



# VODKA

# QUIZ

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**T**he bad news: Vodka is shrinking on the global scale. According to the Global Vodka Insights, a report from just-drinks and the IWSR based on 2015, the latest full-year data available, vodka's top four markets—Russia, the U.S., Ukraine and Poland—all lost volume and value in 2015. And while the U.S. is expected to be essentially flat, the others will experience further declines right through to 2021.

The good news: Globally, vodka is pursuing a clear trend of premiumization, the report notes. More specifically, low-price and value sales are declining; the standard segment is flat; but premium and super-premium sales are increasing.

And most relevant of all: vodka is still the biggest-selling spirit in America. And it continues to be available in myriad forms and formats, despite it being famously neutral at its core. Here are a few Q&A's to keep up to speed on vodka today.

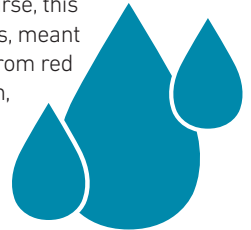


**Q. HOW IS VODKA DIFFERENT FROM OTHER CLEAR SPIRITS, LIKE GIN, UNAGED WHISKEY AND UNAGED BRANDY?**

**A. Vodka is meant to be distilled to neutrality.** While gin, unaged whiskey and unaged brandy may be clear, they are hardly neutral.

- Gin's base spirit begins as neutral alcohol, but the botanicals, especially juniper, make it gin.
- Unaged whiskey retains the character of the base grain. It's easy to distinguish a rye whiskey from a corn whiskey from a malt whiskey, etc. just by nosing and tasting it.
- The same is true of brandy. Most of the sweetness of the base fruit is gone, but the essence of that fruit usually remains.

That's usually not the case with the various vodka bases; they are both clear and neutral by design. Of course, this excludes flavored vodkas, meant to taste like everything from red velvet cupcakes to bacon, which show that the line where vodka stops being vodka is very blurry indeed.



**Q. IF IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE NEUTRAL, DOES THE BASE MATERIAL REALLY MATTER?**

**A. The answer is YES,** at least from a marketing standpoint. The rise of brown spirits has prompted consumers to care more about production processes and ingredients. That development has not been lost on many vodka makers.

- Super-premium vodkas used to be defined, in large part, by the pretty bottles that housed them—and the old "X Times Distilled." That's not enough anymore.
- We're seeing more legacy brands talk about the grains they use in highly specific terms—perhaps playing up the rye content (to catch the halo of surging rye whiskey), or the specific variety of wheat, perhaps even the type of potato.
- Since vodka can be made, essentially, from just about anything, uncommon bases (rice, for instance) become a means of attracting attention.
- Apparently, so does verbiage borrowed from other categories... "single malt vodka," anyone?

