



Grape Guidance
Why 'Hugh Johnson's Pocket Wine Book' endures **D11**

OFF DUTY

Graciousness Guidance
The new, looser rules for 'hostess dresses' **D3**



FASHION | FOOD | DESIGN | TRAVEL | GEAR

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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This holiday season, it's all about vodka. Here's your guide to the versatile spirit commanding new respect at cocktail bars, the bottles to buy and the festive drinks you'll want to make with them.

By **BETSY ANDREWS**

ON A RECENT afternoon in Northern California, aroma infused Hanson of Sonoma's distillery as two guys armed with peelers and knives worked on cases of organic produce. The family-owned outfit was producing its cucumber vodka the old-fashioned way, by macerating the cucumber along with mint in tanks of the spirit. A refreshing, sweet-savory drink, the cucumber vodka, like all Hanson vodkas, is certified organic. What's not to love?

It's a question worth asking because, for years, vodka hasn't gotten much love from mixologists. The generation that brought the classic cocktail revival has had little use for a spirit not found in pre-Prohibition recipes. They've condemned industrial vodka's wan character and the chemicals that give it flavors like bubble gum and peanut-butter-and-jelly. An Internet search of a decade's-worth of bartender opinions on vodka yielded venom, such as: "The people who put together crap like this do no respect to me or the drinking public."

Yet the drinking public adores vodka. It accounts for a third of U.S. booze sales by volume. With '90s-era drinks like the espresso Martini making a comeback, it seems mixologists will have to give the people what they want—always a good policy for the home bartender, too.

The best of today's vodkas offer character, versatility and artisanal excellence. The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau has recognized as much. In 2020, the Bureau changed vodka's definition, scrubbing the phrase "without distinctive character, aroma, taste, or color."

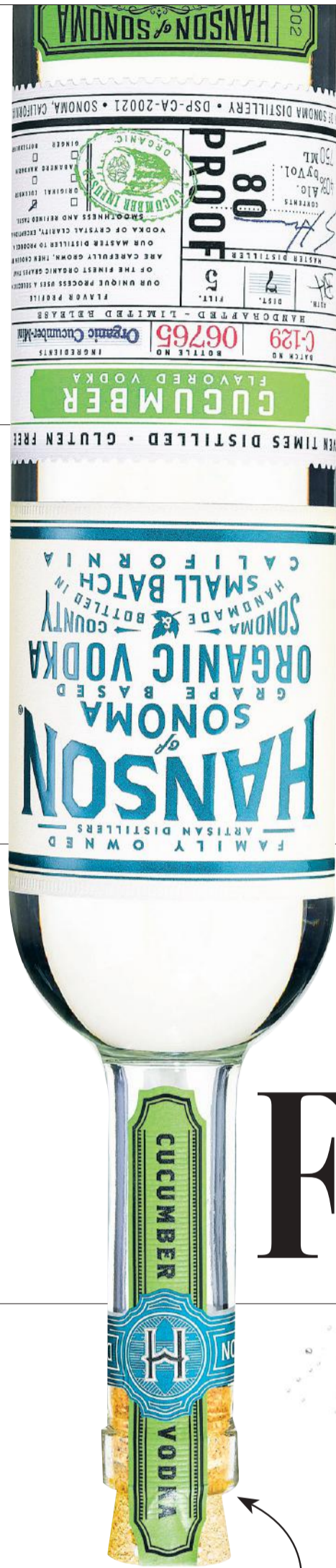
That was a relief to Tony Abou-Ganim, author of "Vodka Distilled." "What drove vodka's popularity in the West was trying to make it as pure and neutral as possible," he said. "But the beauty of vodka is what is left in, not what's taken out. When you talk about the Old World, it's a different style, big and robust."

Vodka did not arrive in the U.S. in a significant way until 1934, when Smirnoff was imported. Though the spirit is produced throughout the world now, its roots reach back as far as the 9th century, to Poland or, more likely, Mr. Abou-Ganim argues, to Russia. In that part of the world, it's consumed neat in small shots, a bold companion to pungent foods.

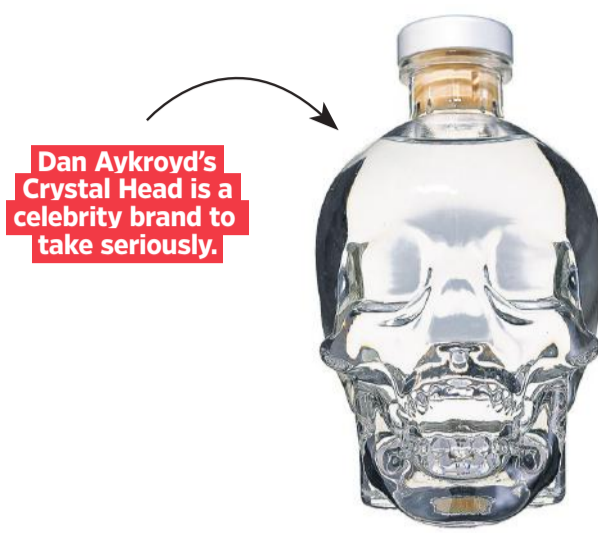
"Vodka is about gathering," said Slava Borisov, who bartends at the Four Seasons Chicago's Adorn Bar, referring to his native Russia. There, vodkas considered the best were, historically, distilled from rye, which has a spicy panache. But any base ingredient with sugar in it can be made into vodka, be it milk, millet, molasses or maple syrup. The Hansons chose a crop abundant in Sonoma: grapes. Organic French Colombar and other varieties lend a mellow fragrance to their spirit.

Before distilling, the raw ingredient must be fermented, with yeast converting sugars to alcohol. "Our yeast walks a fine line between highlighting the fruity, sweet grape

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Cucumber and mint give this organic grape-based vodka its fresh flavor.

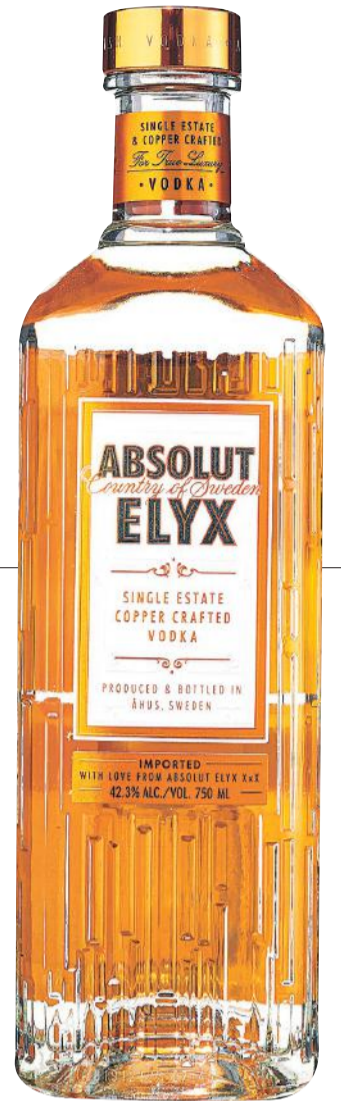


Dan Aykroyd's Crystal Head is a celebrity brand to take seriously.



Yes, bison grass vodka is a thing.

This premium bottling from a Swedish megabrand is full of character.



CLEAR FAVORITE



This distillery uses Rocky Mountain spring water and estate-grown potatoes.

F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (BOTTLES); GETTY IMAGES (BULL, GLASS)

Inside



THE WEALTH CAP

How the plain hats on 'Succession' became a coded signifier of affluence **D2**



NO LONGER POLES APART

Backcountry skiing has influenced gear for the resort-bound, too **D7**



VROOM WITH A VIEW

BBQ meets m.p.h. in a weekend of Formula-1 fandom in Austin **D6**



A GIRL-POWER POWDER ROOM

Teen bathroom decor that's chic enough to take a young woman into adulthood **D13**

DESIGN & DECORATING



1. TIE ONE ON

Like the blown-out floral of the wallpaper, the supersize bow that forms the chair's back takes a typical girly trope and undercuts its sweetness with scale. Plus, a gold seat feels "very Marilyn Monroe at a makeup table," said Ms. Crosby Pollard. This Qeeboo Ribbon Chair, too, brings in a bit of Hollywood. \$574, Lightology.com



2. DISH UP AN OFF TOUCH

To build on the color story with the trinket tray, Ms. Crosby Pollard teased hues from the walls rather than from the cabinet. A tray the same lilac-pink as the built-in would be too matchy, she said. "It's kind of good that they're off a little bit." The checkered base of this Buffalo Plaid Guest Towel Tray would also be nicely askew in a floral room. \$36, JaysStudio.com



3. TWIST A CLASSIC

The room's wallcovering veers more Turkish and modern than classic chinoiserie. "We didn't want the wallpaper to feel like it was her parents'," said Ms. Crosby Pollard. The graphic quality of this Anna French Tree House paper similarly plays with Asian-inspired patterns. "It's not your grandmother's chinoiserie." \$244 for a double roll (33 feet), WallpapersToGo.com



ANATOMY LESSON

Room to Grow

A girly bathroom designed for a teen and her future, 20-something self

BY ELIZABETH QUINN BROWN

What keeps this obviously youthful and feminine vanity area from making your teeth hurt? Maria Crosby Pollard, the interior designer behind it, had to balance the teenage occupant's love of the very Floridian patterns of the late fashion designer Lilly Pulitzer with the room's decidedly nontropical location of Alexandria, Va. Also on the program: décor that would suit the teen as she ages into adulthood.

First stop was wallpaper that satisfied the yen for Lilly-esque pinks and greens. While an all-over small pattern reads sweet, noted Ms. Crosby Pol-

lard, "the scale of this pattern was appealing and fresh, and the dark lines of the branches offer some graphic relief." Next challenge: bringing in a lot more pink, a color she said suited the client, without getting treacly. Mixing tonalities is the secret. Bubble-gum pink vases dominate the paper pattern; the cabinet's rosy lilac is clouded with gray; the stripes of the window shade and circles on the tray contribute a deep raspberry and the flower vessel adds a peachy shade. "If all the colors are super clear, they feel a little too show bird-y," she said. Also anticipating the girl's older self? Hits of glamour like crystal drawer pulls. Here, Ms. Crosby Pollard's other strategies for satisfying the needs and tastes of a young woman on the verge of "adulting."



4. GET ONE THING STRAIGHT

Ms. Crosby Pollard customized the linen shades with striped cotton grosgrain ribbon from Nina Campbell to add sophistication. "If I'm using a pattern that has a lot of curves and florals, I'm drawn to doing a foil for that—something graphic and clean to give it a little air," she said. Wide Woven Border by Nina Campbell in O2, about \$48 a meter, JaneClayton.co.uk



5. RELIEVE THE BUSINESS

The simplicity of the Anette Library Light, by Ralph Lauren for Visual Comfort, provided a counterpoint to the energetic wallpaper. "You need a place where your eye can rest," said Ms. Crosby Pollard. Of mixing polished nickel with the gold-toned chair she said, "People just don't get so hung up on that anymore." \$669, CircaLighting.com

6. RAISE THE HARDWARE

To make the space both girlish and grown-up, Ms. Crosby Pollard grabbed crystal drawer pulls. "[They feel] a little bit glamorous and special and nice in your hand," she said. Their simplicity suited her aims, too. "These just felt a little fancy without feeling fussy." Plus, they don't complicate the color scheme. \$24, HouseOfAntiqueHardware.com



F. MARTIN DOMINY (THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (TRAY, WALLPAPER, DRAWER PULLS))



CHIC TRICK

This Move Puts a Floor Over the Top

A painted floor makes a more idiosyncratic style statement than rugs or wall-to-wall can muster

The Appeal Patterning a floor with paint "adds maximum impact," and does so rather economically, said Jeremy Clark, an interior designer in Birmingham, Ala. In a local house, Mr. Clark had white track stripes added to new white-oak floors in a breakfast room (shown left) to animate and visually lengthen the space. Easy maintenance also drove the decision. "This is the family's primary entrance, and it's easier to sweep than vacuum," he said. An errant glob of spaghetti sauce is easily wiped up, too.

The Tips Mr. Clark paid Atlanta decorative-arts painter Hayden Gregg \$2,500 to apply Benjamin Moore's White Dove and then a water-based



Painter Chris Pearson riffed on an inspiring marble floor in Rome for New York design firm Redd Kaihoi.

sealer to about 300 square feet, but the designer also believes a diligent layperson could pull off the technique over a weekend. "There are things to research, like using the right tape to mask off, but I think [painting a floor] would be easily accomplished." Chris Pearson, the floor painter responsible for the faux marble above, suggests that DIYers draw the room to scale on graph paper first. "A good general rule is to have enough repeats to create a pattern but not so many that they get too small or the floor gets busy," said the Roselle Park,

N.J., painter. Treating floorboards to even a single color shakes up a space. Mr. Clark coated some of those in his 1924 home because they were in "horrific" shape. One bedroom went from unsightly to a deep, olive green underfoot. "It immediately feels more custom and costs a fraction of what it costs to refinish a floor." And you just roll paint on and seal it, he noted.

The Caveats Mr. Pearson approaches the floors of spaces like dining rooms as isolated works of art, but when working on a passageway such as a foyer, he said the transition from the painted floor to nearby rooms is very important. "I think about how it's going to relate to the other floors in the house." And painted floors might fluster the fussy. "If someone isn't willing to have something that isn't quite perfect, then this is not for them," said Mr. Clark. Chair legs without protective pads on them, big dogs, high heels, dropped serving platters—will nick or scratch. "I'll get down and look at a wooden floor that looks perfect and see the same things I see in my painted floors, but they show more on a pattern of light colors," admitted Mr. Pearson. "But honestly," said Mr. Clark, "the patina just increases its charm, right?" —Catherine Romano

ROW HOUSING In a Birmingham, Ala., breakfast room, local interior designer Jeremy Clark called in Atlanta painter Hayden Gregg to stripe an oak floor.