and vanilla. Warming and reminiscent of a great single malt Scotch with a depth of flavors.
In the glass: Serve in a heated snifter or on the rocks with sides of fresh lime juice and sparkling water. Perfect for a margarita or a cilantro smoothie.

10 CANE RUM
TRINIDAD
On the tongue: W… rounded and not t… sweet, with an unc… lying taste of hone… and citrus and hint… of pear. The finish is long and reveals pure sugar cane to perfection with a sweet, oaky snap.
In the glass: Cocktail connoisseurs will appreciate this rum in a dark 'n' stormy, a daiquiri or a mojito.

…cherry and malt tones.
In the glass: Try my own recipe, the Velvet Genever. Combine 1 oz gin, 1 oz grapefruit juice and 1 oz Drambuie with a dash of bitters in a shaker with ice. Serve in a martini glass.

…SON'S
…VODKA
…BJÄRE,
…EN
…tongue: A …a with a fresh, …ublimely smooth, even as it hits the back of your throat.
In the glass: Perfect for a gimlet, a classic martini or served straight and icy cold.

Find Fairmont cocktail recipes at everyonesanoriginal.com.

TIME
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CNN.

Recipes: Meat-Based Cocktails

Want to freak out your friends? Start your party off by serving some fat-washed cocktails. That's the high-brow term for meat-infused drinks. And they're being served by some of the most famous bartenders in the nation, though if you talk to them, call them mixologists. They're that famous.

Meat & Potato Martini

By JOEL STEIN Thursday, Apr. 01, 2010

The Meat & Potato cocktail.
KARLSSON'S GOLD

Created by Peter Kasperski, Cowboy Ciao, Scottsdale, Ariz.

- 2 oz. vodka (Karlsson's Gold recommended)
- 2 or 3 drops of Worcestershire sauce
- 2 or 3 drops of Peychaud bitters
- 2 or 3 drops of Mezcal (Sombra recommended)

Combine with ice in shaker, shake vigorously and strain into a martini glass. Garnish with bacon that has been dredged in panko and deep fried.

See TIME video: Joel Stein Samples Some Meat-Infused Booze

BULLFROG & BAUM

imbibe
LIQUID CULTURE

CLEARING THE WAY

Vodka Gains New Momentum Behind the Bar

12 to Try

All too often, a vodka's reputation is built on style rather than substance. To avoid a pretty bottle or clever marketing campaign from influencing the search for nuance and character, all vodkas listed here were sampled in a blind tasting. —P.C.

42 Below
A well-balanced New Zealand export with a light aroma of slate, a medium body, a mineral dryness and a delicate herbal sweetness on the finish. *$24, drinkupny.com*

Absolut
One of the bestselling vodkas proves its reputation isn't only built on its iconic bottle. With a light fragrance of lemon peel and a full, round mouthfeel, Absolut has a gentle bite and a light vegetal sweetness. *$21, shoppersvineyard.com*

Charbay Clear
The initial aroma is subdued, but has a pleasant, medium-bodied viscosity and a slow, rich heat tinged with traces of lemon peel and almond milk. *$32, internetwines.com*

Karlsson's Gold
Made in Sweden from a base of potatoes, Karlsson's Gold has a rich, fruity aroma and a full, creamy body, with bright nuances of apples and plums. It's surprisingly rich, with enough personality to be enjoyed on its own. *$24, beltramos.com*

Medoyeff
This Oregon-distilled vodka has a lean, brisk character. A light aroma of grain leads to a medium-bodied spirit with a snap of heat and a touch of yeasty sugar on the finish. *$26, beltramos.com*

Russian Standard
This vodka has a medium body, a mellow burn and a dry, grainy flavor followed by a lightly honeyed finish. For less than $10 more, the Platinum is similarly lean and dry, but has a spicier snap balanced with a doughy richness. *$20, drinkupny.com*

SKYY
Another longtime industry leader, for a reason. With a light, grassy aroma and a rich body touched with notes of butter and almonds, SKYY has a modest, nicely balanced character well-suited for cocktails. *$17, bevmo.com*

Square One Organic Rye Vodka
Made in Idaho from organic rye, this vodka is crisp and balanced, with a medium body, a slight spicy snap and a finish that is full and mildly sweet. *$33, klwines.com*

Tito's Handmade Vodka
One of the leaders in a growing craft-vodka boom, Tito's is made from corn. It has a medium body and an earthy, mineral flavor that's dry and balanced with a lightly sweet finish. *$16,*

White Vodka
…m pretty much any-
…rtfully demonstrates
… milk sugar. It has a
…a round, full-bodied
… Gold Vodka is made
… gentle sweetness of
…y and a mellow heat.

…60
…implied sweetness of corn and spun sugar, but on the palate this medium-bodied vodka is moderately dry, with hints of anise and a slight nutty richness. *$30, wallywine.com*

Check out tasting notes for additional vodka brands: **IMBIBEMAGAZINE.COM/MA10**

BEVERAGEMEDIA
METRONEW YORK
March 2010
Search & Order Online with
www.BevNetwork.com

The Gold Coast

by Jim Meehan

PDT, NYC

Back when Jim Meehan was shifting his focus from fresh fruit martinis to classic cocktails, the ace bar man of PDT, one of the nation's most prestigious cocktail dens tucked inside a New York hot dog joint, relied on gin and other flavorful spirits to introduce his guests to more complex libations. "Nowadays, I meet so many young bartenders who hate vodka because they were trained by my contemporaries. Five years ago, we needed to beg vodka drinkers to try gin; that's not the case anymore," he explains. While PDT has always served vodka cocktails, for the first time they've finally added one to their creative menu. "Until recently, neutrality was the benchmark for a good vodka; that has begun to change," Meehan points out. "In order to introduce our craft to a broader consumer base talented mixologists can't continue to exclude the most popular spirit in the world." The libation that made the cut is "The Gold Coast," a vodka Old-Fashioned made with Karlsson's Gold. Meehan likes that the cocktail "enhances the subtle nuances of the sophisticated base spirit" instead of masking the flavor: "Vodka is slowly evolving to meet the needs of mixologists as producers begin to understand and respect our craft."

Ingredients:
2 oz. KARLSSON'S GOLD Vodka
¼ oz. Carlshamns Flaggpunsch
¼ oz. Simple Syrup
1 pinch of Fresh Dill

Method: Add the dill and simple syrup to a mixing glass and muddle. Add everything else and ice, then stir and strain into a chilled Old-Fashioned glass. Garnish with two spritzes of Black Pepper Essence.

THE HOLLYWOOD ISSUE ★ WHY BLACK LOVE STORIES AREN'T MAKING IT TO THE BIG SCREE

UPTOWN

LUXURY LIFESTYLE & LIVIN

Feb/Mar 2010

INDULGE SPIRITS

FULL PROOF DESIGN

Dress up your bar this spring with these stylish bottles.

By Tiffany Parish

▲ Fewer than 50,000 distinct bottles of The Glenrothes 1985 vintage malt scotch whisky ($120) were produced.

▲ The label of this award-winning bottle of Corzo Reposado tequila ($52.99) can be personalized, making it the perfect gift.

▲ Karlsson's Gold ($39.99) scored a silver award at the Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival, but the taste of the Swedish potato–based vodka always scores well with fans.

◄ We included Oxley dry gin ($50) in our holiday gift guide ("The Art of Giving," December/January 09/10) for the taste, but the handcrafted bottle tempts even non-gin drinkers to partake.

► Founded by a woman, the company Square One produces this organic vodka ($30). Expertly engineered inside and out, each bottle has eco-friendly, pesticide-free ingredients and a sleek square design.

◄ Loft Organic Liqueurs in spicy ginger ($29.99) gives cocktails a kick, without any artificial flavors, colors, or preservatives, while the frosted glass gives the bottle an elegant finish.

Liquor.com BETA
Your *expert guide* to all things *cocktails* and *spirits*.

Sipping Vodka

Posted FRIDAY FEBRUARY 05, 2010

Today one of the most popular drinks across the country is one of the simplest: vodka and club soda. The low-calorie highball packs an alcoholic punch but is supposedly hangover free. The one thing it doesn't offer much of is taste. Until now. Let us introduce you to a new breed of vodkas that are hardly neutral—in fact, they offer enough flavor that even a whiskey fan might consider sipping them neat or with soda. It's a whole new, clear drinking perspective.

BELVEDERE IX:

Belvedere's ultra-premium vodka is ubiquitous. Last year, the brand introduced IX ($40), which comes in a snazzy pink and black bottle designed by graffiti artist Andre Saraiva. What's inside is even more striking—vodka blended with a mix of ingredients, including ginseng, guarana and black cherry.

ZUBROWKA BISON GRASS:

Never mind the gimmicky blade of grass inside each bottle. The greenery is indigenous to the Polish countryside and gives Zubrowka Bison Grass Vodka ($29) a distinct herbaceous quality with a burst of vanilla. Rumor has it that the grass doubles as an aphrodisiac.

KARLSSON'S GOLD:

You might say Karlsson's Gold ($40) is a potato flavored vodka. The Swedish spirit is made from seven different varieties of local spuds. Karlsson's is only distilled and filtered once to keep as much earthy flavor as possible.

SQUARE ONE BOTANICAL:

Square One has won over drinkers with its organic vodka made from American rye. The brand's latest venture is Square One Botanical ($35), which blends vodka with a mix of eight aromatics, including lemon verbena, chamomile and coriander. This may just be the dawn of a new botanical spirit category.

Tags: Featured Articles, Liquor Lifestyle

BULLFROG & BAUM

SOMA

THE HOLIDAY ISSUE

Dec 09 / Jan 10

SWEDISH SPIRITS

THE IMPRESSIVE RISE OF SWEDISH VODKA BRANDS IN A CLUTTERED MARKET

Text by Christopher Null

Today, Absolut faces more competition than ever, driven by literally hundreds of brands that have arisen in its wake as they attempt to replicate the popularity of Grey Goose's prominence in the market.

And now Absolut has competition right in its own backyards. Perhaps the biggest vodka success story of the post-Grey Goose era has been Svedka, a relatively inexpensive Swedish brand which seemingly came out of nowhere. Svedka's arch and sarcastic, ultra-futuristic, fem-bot anchored marketing campaign (slogan: "voted #1 vodka of 2033") is the subject of much controversy, inspiring a love it or hate it response from many drinkers. Whatever the response, it seems to have worked: Svedka, manufactured by a cooperative of Swedish farmers, now claims its spot as the number five vodka brand (ahead of Stolichnaya and Ketel One), selling 26 million bottles in 2008. With a roughly $12 shelf price, Svedka is an absolute bargain compared to Absolut (at $18 and up), and the brand is now moving into flavored versions.

More Swedish vodka brands have also cropped up in the last couple of years, including Purity, which comes in a bottle that looks like it was carved out of ice, and Karlsson's Gold, which is made by Börje Karlsson, Absolut's former master blender. Karlsson's uses new potatoes as its base starch instead of winter wheat, which all of the other major Swedish vodkas rely on as the basis for the spirit. Though potatoes are more traditional, it's cheaper and simpler to use grain to make vodka. Karlsson isn't content with just one variety of potato, either. He uses *seven* of them in his unique vodka.

Karlsson's also takes a serious diversion from its ultra-hip, minimalist brethren, packaged in a tubby and squat bottle which features a golden potato on its label. Is Karlsson gently ribbing his old employer's simplicity with this decidedly different label and bottle design? The company suggests it is simply trying to focus on what's inside the bottle instead of fancy packaging.

So what is it about Sweden that inspires such a passion for vodka—or at least the passion for Americans to buy it? Maybe it's the IKEA factor: It's good enough, the prices are right, and with a little bit of patience, anyone can build something beautiful out of it.

BULLFROG & BAUM

Arizona Foothills

January 2010

In Every Issue

January 2010

BUZZ
20 What's Hot
26 AZ Giving: *Against The Current*
28 Travel: *In Search of Utah Gold*

DISH
34 Bites
40 Taste Test: *What's in a Name*
44 V.I.P.: *Paola Embry*
46 Tables About Town

STYLE
52 Beauty: *Resolution: Beauty*
54 Tête à Tête: *Terry Lundgren*
56 Fashion: *All About Ease*

DESIGN
64 In House
68 Homes: *Troon Love*

TALK
88 Hot Ticket: *Be Jeweled*

On the Cover

Alexander Wang [illegible] **Allison & St. John** [illegible] **Photographed by** Iggy M. **Hair/Makeup by** [illegible] **Model:** [illegible] **Location:** [illegible]

DISH *bites* *By Melissa Larsen*

AFM *Loves*

Caviar Dreams

The most elegant of eats is also eco-friendly. BLACK RIVER CAVIAR offers the world's only wild-raised caviar from a sustainable farming facility in Uruguay. $102 for a 30-gram tin. *www.blackriverca viar.com.*

Gold Standard
Though it was launched in 2007, **Karlsson's Gold Vodka** ($40) is just now making its way to Arizona markets. The luxury vodka is created from new potatoes grown in Sweden's Cape Bjäre and is best served on the rocks with fresh-cracked black pepper. **www.karlssonsvodka.com.**

OUT IN THE OPEN

Vincent's Camelback Market is now open for its 10th season, outside of Phoenix's Vincent on Camelback restaurant. In addition to selling local produce, imported fruits and vegetables, breads, mustards, flowers and gifts, chef Vincent Guerithault will be churning out his hand-crafted ice cream pizzas. The market is open Saturdays through May. www.vincentoncamelback.com.

"There comes a time in every woman's life when the only thing that helps is a glass of Champagne." —*Bette Davis*

Tour du Jour

Wright's at the Biltmore is hosting its annual *Winemaker Dinner* series, featuring top pours from California's Napa and Sonoma Valleys. Vino from each winery will be paired with four to six courses prepared by renowned guest chefs. Here's the 2010 schedule:

Jan. 7: ZD Wines, Napa Valley
Feb. 4: B.R. Cohn Winery, Sonoma County
March 4: Rubicon Estate-Francis Coppola, Napa Valley
April 1: Newton Vineyards, Napa Valley
May 6: Rombauer Vineyards, Napa Valley

Dinner and wine pairings are $125 per person. 602.381.7632, www.arizonabiltmore.com.

BULLFROG & BAUM

MARTHA STEWART
Living
WISHING YOU A sparkling SEASON
DECEMBER 2009

THE BRIEFING

THE SAGITTARIUS

Say *"skål!"* to a new drink with a Swedish vibe that's dedicated to Sagittarians. The base is Karlsson's Gold Vodka, distilled from Swedish potatoes only once, yielding an earthy flavor; we added pepper, dill, tonic, and a hint of lime. The accompanying nibble is easy to make: Mix cream cheese with lemon zest and pepper, spread on rye bread, and top with smoked salmon.

karlssonsvodka.com

THE SAGITTARIUS

MAKES 1

- 1½ ounces vodka, preferably Karlsson's Gold
- 2 teaspoons fresh lime juice
- 3 dill sprigs, plus more for garnish
- Freshly ground pepper
- Ice cubes
- 1½ ounces tonic water

COMBINE vodka, lime juice, dill, and a pinch of pepper in a cocktail shaker. Crush dill using a muddler or the handle of a wooden spoon. Strain into an ice-filled glass. Top off with tonic; stir to combine.

SERVE with a dill sprig and an additional pinch or 2 of pepper.

BULLFROG & BAUM

November 2009

JEZEBEL

ATLANTA LUXURY LIVING

Inside **Out**

While we don't advocate judging books by covers, one look at these bottles' stunning craftsmanship reveals the quality of the contents. –Nancy Davidson

With a flavor profile unlike any other tequila you've ever tasted, **Maestro Dobel Diamond Tequila** is made from a unique blend of reposado (rested), añejo (aged) and extra añejo (aged more than three years) tequilas that make it a lovely, full-bodied sipping drink. The clean taste also makes it great for mixing in a premium cocktail. The handsome bottle is hand-filled and hand-labeled. $75.

Presented in a sleek metallic silver bottle that reflects the glacial waters used to produce it as well as the elegance of the final product, **Stolichnaya Elit Ultra Luxury Russian Vodka** is the first ultra-luxury vodka from the well-known company. Its distinctive taste and velvety texture are created by combining old (a traditional Russian recipe) and new (a patented freeze-filtration process that involves changing the vodka's molecular structure) distilling techniques. $69.99.

Designed by Hans Brindfors, the creative genius behind the iconic Absolut bottle, **Karlsson's Gold Vodka**'s award-winning bottle is a perfect match for the well-rounded spirit inside. Made from golden potatoes and distilled only once (unlike most vodkas, which are distilled many times), it's surprisingly soft on the palate with wonderful character and flavor. $40.

This very special selection of **Milagro Select Barrel Reserve** is a pristine product of the agave plant that you can savor; its richness and sophistication are comparable to cognac. The hand-blown glass bottle has a magic of its own, with a representation of the piña, the heart of the agave plant, "growing" out of the bottom. Reposado, $62; Añejo, $90.

The sleek modern design of **Corzo** ultra-premium tequila isn't what you'd expect from the maker of Cazadores, the tequila with deer antlers on its label. But neither is the extra-smooth flavor that comes from a triple distillation of the agave grown in the highlands of Jalisco. It's as easy on the palate as it is on the eyes. Silver, $69; Reposado, $68; Añejo, $83.

It's nice to drink out of finely crafted lead crystal glass, but the **Riedel Bar Collection** is about more than aesthetics. Each glass is carefully designed to deliver the best possible experience. The shape of each vessel highlights the best aromas of each spirit, then delivers the liquid to the precise place in your mouth that will allow you to appreciate the flavor. Pictured from left: Destillate (recommended for aquavit, maraschino and other stone-fruit spirits), brandy, martini, port, Grappa, cognac, single malt whiskey, tequila, bourbon, rocks; "O" spirits and "O" martini. From $24–$85 per box of two glasses, depending on type.

Tasting Table
Food Culture Daily
EVERYWHERE

Fri. 28 Aug '09

Spirits | ***EVERYWHERE***

Solid Gold

A Swedish potato vodka is converting the skeptics

Vodka is the Coldplay of the spirits world: Cocktail experts like to decry it as overhyped, overplayed and underwhelming, yet most find themselves turning to it more often than they admit.

Indeed, Karlsson's Gold is making the liquor elite reevaluate their relationship with vodka.

This Swedish spirit made its debut in the United States two years ago (its distribution has increased by a significant amount recently) and it's anything but neutral or indistinct, which has (for whatever reason) become a benchmark for top-shelf vodka over the years.

Created by Börje Karlsson (who helped craft another Swedish vodka called Absolut), Karlsson's Gold is made from seven varieties of potatoes grown on Sweden's Cape Bjäre and distilled only once to retain their natural flavors--an anomaly among premium vodkas, for which multiple distillations (three, four, five or more) are typically a badge of honor. The final product has a satiny texture along with flavors of vanilla, citrus and, of course, earthy potato.

Karlsson's Gold is probably best enjoyed on its own (served chilled or with a giant ice cube) but it's also become a favorite mixer among otherwise vodka-eschewing barkeeps like Greg Best of Atlanta's Holeman & Finch, who created this drink (click here to download recipe) with the exceptional spirit in mind.

BULLFROG & BAUM

SOUTHERN
BEVERAGEJOURNAL
FLORIDA EDITION
www.BevNetwork.com
July 2009

clear differences

IN A MATURING MARKET, CONSIDER BALANCE WHEN BUILDING YOUR VODKA SELECTION

BY JEFFERY LINDENMUTH

Rumors of the death of vodka have been greatly exaggerated. In an April 23rd story in the *Wall St. Journal*, Eric Felton dubbed vodka as passé, citing the decline of vodka cocktails in *Food & Wine* magazine's latest cocktail recipe edition, *Cocktails '09*. Indeed, many cocktail cognoscenti have been attempting to vanquish vodka for years, berating it as overpriced, flavorless and a backbar bully to their preferred spirits. However, not everyone got the memo. Vodka remains the most consumed spirit in America, with 28% of total spirits sales by volume in 2008 according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS).

The landscape of this monolithic white spirit has changed dramatically over the past decade. After making significant gains across all price points for five years in a row, vodka stumbled slightly in 2008. According to DISCUS, sales of high-end premium and super-premium vodka, where 750 ML of this odorless, colorless and flavorless spirit can fetch as much as $70, actually dipped. While the lucrative super-premium segment grew in excess of 27% just two years earlier, achieving a five-year growth of 138.9%, it turned negative in 2008. Value- and premium-priced vodka posted modest growth.

1 differences that matter

No, vodka is not dead, but it has matured. Fortunately it's also left some childish ways behind. While marketers once focused on numbers of distillations and filtrations, points that were sometimes difficult to quantify, the good news is that many vodkas now have differences worth talking about. Because vodka can be produced so quickly and affordably, it is in a unique position to respond to current market trends faster than any other spirit.

4 raw materials

Vodka can be made from almost anything: wheat, rye, corn, even grapes (used for Cîroc Vodka), have been distilled into vodka, so it's a good idea to add variety of raw materials to your vodka line-up. Ironically, a very traditional material is the most often overlooked in many vodka selections: potatoes. "Right now we have 217 vodkas from around the world, and only four are made from potatoes. My favorite is Christiania, a potato vodka out of Norway," says Aaron Harmych, bar manager of Red Square at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas. While only about 3% of vodkas are made from potatoes, many bartenders, including McShane, say potato vodka is the type most often requested by customers, possibly because many want to avoid the gluten that they associate with wheat products.

In developing a new super-premium potato vodka, Karlsson's Gold from Sweden, Peter Ekelund, CEO and chairman, decided to treat the potatoes more like wine grapes, focusing on separate distillates from 20 different potato varieties. "Fifteen tasted about the same, two tasted awful and the remaining three were interesting, with different characters, so that is where we concentrated our effort," says Ekelund.

Ekelund is seeking to carve a unique niche, even among a small handful of potato vodkas, including larger brands like Poland's Chopin and 42Below from New Zealand. "The vodka market has an advantage in that it is so big and offers many choices. There is a trend where all the big city bars have the same products. Vodka provides an area for restaurants and retailers who want to differentiate. There is a new type of consumer, and whether they are seeking a microbrew, or a biodynamic wine or unique vodka, they are in search of brands that are not in every airport lounge. There is an opportunity there," says Ekelund.

BULLFROG & BAUM

The Washington Post

Drink

SPIRITS

Jason Wilson

Wednesday, June 24, 2009

There's Room for One More

Put on your beret, light up a Gauloise, put down your Kierkegaard and consider the following: Does the world need another vodka?

Maybe that doesn't rank up there with life's great philosophical puzzles, such as "What is the nature of the universe?" or "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" or even "How many licks does it take to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop?" But "Whither vodka?" has become the hot-button question of the cocktail realm. In April, the Wall Street Journal declared that it's official: "Vodka is passe." A few weeks later, the New York Times countered: "Vodka Dead? Not So Fast." That level of debate probably explains why no one is asking lifestyle journalists to help solve the financial crisis, stop the swine flu pandemic or save the ailing newspaper industry.

Still, "Does the world need another vodka?" is a question that surely has been pondered by those of us who've seen liquor store shelves sagging under the sheer volume of premium vodkas on the market. I can only assume that the development of new vodkas — each in a fancy bottle and with romantic stories involving special places and rare ingredients — will go on until the world ends in fire or ice. In fact, I have a recurring dream in which the first sign of the Apocalypse is a press release for a vodka that has been quintuple-distilled from tears of flaxen-haired angels and flavored with the ambrosia of Mount Olympus.

All of which is to say that I was not particularly surprised to learn that the makers of a Swedish vodka called Karlsson's Gold claim the recently launched product is "the first luxury vodka that can sincerely boast its own terroir." Nor did it surprise me that this vodka is made exclusively from new potatoes grown on Sweden's Cape Bjare ("the region is to potatoes what France's Bordeaux region is to grapes," according to the company). Nor that these potatoes are so delicate that they must be washed and refrigerated within four hours of harvest. Nor that they are sought after by chefs in Scandinavia's finest restaurants. Nor that the vodka was motivated by its maker's altruistic desire to keep Cape Bjare's potato farmers on their land.

I was, however, surprised at the question raised by one of Karlsson's Gold's founders, multimillionaire Peter Ekelund, when I met him a couple of weeks ago in Sweden. "Does the world need another vodka?" Ekelund asked. "The product has gotten so boring. It's gotten too big for its own good." His response was, of course, to create another vodka that retails for $40 in the United States. "We wanted to do something contrarian," he said.

The contrarian idea: Can a vodka actually have taste?

BY JULIA EWAN — THE WASHINGTON POST

Karlsson's Gold, at top; below, one of the experiments using single-variety potatoes.

Odd, really, how few of the dozens of vodka companies ponder that question. Most non-flavored vodkas chase some standard of purity and neutrality and boast of being thrice distilled, five times distilled, 10 times distilled. Essentially, those vodkas are marketed based on their utter lack of flavor.

Karlsson's Gold, on the other hand, is an unfiltered blend of several potato varieties that grow on Sweden's southeastern coast — Solist, Minerva, Gammel Svensk Rod and others — that's then distilled as little as possible, going through a continuous still only once and retaining some of the funkier elements to give it character.

When I tasted with Ekelund, he brought out some experimental bottlings of single-variety, single-vintage, single-farmer potato vodka. Say, a June 2004 Minerva, or an August 2006 Solist. To say I was skeptical is an understatement. But when I tasted, the differences were significant and noteworthy. A 2004 Solist was sweet and starchy compared with a 2004 Minerva, redolent of apple peels, or a 2006 Gammel Svensk Rod, which was hot on the finish but full of herbal intensity.

The Karlsson's Gold approach, then, is to make a vodka that derives its taste from carefully chosen ingredients — in this case, gourmet potatoes — meaning its gimmick is really no gimmick at all. The final blend is rich, creamy and smooth, with notes of herbs and crisp fruit. It is a lovely spirit: vodka with flavor.

"These are the ideas that change industries," Ekelund said. "The big ideas to solve problems."

That sounds like pretty grand talk from a small-potatoes vodka company that's now selling about 25,000 cases a year worldwide. Until you realize, in the ultimate ironic twist, that Ekelund and his colleagues at Karlsson's are actually the same people responsible for setting the premium-vodka snowball rolling nearly three decades ago when they worked for another little Swedish company called Absolut.

You remember Absolut? The brand that single-handedly reinvented vodka as a fashion accessory back in the 1980s? The one whose Andy Warhol-designed ads seemed to have graced the back page of every magazine in America for nearly three decades? The one that sells 11 million cases annually worldwide and was recently sold to Pernod Ricard for more than $8 billion? The one with the universally recognized bottle, the one whose flagship vodka tastes like — well, nothing? The one that opened Pandora's box by creating flavored vodkas such as Absolut Peppar, Absolut Pears and, most recently, Absolut Mango?

In Stockholm, I met some of the other principals in Karlsson's. One was master blender Börje Karlsson, who is crediting with fathering Absolut. At a dinner where several American and Swedish bartenders were trying to mix cocktails using his vodka, Karlsson wasn't very happy. "I've spent my life making spirits to be enjoyed on their own," he said. "I make the spirit a certain way. I like to drink it that way."

So you never drink cocktails? I asked.

"No, never. To do so would be to destroy a good spirit. Cocktails destroy good spirits."

Karlsson added, "this way of drinking vodka is an American idea." That comment, of course, represents the familiar European whine about how Americans ruin what is good and pure in the world. Which is sometimes true, but not always.

So I was pleased when one of Karlsson's Swedish colleagues pointed out the ridiculousness of that position by asking, "What about Absolut?" Yes, I told Karlsson, I think we Americans can take the blame for a lot of things, but not for, say, a vodka called Absolut Global Cooling.

I had to agree with him about one thing. Karlsson's Gold, beautiful as it is, is not really a vodka to be mixed in a cocktail but rather chilled and sipped by itself. Or perhaps with a little cracked black pepper, or maybe a little club soda or ginger beer (but never tonic). The subtle flavors and the creaminess were lost in most of the cocktails I tried.

One way I enjoyed it was in kaffegok, a traditional eye-opener of Bjare potato farmers, in which the vodka is added to coffee. According to one of the Karlsson's people, gok "either means 'a bird' or 'having sex' " in Swedish.

Now, there's a real puzzle to ponder.

Jason Wilson can be reached at jason@tablematters.com or food@washpost.com.

BULLFROG & BAUM

Special Issue
Robb Report
RobbReport.com
June 2009

21st ANNUAL BEST of the BEST

Idaho has nothing on Sweden when it comes to potato pride. In fact, it was not until 1980 that distillers in that country could legally produce vodka made from anything other than the spud. With the recent release of **Karlsson's Gold Vodka** *(www.karlssonsvodka.com, $40)*, master blender Börje Karlsson (who played a major role in the creation of the grain-based Absolut vodka) returns to his roots with a classic Swedish vodka made from seven potato varieties, all grown on Cape Bjäre (home of the golden potato) and harvested during the summer months, before they have an opportunity to develop skins. Unlike most of today's vodkas, which typically undergo multiple distillations, this crystal-clear spirit is distilled only once. The result is a smooth, aromatic spirit that actually shows *terroir* and has a lush, silky mouthfeel that leads to a charming, vanilla-laced finish. —A.D.B.

BULLFROG & BAUM

MEN'S VOGUE
STYLE IS HOW YOU LIVE
NOVEMBER 2008

THIS SPUD'S FOR YOU Each Karlsson's vodka is created, like fine wine, from precious varietals.

CELLAR

nordic beauty

Tired of vodka that has all the nuance of a KGB interrogation? Sweden's latest export turns potatoes into an elegant elixir. By Lawrence Osborne

On my way to the potato farm, I wondered if there were such a thing as a vodka critic. It certainly wouldn't be me. I've always felt pretty indifferent about the clear elixir. Mass-produced and made these days mostly from wheat, vodka doesn't exactly charm the palate. Even here in rural Sweden, the vodka critic must be a rare bird. But when the farmers of the Bjäre Potato Growers Association came out to meet me, they wanted to know if I was a vodka critic. They looked doubtful at first, pointing out that even though they grew the best potatoes in the world—and made the best vodka in the world from them—a vodka critic was a dubious proposition.

"I am not a vodka critic," I protested as they surrounded me at the edge of a luminous field planted with the noble Gammel Svensk Röd (Old Swedish Red) varietal. "I am not even a vodka drinker." They put their thumbs into their pockets and tilted their heads back. Then *critics >58*

Photographed by Richard Pierce

CELLAR

one of them came forward and pronounced in prophetic tones, "*Dis is de Mecca of de potato.*"

The place: Cape Bjäre on Sweden's mild west coast, two hours north of Malmö. The conditions: sandy soil, Gulf Stream warmth, and wide-open skies. You should also know that Ingmar Bergman filmed *The Seventh Seal* on these flat, moist meadows and wetlands that dip down to a Viking sea called the Kattegat. The local village is Torekov, considered the Hamptons of Sweden, and I was there with the 53-year-old millionaire entrepreneur Peter Ekelund, who, almost 30 years ago, invented Absolut. (It remained a government-owned brand until it was sold to Pernod for $9 billion this year.) Ekelund has a vacation house nearby, close to where he spent his boyhood summers, and he came back to Bjäre a couple of years ago to create an elite potato vodka called **Karlsson's**.

Farmers here rave about their unique potatoes the way vintners go on about their Cabernets and Nebbiolos.

Packaged in what looks like a bulbous medicine bottle (designed by Hans Brindfors, who brought you the Absolut bottle), Karlsson's is supposed to be a vodka unlike any other. Made by septuagenarian master distiller Börje Karlsson (also of Absolut fame) at a former stable near Stockholm, it's a return to Swedish roots (literally) and to a taste that incriminates the starchy, sweetly soapy tang of most vodka produced today. "I think of it," Ekelund said, "as the nemesis of Grey Goose." His idea was to search for potato *terroir*—that concept so dear to the hearts of winegrowers. And so he and Karlsson sifted through the cape's potato varietals looking for something unique—"something," as Ekelund put it, "totally Bjäre."

Farmers here rave about their unique potatoes the way vintners go on about their Cabernets and Nebbiolos. There's the Minerva ("incredible!"), the Santa Tora ("delicately sweet!"), the Princess ("aristocratic!"). Bjäre produces 50,000 tons of spuds a year, but many of these multicolored exotic varietals are too knobbly and homely to sell to supermarkets. So it's elite vodka that's going to save the day, because just as these potatoes taste like no others, they make—as I was to find out—vodkas like no others.

After I'd gone out on a combine harvester to pluck a few Gammel Svensk Röds, we sampled some experimental distillations. Many of these were labeled vintage, because Ekelund has found that handmade potato vodkas, like wine, differ from year to year. For example, Karlsson's 2005 Minerva, made exclusively from the potato variety of that name, was funky, earthy, and amazing. You'd never waste it in a screwdriver or Bloody Mary. I had to say I wished it were in a bottle already. Fat chance.

"Everyone hates it," Ekelund told me. "They say it's unmarketable. But I love it too. It has less starch, more protein—like a good Scotch. More meat." Karlsson's did release a 2004 Minerva, but in the States you may have better luck finding the splendid Karlsson's Gold blend (sherry-lehmann.com; $39.95).

There's an irony here. Up until about 1980, all Swedish vodka—by an agreement between farmers and the government—had to be made from potatoes. But it was Ekelund who helped persuade the government to allow producers to use wheat instead. "Looking back, I regret it," he said. "Absolut is made from wheat, and can you compare it to these vodkas?" Not really. It's like comparing Old Grand-Dad to an aged Laphroaig.

A few days later I was pleased to find Karlsson's on the list at the Pontus restaurant in Stockholm. As I careened my tipsy way through courses of oysters, sole, and, naturally, Cape Bjäre potatoes (they are sought after by all the best Swedish chefs), out came the 2006 Gammel Svensk Röd in its bulbous medicine bottle. It had subtle heat, hints of earth and tuber, and—I thought—even a tiny dash of chocolate. Of course, I could be wrong. Vodka critics are still thin on the ground, and I'm certainly not yet one of them. But I'm finally ready to try. □ *critics>60*

www.mensvogue.com

We test odd vodkas—bison-grass infusion anyone?—at **mensvogue.com/go/vodka**

BULLFROG & BAUM

MANHATTAN'S LARGEST DAILY CIRCULATION

amNewYork

amNY.com

Vodka: Not just a drink

By Dan Dunn
Special to amNewYork

In my line of work you regularly come across all kinds of curious information related to adult beverages.

Just the other day, in fact, a helpful amNewYork reader forwarded an MSN.com article that identified things people do with vodka besides consume it.

Turns out, the world's most popular spirit isn't merely ideal for making cocktails — it can also defeat poison ivy (when applied immediately after contact), give you lush hair (add a jigger to a 12-ounce bottle of shampoo) and preserve flowers (add a few drops of vodka and a teaspoon of sugar to the vase water).

This raises a number of interesting questions, not the least of which is, do chrysanthemums get hangovers? Personally, the only thing I've ever done with vodka is drink it. Well, except for that one time back at the dorm in college when we ran out of soap and ... ah, but that's a story for another time.

For those primarily interested in imbibing vodka, here are a few you ought to check out:

Top-notch vodka brands

- **Karlsson's GOLD ($40)** The U.N. has designated 2008 as the "Year of the Potato," thus removing any lingering doubts about the significance of that organization's work. Made from a blend of seven different Swedish potatoes and distilled just once, Karlsson's is a pure expression of what authentic vodka tastes like — it's got Old World character not found in many new-school brands. Try some in a dirty martini. You won't be disappointed.
- **Three Olives Root Beer-Flavored Vodka ($16)** I know what you're thinking, because I thought the same thing when I first saw this: Gotta get some Häagen-Dazs in the hizzy, pronto! When you're finished experimenting with spiked floats, try a cocktail called a Brotherly Love, named for the city where root beer and the Imbiber were born. Mix 2 ounces of root beer vodka with 4 ounces of lemon-lime soda in an ice-filled glass.
- **Sïku Glacier Ice Vodka ($23)** Thanks to global warming, glaciers are melting at such an alarming rate that suggests our great-grandkids might be vacationing by the beach in Kansas. Even worse, once glaciers such as the Qalerallit Sermia in Greenland are gone, what will the folks at Sïku use to make their crisp, delicious vodka? I strongly recommend you try this robust spirit, but act now, before it's too late!

Dan Dunn is the author of the book "Nobody Likes a Quitter (and other reasons to avoid rehab)."

BULLFROG & BAUM

NEW YORK POST

PROOF POSITIVE

Karlsson's Gold Vodka

FOR ONCE, a new vodka isn't boasting about its umpteen distillations, filtrations and ultra-purity. Instead, it's bragging about its potatoes — and you can actually taste them. Crafted by Borje Karlsson, who distilled the latter-day version of Absolut, this spirit prides itself on sourcing only spuds from Sweden's Cape Bjäre region. The result is a subtle flavor that's lively and fresh on the tongue. I'm generally a gin man, but if I had to go for a vodka martini, I'd make it Karlsson's.

— *Isaac Guzmán*

TABLE HOPPING

Le Royale

21 Seventh Ave. South; (212) 463-0700

It's only fitting that 2008's Great Nightlife Hope would occupy the former space of Luke & Leroy, which actually made nightlife interesting for a minute or two in recent years. Financing the slightly sanitized resurrection is former CentroFly and Drinkland owner David Baxley, who jokes that this ambitious, anti-yuppie venture may result in a "not-for-profit organization," though Le Royale — a name-play on its cross street, Leroy — should be fun in the meantime. Here's your VIP tour.

– *By Brian Niemietz*

...KING THE SCENE...

The crowd is what u'd expect: refu- rom 205 Club, Hiro ge and Beatrice Inn bscribe to Paper and agazines and peruse snake.com for photos selves every morning. **50 bottles of Abso-** e available, but **$6 eers** are more popular.

Three sumo wrestler statuettes stand guard on the bar. Operators smile politely at visitors who frequently refer to them as "Buddhas."

Six nights a eek, indie bands **Justice** play up- airs, where there's the rarest of night- e throwbacks — an actual dance floor!

In the month Le Royale's been open, moonlighting rockers-cum-deejays have included Bloc Party singer **Kele Okereke**, **Bjorn of Peter Bjorn and John**, and **The Kills' Jamie Hince**, who recently spinned tunes and made out with **Kate Moss** intermittently.

In this club's former incarnation, the semi-spacious lower-level bathrooms served as **unofficial smoking lounges**. This space is now a revamped table and banquette area, and the commodes now reside in what was a private office.

As Luke & Leroy, this venue begot the **Misshapes**, who threw their **legendary Saturday soirees** here until late 2005. There's also the fashionable Robot Rock party on Fridays, and Patrick Duffy's infamous gay party on Sundays.

The bilevel venue holds 250 people, and features a **soundtrack** heavy on **Hot Chip, Stevie Wonder, Chromeo** and all things unappealing to Top 40 types.

HOT DISH

What's new and what's tasty around town this week

BULLFROG & BAUM

DAILY NEWS

Wednesday, October 10, 2007

news bites

BY JAY CHESHES

Party food for party people

Michael McCarty's new cookbook, "Welcome to Michael's: Great Food, Great People, Great Party!" (Little Brown, $40), opens the doors — as the title suggests — to the restaurateur-chef's high-powered dining rooms in Santa Monica and New York. These lunchtime haunts of the media and Hollywood elite are as well known for their massive, pricey salads (the Cobb being a perennial favorite) as the deals made while eating them. Recipes for those salads, along with a full range of the restaurants' simple, lively California cuisine, are interspersed with adoring quotes from famous patrons and restaurant biz colleagues.

Vodkas take aim at big and small spenders

New vodkas continue to flood the market at a dizzying pace. Inexpensive Sobieski, the biggest selling vodka in Poland, has just been introduced to the United States with a marketing campaign aimed, according to press materials, at overthrowing the "tyranny of overpriced vodka." The vodka, which retails for $10.99, is one-quarter the price of Karlsson's Gold, a stylishly packaged superpremium newcomer from Sweden. Touted as the "first vodka with *terroir*," Karlsson's is the brainchild of master blender Borje Karlsson, who helped develop the original recipe for Absolut. The vodka, distilled from seven varieties of Sweden's "finest virgin new potatoes," goes down smooth with a faint sweet-herbal finish.

Candy with a cool sense of humor

Papabubble, a playfully hip Barcelona-based candy shop with a cultish following (and offshoots in Tokyo and Amsterdam), is scheduled to open its first United States outlet in SoHo on Oct. 18 — at 380 Broome St. The brainchild of Australian expats Christopher King and Nigel Chouri, the shops specialize in beautifully packaged, brightly hued, boisterously flavored handmade hard candy pulled and cut on premises like saltwater taffy. Flavors like rhubarb, kiwi and cinnamon will change seasonally. www.papabubble.com.

Make your last cookout count

With the weather still nice enough to eat outdoors, picnic packers are filling parks every weekend. You can increase your dining style — and earn some green points — with the newly imported line of French biodegradable and fully compostable servingware, made from thinly shaved wood. Both the oval plates — which have a lovely ruffled edge — and the packs of wooden silverware (called Pic Woody's, they're $2.69 for 10) are practically works of art: You'll find yourself taking them home rather than tossing them. Both are available at Fairway Markets.

Rachel Wharton

BULLFROG & BAUM

The New York Times

Wednesday, October 3, 2007

FOOD STUFF

Florence Fabricant

TONY CENICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Swedish Vodka Respects Its Roots

Vodkas these days tout the fact that they are triple-distilled or quadruple-distilled for the most neutral flavor. But not the new Karlsson's Gold Vodka from Sweden. It is distilled only once, resulting in a slightly earthy, pleasantly vegetal aroma; a clean flavor with hints of sweet nuttiness; and a smooth finish.

This is a potato vodka, Sweden's traditional type of vodka. It is very appealing on the rocks, and it might be shown at its best in a vodka gibson. What could be better than potatoes and onions?

The vodka is about $40 at Morrell Wine, Park Avenue Liquor Shop, Chelsea Wine Vault, Columbus Avenue Wine & Spirits and Sherry-Lehmann.

KARLSSON'S

GOLD

VODKA

Created from seven varieties of virgin new potatoes grown on Sweden's beautiful Cape Bjare and distilled only once.

Produced by Spirits of Gold AB, Sweden
Imported by MHW, Ltd., Manhasset, NY
40% ABV

www.karlssonsvodka.com

SAVOR SLOWLY.