



Ed Schwartz
 Out of My Mind

The first vodka taste-off

This wasn't easy – especially for a wine writer. I decided to do a taste-off of 10 well-known vodkas. I slightly chilled all of the bottles and tested each brand blind so as not to be swayed by the bottle, the name or its advertising. This requires extremely deep concentration, but I was certainly up to it. After all, I am a professional. I did this at the cocktail hour for authenticity. After tasting, I ranked the vodkas in the order I perceived them. Without fanfare, here are the results of the vodka competition.

1. Belvedere (tied for first). From Poland. Clean, and beautifully clear. On the nose, strong notes of alcohol and water. Lots of alcohol in the aftertaste which soon dissipates into the essence of the vodka itself. A classic. Excellent.

2. Gray Goose (tied for first) From France. Beautifully clear and clean. On the nose, strong notes of water and alcohol. Plenty of strong alcohol in the aftertaste, which soon transmutes into the essential taste of vodka itself. A classic. Excellent.

3. Chopin (tied for first). Also from Poland. In the

glass, this vodka is beautifully clean and equally clear. Upon inhaling, there are predominant notes of both water and alcohol in fine balance. In the aftertaste, strong overtones of alcohol which soon dissipate into the quintessential essence of vodka. A classic. Excellent.

4. Smirnóff. Formerly Russia, now USA (tied for first). Upon pouring into a glass, this vodka shows equal amounts of clean and clear. Taking a big whiff, the fresh scents of alcohol and water emerge. After swallowing, the top notes of water and alcohol stay on the palate then give way to bottom notes of alcohol and water. A classic. Really excellent.

5. Absolut (tied for first). From Sweden. Clean and wonderfully clear. Lots of oomph in the nose from alcohol and water. This carries through in the taste and aftertaste which then leaves the impression of clean and clear vodka. A classic. Excellent. Love the ads. Is this how it's spelled? What happened to the "e"?

6. Finlandia (tied for first). Not surprisingly, from Finland. Clean and clear, and upon sniffing it, lots of vodka and water come through. In the aftertaste, not quite sure. Mouth getting a little numb. Funny – I can't feel my tongue. Still, it's a classic. Excellent.

7. Purus (tied for first). From Italy. Clean and

wonderfully clear, which is good, because I just spilled the stuff all over my shirt. Nuts! I dropped my pen. Doesn't have much taste but what the devil would you expect? My mouth is really numb; maybe this is a good time to see my dentist. This is vodka, all right. From Italy? I thought Italy made wine! Must have had some grapes left over. Recession and all that. Still, a classic and darned good! Speaking of classics – didn't the Renaissance come from Italy? Is there a Mona Lisa vodka? Did I mention excellent?

8. Grey Goose (tied for first). Oops – I think I did Grey Goose already. Hard to read my notes. I thought geese were white.

9. Blue Ice. From the good old USA. Buy American! Say this is really good stuff! The bottle looks like an icicle. I am having trouble writing this down, but it is certainly a good vodka from the good old United States and I think you should buy this, because it's a classic and we should drink locally. Yes, support your locally.

10. All tied for first. No seconds here. What a nice tasting. Dropped my pen and my notes. No problem – everything good. It's only 8 p.m., but I think I will turn in early. Let's see – which way is the bedroom? I know it was here this morning. Excellent.

