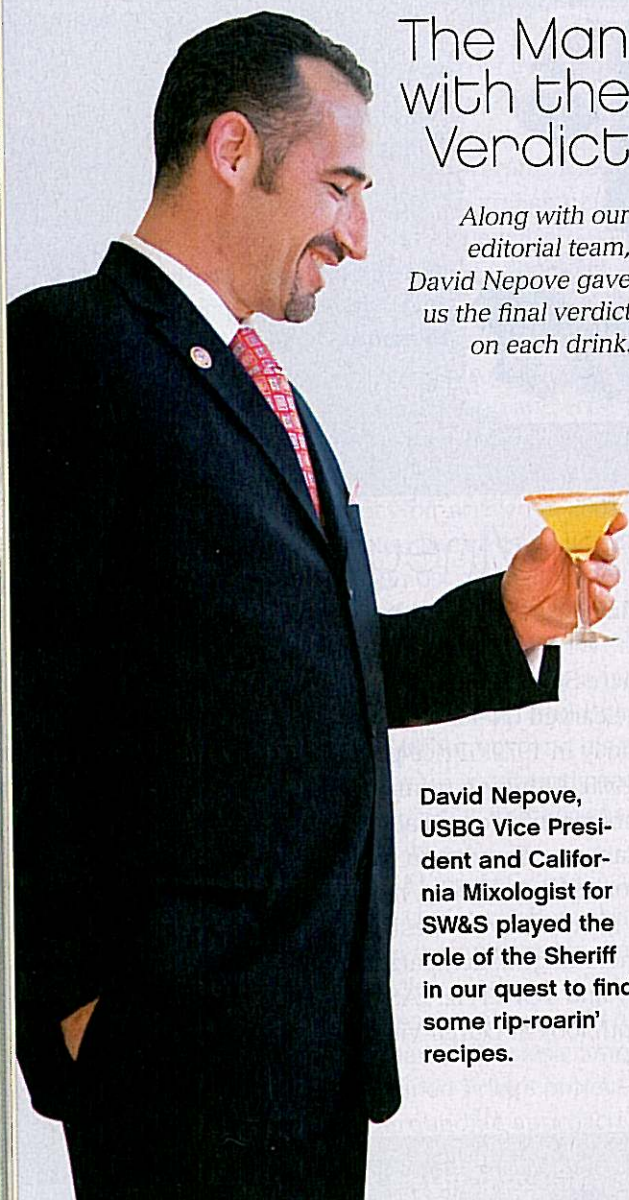


Calling the Shots

THE TASTING PANEL invited a posse of vodkas and a stable of gins to our round-up at In the Mix, the bar at The Sheraton Universal Hotel in L.A., for a summer cocktail Showdown

photos by Cathy Twigg-Blumel



The Man with the Verdict

Along with our editorial team, David Nepove gave us the final verdict on each drink.

David Nepove, USBG Vice President and California Mixologist for SW&S played the role of the Sheriff in our quest to find some rip-roarin' recipes.

Blue Ice Vodka

The great American vodka, Blue Ice is produced from Idaho potatoes. New Blue Ice Organic Wheat vodka is USDA certified organic, and crafted from Idaho water and locally harvested winter wheat.

21ST CENTURY SPIRITS

Blue Ice Heart Throb

Blue Ice vodka
Cointreau or triple sec
Pomegranate juice
Fresh lime juice

The verdict: The pomegranate and fresh lime match well with the vodka's earthy qualities, putting some spring in the step of any possibility of a bite.

The Green Bee

Blue Ice Organic Wheat vodka
Organic agave nectar
Juice of half a lemon
Mint leaves

The verdict: The muddled mint and fresh juice could not disguise the profound taste of the wheat, which on its own offers up a wonderful mouthfeel and delights of vanilla cream pie.



Kevin Egan of 21st Century Spirits.

Ketel One Citroen

It's the natural citrus essence—and the brand's inherent smoothness—that has made Ketel One Citroen one of the most popular lemon-flavored vodkas in the marketplace. Made at the Nolet Distillery in Holland, it possesses a remarkable cleanness from ten generations of distilling technique and tradition. The super-premium vodka is produced from high-quality wheat and is crafted from small batches using traditional copper pot stills, including the original copper pot still "Distilleerketel #1" after which Ketel One is named.



Dwayne Davenport of Ketel One.

DIAGEO NORTH AMERICA

Ketel One Summer Sipper

Ketel One Citroen
Lemonade (or fresh-squeezed lemon juice and simple syrup)
Garnish with a sprig of mint

The verdict: A grown-up's lemonade that is incredibly refreshing.

Tanqueray Rangpur Gin

Distilled with rare Rangpur limes (not a true lime, the Rangpur has a tart mandarin-lime-lemon flavor and a deep orange pulp). Distilled once with juniper and coriander, the spirit goes through a re-distillation with Rangpur lime, bay leaf, and ginger.

DIAGEO NORTH AMERICA



The Basil Gimlet

Tanqueray Rangpur gin
Cranberry juice
Torn basil leaves

The verdict: The subtle, simple and practical cocktail, plus the lime-inspired flavor of the gin, favored the dry, sharp, zesty sweetness of the cranberry juice and was balanced by the aromatic basil. No lime squeeze necessary! Rangpur takes gin beyond the category.

Ruskova Vodka

Channeling the spirit of Mother Russia, Ruskova is made from the highest-quality Russian-grown grains and is six-times-distilled to produce a vodka that packs a punch of spice, without the burn. The authentic Russian-produced-and-bottled vodka is also surprisingly reasonably priced, making it a favorite among consumers looking to experience the best vodka Russia has to offer without breaking the bank.

ANSON IMPORTS



The Ginger Ruskova

Ruskova vodka
Fresh lemon juice
Homemade ginger simple syrup
Organic unfiltered apple juice
Fresh basil

The verdict: The spicy, peppery rye vodka goes into high gear with the pungency of the ginger, so the addition of the apple juice makes for a memorable cocktail with a long, complex finish.

Gabriel Boudier French Saffron Gin

The secret to this orange-hued gin's success is its mixability. This fragrant spirit is micro-distilled in Dijon with eight natural botanicals, and the saffron gives it an exotic twist.

21ST CENTURY SPIRITS

The Saffron Peach

Gabriel Boudier Saffron gin
Fresh peach syrup or purée
Fresh lemon juice
Dash of agave nectar

The verdict: A slice of fresh peach makes a summery garnish and, with the peach and the agave sweetness, gentles the herby botanicals.