

## FINE SPIRITS: Four high-quality examples show vodka's diversity

*Vodka has always left me puzzled and more than a little skeptical. If a primary attribute of a high-quality one is purity, perhaps reflected in the number of times it's been distilled, aren't most vodkas simply untainted neutral spirits and, essentially, all the same?*

*Why, then, do so many vodka drinkers display a defensive, bordering on rabid, brand loyalty? True aficionados argue that there are significant differentiators, such as the product the spirit is distilled from – potatoes, fruit, wheat, or sugar cane, for example. Most important, some say, the water used to reduce the alcohol level to the most common 80 percent creates essential and perceptible differences in taste.*

*All right, I'll concede the point. In the 1970s vodka replaced bourbon as the most popular spirit in the U.S. and more than 140 brands are currently produced worldwide. Many of those brands sell a wide assortment of styles and flavors, so how can an erstwhile purveyor make a product stand out on a very crowded liquor store shelf? In several ways, actually: Unique packaging may be used to catch the eye; water obtained from an unusual source, like an iceberg or glacier, may be touted. And then there are all the infused flavors; a dizzying assortment of different and/or unusual ones – citrus, vanilla or chocolate, all manner of berries, even (gasp) bacon..*

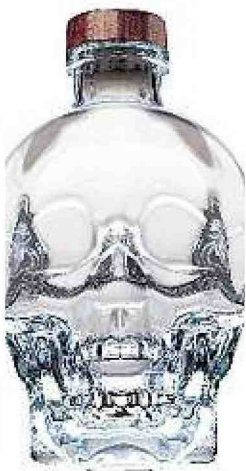
*I've chosen four high-quality and slightly unusual examples to highlight some of the seemingly limitless variety out there.*

*All can be found in our area.*

### ■ Crystal Head Vodka

Founded by actor Dan Aykroyd, CHV boasts a purity derived from its Newfoundland water and unique Herkimer diamond crystal filtration process. The back story of the bottle, based on the myth of 13 ancient crystal skulls found around the world, may just be clever marketing, but this one really stands out on the shelf.

**How much:** about \$45 (750ml)

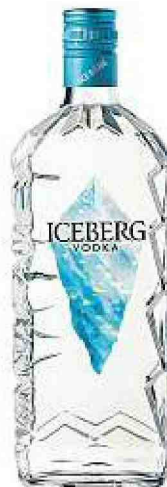


— Bob Probert

### ■ Iceberg Vodka

Taking the idea of pure water to new heights, Iceberg is made with water harvested from Canadian icebergs. Existing in its frozen state for more than 12,000 years, the company calls the water the “purest this planet has to offer” containing only an infinitesimal amount of impurities. Distilled from Ontario “Peaches and Cream” corn, it has an exceptionally clean taste.

**How much:** about \$15 (750ml)



## ■ Ocean Vodka

How about using pure water collected from new depths? Ocean is made with desalinated deep-ocean water from 3,000 feet below the surface of the Pacific off Hawaii. Made with organic sugar cane and certified 100 percent USDA organic and 100 percent gluten-free, the vodka's high mineral content – calcium, magnesium and potassium – give it a unique, flinty, flavor profile, especially on the finish.

**How much:** about \$33 (750ml)



## ■ Bakon Vodka

On-air mentions by Conan O'Brien, Jay Leno, Fox News and CNN helped launch this unique brand in a market bordering on fanatic for all things bacon. Not quite as off-the-wall a flavor as you might initially think, I think this vodka is more suited to cocktails than to sipping, and it makes perfect sense in a unique Bloody Mary.

**How much:** about \$29 (750ml)



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