

are you there, vodka? it's me, flavor

A NEW WAVE OF INTRIGUING FLAVORS LAND ON MIAMI'S MOST TRAFFICKED TOP SHELVES.

BY MARIA TETTAMANTI

Flavored vodka is nothing new—we've been downing orange- and lemon-tinted spirits for decades here in Miami. But recently producers have started coloring outside the lines, if you will, with iterations such as espresso, marshmallow, chocolate, lime, or—gasp—bacon.

"Mixology and infusion are at an all-time high. People aren't satisfied with drinking plain old vodka," says Chris Shackelford, Voli Light Vodka brand ambassador. "People drink vodka tonics because that's what they watched their parents drink, but now there are alternatives. With so many options, you can discern your favorite," he adds.

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The current roster of new vodka flavors is dizzying: Stolichnaya recently introduced Chocolat Razberi and White Pomegranik, while Van Gogh Vodka unveiled Double Espresso and Dutch Caramel essences. Zubrówka is a vodka distilled from rye and infused with bison grass, a plant that grows in a northern region of Poland where the now-endangered European bison graze, imparting herbaceous notes of vanilla and almond. Three Olives, which has long featured cherry, now offers bubblegum, and Smirnoff recently introduced whipped cream and "fluffed marshmallow" flavors. Even more extreme is Bakon Vodka, which would work well with

blue cheese olives, and brings out a new side of a traditional Bloody Mary.

Miami's most adventurous palates are guzzling them up, too. "With the recent diet fads, people are trying to cut sugar-loaded sodas and juices out of their drinks," says Matt Daniels, bar manager at Wall at the W South Beach. "I don't think it's a passing trend, either. If society keeps progressing in a healthy direction, I see it hanging around."

But for some mixology purists, who pride themselves on creating flavors rather than buying them, infused vodkas may be too much of a shortcut. Bar Lab CEO Elad Zvi's Miami Beach-based beverage consulting company, whose clients include W South Beach, Christian Dior, and Carnival Cruises, is responsible for creating cocktail menus, and he wonders if the deluge of unusual new flavorings are no more than a fleeting fad. Zvi does, however, tout Hangar One Vodka's Chipotle flavor (think mild earthy and smoky spice) and Square One Organic Spirits' Cucumber blend for their respective artisanal and organic properties. "Eventually, people will distinguish the on-point brands from the bad seeds," he says.

No matter if you take your vodka neat, on the rocks, or with a splash of soda or tonic water, there's no doubt that exotic flavors are having a Miami moment. Whether it's a temporary one or here to stay, we'll have to keep drinking to find out. **OD**



From Stolichnaya to Van Gogh, the best vodkas are bursting with flavors as diverse as chocolate-raspberry, marshmallow, caramel, and even bubblegum. Broughton vodka glasses, **Ralph Lauren Home** (\$395, set of four). *Kiliwatch, 3817 NE Second Ave., Miami, 305-576-0013*