



Exclusiv Vodka from Moldova shows great flavor and value.

Credits: Exclusiv Vodka

'Tis the season for vodka

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Whether we're shaking or stirring, or giving has a holiday gift, [vodka](#) always takes center-stage this time of year.

What cocktail is more elegant than a shaken dry vodka martini with an olive served up in a martini-style glass? I know, purists want gin in their martini, but our modern palates call for clean, crisp, crazy-cold vodka – served up.

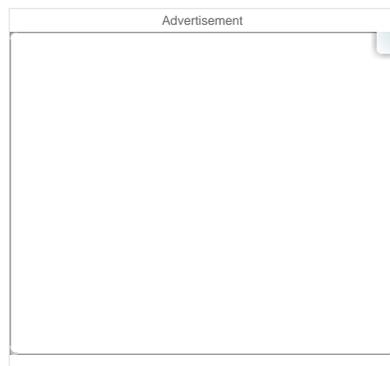
Dinner parties everywhere are serving **Grey Goose, Ketel One, Belvedere, Hangar One** and other top-shelf varieties. But there's a slew of intriguing bottles coming to market just in time for seasonal pours or as gifts. A couple bottles of note:

• **Exclusiv Vodka, Moldova.** This tiny eastern European nation landlocked between Romania and the Ukraine is quickly making a name for itself with its sophisticated and value-priced premium vodka. This luxurious tasting spirit is made with high quality winter wheat, giving it a sweeter, more polished taste. The International Review of Spirits gave Exclusiv its "gold medal" rating. I just call it smooth, tasty and appealing. \$12 for 750 ml bottle. Also available in 1.75 ml format for about \$20.

• **Ocean Vodka, Hawaii.** OK, I am so into this vodka. I've been completely sucked in by the deep-ocean water and organic Hawaiian sugar gimmicks. But it's not hype, this vodka is good. Trace potassium, magnesium, calcium and other vital minerals come through in the flavor, making this handcrafted, Hawaiian-made vodka delightfully smooth and delicious.

Vodka is more than 50 percent water, so what you put in matters, and this is sourced 3,000 feet below the surface of the Big Island. Desalinated, of course. Combine that with 100 percent USDA Organic sugar for your carb base and you have a conversation piece in a glass. \$33 for 750ml bottle.

• **Vincent Van Gogh Peach and Dark Chocolate Vodka** (two different bottles), Holland. The folks at Van Gogh just keep the hits coming. And these two are just fun. But rather than the sticky sweet stuff that some of the lower end brands offer, these are smooth and sophisticated. I like the peach-infused variety on its own or on the rocks with a splash of club soda. Same with the chocolate – unless, of course, you want to make a truly grown up chocolate milk. Pour a good dram into a shaker with ice, along with a bit of cream, stir and strain and serve up for a sexy chocolate kiss cocktail. \$27 each for 750ml bottle.



The gift of fine spirits is always appropriate, as is serving fine cocktails. These vodkas are readily available at **AJ's Fine Foods, Total Wine & More** and at **BevMo** locations Valleywide. Cheers!

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