POSE FOR PLAYBOY

SIGN UP FOR PLAYBOY PLUS

SIGN IN TO PLAYBOY



SIGN IN TO PLAYBOY

PLAYBOY

HOME

SHOP

ENTERTAINMENT

GAMING

NIGHTLIFE

STYLE

WOMEN

SEX & CULTURE

HUMOR

PLAYBOY PLUS

VIDEO

SUBSCRIBE

MORE

MORE

PLAYBOY RADIO

PLAYBOY.TV

DOWNLOAD THE APP

MORE

PLAYBOY RADIO

PLAYBOY.TV

DOWNLOAD THE APP

SIGN IN



Here's How You Start an Impressive Spirits Collection

By <u>Jason Horn</u> April 20, 2016

Share



© ANDREW GOMBERT/epa/Corbis

If you're a bit of a booze connoisseur, you've probably tasted quite a few rare, old and otherwise special spirits. But to take the next step and get seriously hardcore, you have to start putting together a collection of your own.

Wealthy wine drinkers have been amassing cellars full of cult-favorite Napa cabernets and *premier cru* Bordeaux vintages for decades, but it's only in the last few years that folks have really started to do the same with distilled spirits. And those collectors are starting to have a real impact on the market: High-end bottles are often snapped up the moment they hit shelves (or even before), forcing the rest of us to pay crazily inflated prices to get a taste of 40-year-old Scotches and Pappy Van Winkle bourbons.

So how can you get in on this game? "Go and buy up something that's going away," says Marcus Fan, a Los Angeles whiskey collector with more than 400 sought-after bottles at his home. As demand for whiskey increases, distillers are increasingly getting rid of bottlings with specific ages so they can utilize younger stocks, which means that the final age-stated bottles gain most-wanted status. One of the most recent of these is the beloved bourbon Elijah Craig 12, which recently removed the number 12 from the front label (the whiskey is still being bottled as 12 years old for now, but whiskey geeks speculate that may be ending soon as well).

For years, the gold standard in hard-to-find whiskey collectors drooled over was Pappy Van Winkle, but now that those bottlings are basically impossible to find in stores, Fan says to look out for "new Pappys" that you might actually be able to purchase at retail. Among these are Yamazaki Sherry Cask, an excellent Japanese whisky that Fan says is already being flipped for five times its retail value, and Elijah Craig's Barrel Proof series, which goes for \$45 in stores but up to \$400 on the secondary market.

But collectors don't just look for current bottles: There's a huge and growing market for vintage spirits of all kinds. Edgar Harden is one of the world's foremost experts in the field, having started the <u>Old Spirits Company</u> after years selling vintage furniture and then wine for Christie's in the UK. "The basement is a great place to start," he says.

The problem is figuring out whether those old bottles in Grandma's cellar are trash or treasure. Two big things to look for, Harden says, are bottles that haven't been opened and labels that aren't faded—a washed-out label means overexposure to sun, which is bad for the booze inside. It's often tough to identify just how old a bottle is, but keep an eye out for tax stamps and seals—Canadian and American tax stamps from the 1970s or before are often dated. And don't discount a bottle because it has a plastic seal around the cap: Harden says he's found an Old Overholt Rye from 1909 with plastic seals. (Twist-off caps, by the way, didn't come into vogue until the 1940s or '50s.)

And it's not just whiskey. Harden buys and sells lots of pre-Revolutionary Cuban rum, as well as Kina Lillet, an aperitif wine that's part of James Bond's Vesper recipe and was discontinued in the '8os. (Lillet Blanc, still sold today, is similar but not exactly the same.) "People always go for the base spirits, but the things I've had that were the most amazing were liqueurs, vermouths and amari," Harden says. "Even an old vintage Jagermeister is just incredibly delicious."

That said, really old Scotch is still where the most expensive bottles are to be found. Martin Green runs the whisky department for Bonhams, which set up the first major auction department dedicated to spirits in 2008. His biggest auctions have all been Scotches, including a 50-year-old Macallan released in 1986 that sold for £16,000 in 2011; a 50-year-old Glenfiddich released in 1991 that sold for £12,500 in 2012; and the world-record holder, a special-edition 55-year-old Glenfiddich of which only 11 bottles were made that went for £46,850.

Unfortunately, the days of heading to out-of-the-way liquor stores to find these kinds of treasures for just a few bucks are over. "For the most part, all the liquor stores in the country have been pretty much raided," Fan says, "So it's not a poor man's game."

And then there's the fact that reselling liquor is technically illegal in the U.S. (though nobody I spoke to for this piece could think of anybody ever getting in trouble for buying and selling collectible spirits online). For that reason, collectors tend to be a bit cagey with people they don't know. Fan suggests joining your local whiskey-tasting group for an easier in. Just about every city in the US has at least one—check Facebook. Just beware of fakes: With a brisk online sale going in empty bottles of popular spirits, <u>fraud could be a problem</u>.

Ready to get started? Here are some "holy grail" bottles to look out for:

VERY VERY OLD FITZGERALD

This 12-year-old bourbon was distilled at the famed Stitzel-Weller distillery up until the early 1980s. It's great stuff that Fan says bourbon fanatics go absolutely crazy for.

PARKER'S HERITAGE COLLECTION

Bottles from any of the annual editions of this experimental whiskey series from Heaven Hill are collector favorites, but "under the right conditions, you can scoop it up at a pretty good price," Harden says.

BLACK BOWMORE 1964

This special-edition bottling was released in the 1990s, but there were only 827 bottles ever made. Green sold one at auction for

£4,800 just last December.

KURUIZAWA

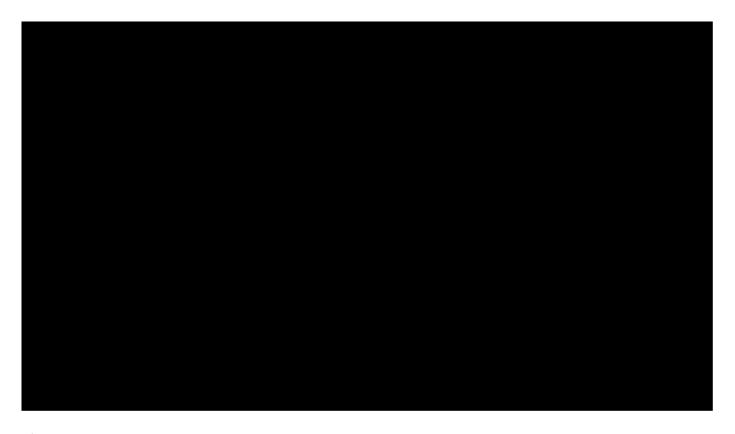
Fan says bottles from this Japanese distillery that stopped production in 2000 are "probably the most sought-after in the whiskey world."

PRE-WORLD WAR II CAMPARI

Harden loves the flavor of vintage Campari, but he's never been able to find any from before the 1940s.

Jason Horn is Playboy.com's spirits columnist. He lives in Los Angeles and you can follow him on Twitter @messyepicure.

AND NOW, A WORD FROM SOME BARTENDERS



Share

Tags

IN THE SPIRIT RUM WHISKEY BOURBON FOOD AND DRINK NIGHTLIFE

More From In the Spirit

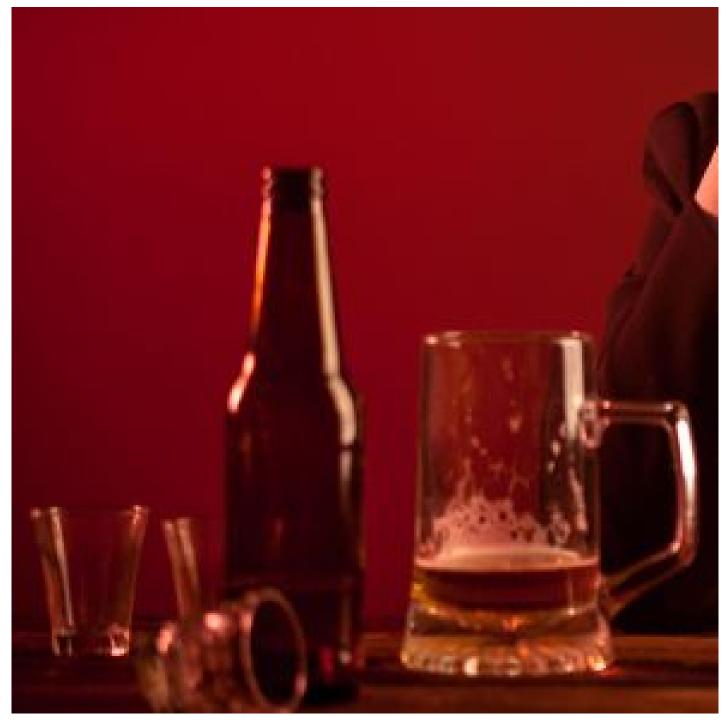


Booze Awards: Do They Mean Anything?

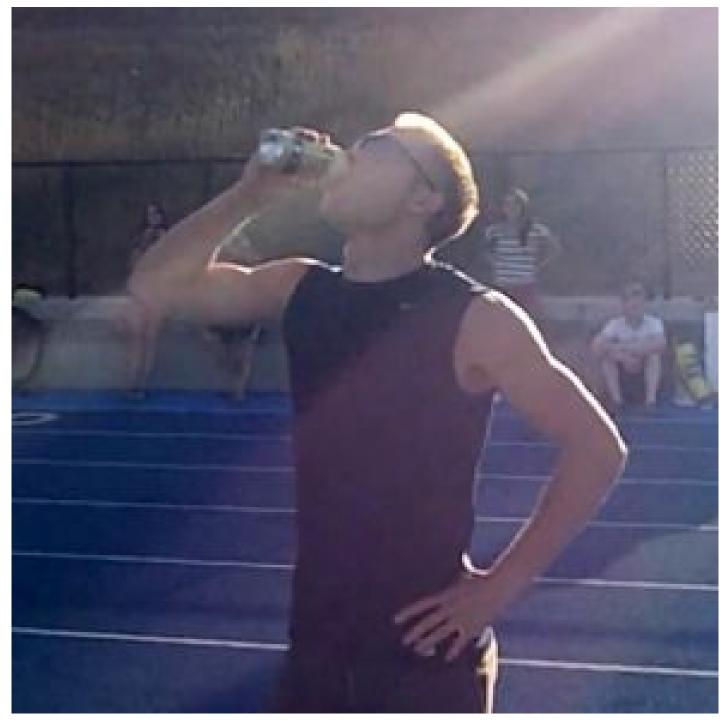
BY JASON HORN



Aquavit, the Scandinavian Spirit to Get You Through Winter $\ensuremath{\mathsf{BY}}\xspace$ JASON HORN



The Art of Pairing a Shot with Your Favorite Beer Style $\ensuremath{\mathsf{BY}}\xspace$ JASON HORN

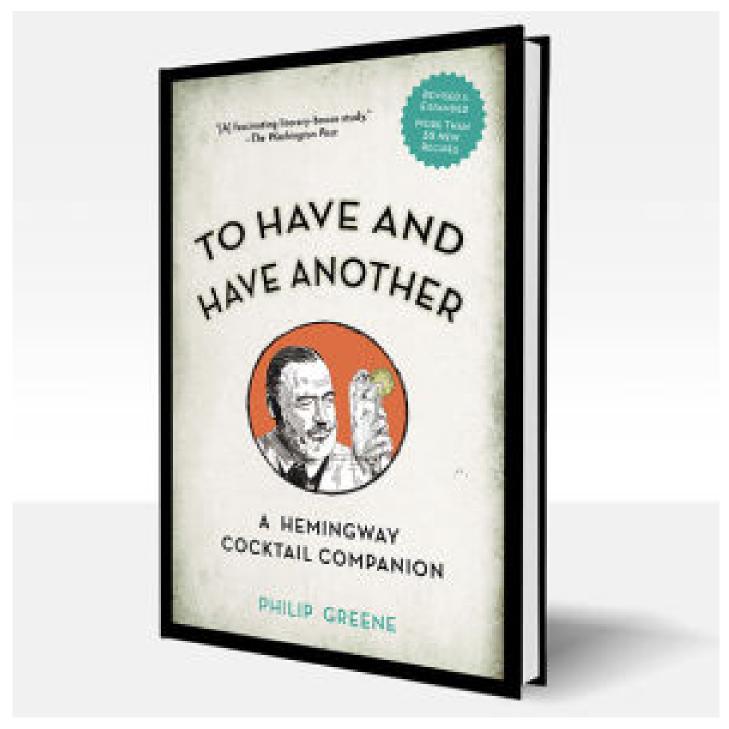


7 Ways Drinking is Good for Your Health

BY JASON HORN



It's Time You Start Drinking Canadian Whisky BY JASON HORN



Having a Drynuary? Read These Boozy Books While Not Drinking BY JASON HORN

SEE ALL IN THE SPIRIT

Playboy Social

Sign up for exclusive photos, videos, humor and more!

Your Email Address

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Magazine



SUBSCRIBE

Playboy Plus



SUBSCRIBE

Content

Entertainment
Nightlife
Style
Women
Sex & Culture
Humor
Video
Advertise With Us
About Us
Privacy Policy
Sitemap

Sites

Playmates.com
Download the App
Playboy Shop
Playboy Archive
Playboy Enterprises
Playboy Careers
Playboy Events
Playboy Radio
Playboy.TV
Magazine Customer Support

©2016 Playboy Enterprises. All rights reserved.

Advertisement