

THE WASHINGTON PANEL

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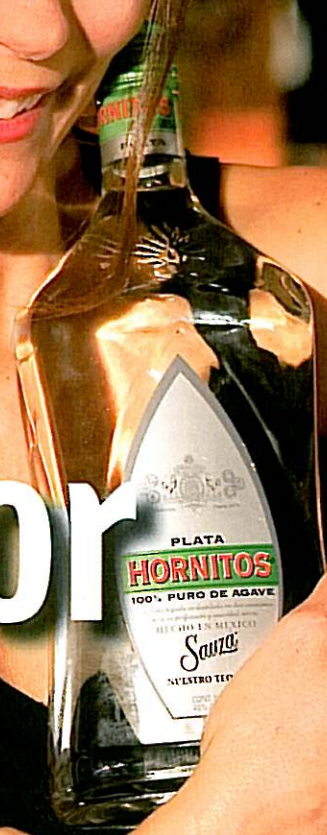
The Premium Instigator

Hornitos
Stirs Up The Premium Tequila Category

*Leslie Whitten, Bar Manager
at Maximo Cocina Mexicana &
Tequila Lounge, Dallas.*

PHOTO: KIRK WEDDLE

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SPEED TASTING

Vodka Velocity

WITH ONLY MINUTES TO WIN US OVER,
THESE BRANDS MADE IT INTO THE FAST LANE

Taking a swift pace around THE TASTING PANEL track, our monthly *Spirits Speed Tasting* was a combination of sound bites and quick sips as nine vodka brands and their ambassadors jockeyed for position—and brand recognition—with 15-minute presentations to the panel at Culina restaurant at the accommodating Four Seasons Beverly Hills.

What follows are tasting notes and talking points from our panel of experts: spirits consultant Aidan Demarest of Demarest/Tello Liquid Assets; K&L Spirits Buyer David Othenin-Girard; THE TASTING PANEL's Publisher/Executive Editor, Meridith May; Four Seasons/Culina Sommelier Brick Loomis; and THE TASTING PANEL'S Editor-in-Chief, Anthony Dias Blue.

photos by Tom Zasadzinski



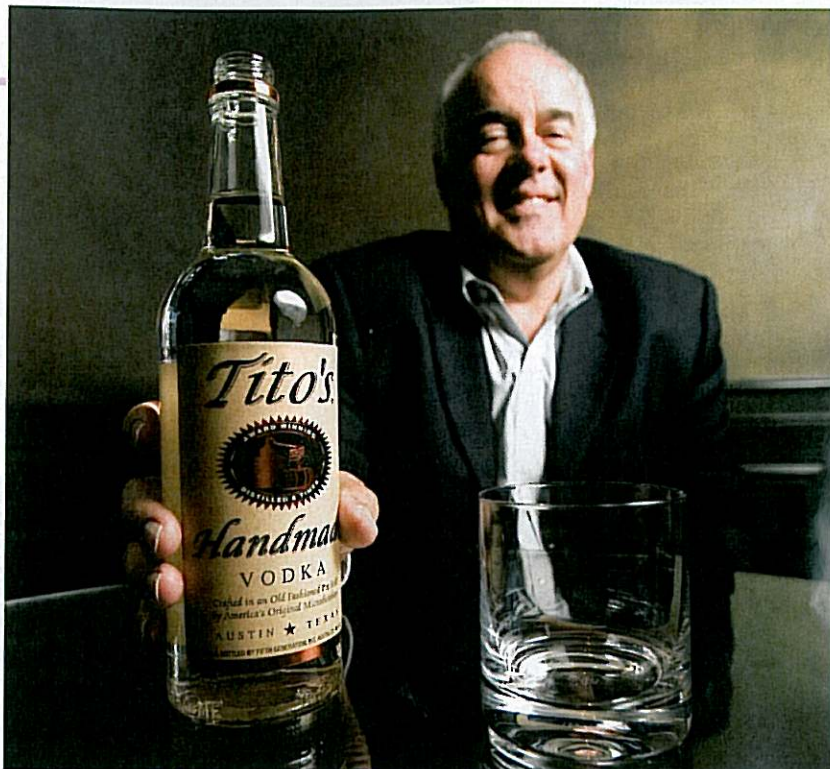
Speed Tasters (left to right): spirits consultant Aidan Demarest of Demarest/Tello Liquid Assets; K&L Spirits Buyer David Othenin-Girard; THE TASTING PANEL's Publisher/Executive Editor, Meridith May; Four Seasons/Culina Sommelier Brick Loomis; and THE TASTING PANEL's Editor-in-Chief, Anthony Dias Blue.

TITO'S

Micro-distillery brand Tito's Handmade Vodka hails from Austin, Texas. It is pot-still-crafted at the state's first distillery, and brand owner Tito Beveridge, a trained geo-physicist, studied pot stills dating back from Prohibition to come up with the appropriate size and shape for his own still. The recently remodeled and modernized distillery continues to run two working copper pot stills; slow-cooking the 100% corn mash for anywhere from eight to 13 days.

SRP \$21-22; Fifth Generation Inc.

X **Our Panel Votes:** A pinch of heat that dissipates and turns sweet on the palate. (MM) Balanced, pleasant red apple notes; soft palate with slight pepper on the long finish; very mixable. (BL) Spicy and hot, with a smooth vanilla middle and a clean, long finish. (ADB) Vanilla and fruit meld with light spice and pepper on the nose, while the sweet corn palate creates a soft middle and just a dash of heat on the finish. (DO-G) The quintessential vodka, perfect for blending. (AD)



Jeff Hodson touts Tito's Handmade Vodka.

BLUE ICE

The iconic Russet potato and pure mountain spring water from Idaho are the pride of family-owned Blue Ice vodka, produced by Master Distiller Bill Scott at Distilled Resources just outside Sun Valley, in Rigby, Idaho. It takes nine-and-a-half pounds of potatoes to craft each bottle; the bottle itself is expertly designed to look like a glacier. Thanks to its potato base, Blue Ice is carbohydrate-, gluten- and fat-free, with 107 calories per 1.5-ounce serving. In order not to strip the spirit of its flavor profile and texture, Blue Ice is distilled in a four-column apparatus via fractional distillation, which removes impurities, and then filtered five times for further clarification.

Introduced almost two years ago, Blue Ice Organic Wheat vodka blends Idaho russet potatoes with certified organic Idaho winter wheat. With a kosher rating to boot, this American-made wheat 'n' potato spirit is a natural addition to the soon-to-be-growing Blue Ice line-up.

SRP \$15-17 (original), \$20 Blue Ice Organic Wheat; 21st Century Spirits

X **Our Panel Votes:** Blue Ice is round, rich and sweet. Blue Ice Organic Wheat vodka has an initial bite, with lean lines and licorice on the mouth. (MM) Blue Ice (potato) is full-bodied with great texture; the Organic Wheat has a mildly spicy start with a supple aroma and taste of grain, and round and rich texture. (BL) Blue Ice (potato) starts with a creaminess that keeps mellowing with a wave of vanilla and zesty spice; Organic Wheat is fresh and lean with only the slightest hint of bite. (ADB) Blue Ice (potato) is spicy, starchy, stony and clean from the start, with an intensely rich, but clean finish. (DO-G) Blue Ice (potato) has length, and a stream of notable attributes: pepper, sweet vanilla and a plush texture. (AD) ■■

