



## **2021 CRAFT SPIRITS JUDGING**

### **SPIRIT JUDGING PROTOCOLS**

Welcome to the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual American Craft Spirits Competition. The ACSA spirits competition will be held remotely with tasting and scoring by the judges beginning April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021. ACSA takes great pride in conducting a rigorously professional judging program in accordance with the following protocols.

#### **Stage One: Receipt and Classification of Spirits.**

All received spirits are stored in a locked room at Cardinal Spirits. Boxes remain sealed until the ACSA/Cardinal team is ready to pour the judges samples into clean vials that have been protected from any aroma taint potentials. They will build kits and get ready to ship to judges' locations along with their judge's packets. Access to the staging area is limited, without exception, to the ACSA Judging Board, the stewards, and relevant ACSA and Cardinal Spirits staff.

### **SPIRIT DEFINITIONS BY CATEGORY**

**(For the complete list of the TTB definitions by category, please refer to the TTB's Beverage Alcohol Manual, Chapter Four, available [HERE](#) in PDF format.)**

#### **1. Spirit Categorization**

- a. A "Spirit Category" is defined as the "parent" spirit type, with most categories having multiple sub-categories.

b. Categories and Sub-Categories shall be as defined by the TTB in Title 27 of the Code of Federal Regulations and must be backed by the TTB-approved COLA.

c. **“Made from Scratch” vs. “Third Party”**

i. All spirit entry categories shall consist of two make-categories within:

Made from Scratch and Third Party.

1. Example: Bourbon Whiskey will award up to 3 medals to both the Made from Scratch and Third Party-Distilled, totaling up to 6 medals in the category of “Bourbon Whiskey”.

ii. Definitions

1. Made from Scratch: a fermented mash/wash that is produced exclusively by original distillation, aged and bottled in-house without any 3rd party spirits being added or blended into the product at any time.

2. Third Party Distilled: a spirit that is either distilled in-house and blended with 3rd party spirits or 3rd party spirits blended and bottled.

**d. Whiskey**

i. Categories

1. Un-aged
2. Aged- two years and under
3. Straight, under four years
4. Straight, four years and over

ii. Sub-Categories

1. Bourbon Whiskey
2. Rye Whiskey
3. Wheat Whiskey
4. Malt Whiskey
5. Corn Whiskey
6. Light Whiskey
7. Blended Whiskey
8. Flavored Whiskey

9. Hopped Whiskey
10. Cask Strength (100° or greater)
11. Other

**e. Rum**

i. Sub-Categories

1. Un-aged Rum Molasses Base
2. Un-Aged Rum Fresh Cane Base
3. Un-Aged Rum Other Sugar Cane Base
4. Aged White Rum (Charcoal Filtered)
5. Aged Rum Molasses Base
6. Aged Rum Fresh Cane Base
7. Aged Rum Other Sugar Cane Base
8. Spiced
9. Flavored Rum

**f. Brandy**

i. Sub-Categories

1. Fruit Brandy
2. Grape Brandy
3. Eau de Vie
4. Grappa
5. Un-aged

**g. Gin**

i. Sub-Categories:

1. London Dry
2. Old Tom
3. Genever (any spirit which is distilled over juniper that has not been distilled to 90proof prior)
4. Contemporary
5. Aged Gin

## **h. Vodka & Grain Spirits**

### **i. Sub-Categories:**

1. Flavored Vodka
2. Unflavored Vodka

## **i. Specialty**

### **i. Sub-Categories**

1. Absinthe
2. Bottled Amaro Cocktail
3. Flavored Liqueurs
4. Cream Liqueurs
5. Historical Spirits
6. Aquavit
7. Other

## **j. RTD (Ready to Drink Cocktails)**

### **Stage Two: Procedures and Process**

#### **Rules:**

**As judging is taking place in the tasting rooms of top professional tasters in their own homes we are asking the following of our judges:**

- Smoking is not allowed at any time during the competition.
- No perfume/cologne can be worn.
- Clothing must be free of residual odor (from smoking, perfume/cologne, or poor hygiene).
- Judges are expected to be professional at all times during judging. Protocols are to be followed as well as specific instructions from the Judging Director.

They schedule judging for themselves when chaos, interference, and distraction are at a minimum and at a considered pace.

To ensure fairness and equal judging experiences, judges are being asked to taste in private without sharing their conclusions with others who are still actively evaluating the spirits

**Judging Panels:** The Judging Panels consist of a minimum of four and a maximum of eight bench judges. The judges are picked to provide a mix of experience between various areas within the

spirits industry—retailers, mixologists, distributors, educators, and journalists/reviewers. Distillers or consultants with a vested interest in a spirit will not be able to preside over flights in that category. Whenever possible, judges with an expertise in a certain type of spirit are placed on the panels, as well as generalists who are qualified to judge a variety of classes of spirits.

An overall score from 1-100 will be tallied for each spirit within the flight. Flights of spirits will be delivered to the panels in unison, with watch glass tops.

Judges will perform a sensory evaluation of the spirits and enter their perceptions on the digital score sheets provided. We are excited to capture digital scoring to help with legibility and requiring fields be filled to create detailed and meaningful feedback. The nose, palate, finish, and balance of spirits will be evaluated in terms of cleanliness, length, depth, and complexity. Tasting notes and judges' comments will be entered onto the score sheet and submitted immediately after that flight is tasted. Rude, sarcastic, or unconstructive comments by judges will not be tolerated and the judging director and support team will address any incoming issues with judges in real time.. Judge's will receive tastings in pre arranged flights and instruction will be given to alert them to heightened awareness of tasting glass conditions and even pouring of samples for consistent comparison. All submitted scores and comments will be digitally submitted via the online tasting form and the recorder will register spirits scoring to qualify for medaling. All the data will be secured by the recorder and is not visible to any judges and is restricted to key staff only.

**Scoring:** The scoring of spirits is based on a 100-point system with the points allotted to criteria uniquely weighted to appropriately match each individual spirits category. Consideration of these points will speak to the overall quality of the spirit within its category and against its peers. This feedback will also generate meaningful information for the producers themselves.

Spirits will then be assigned a medal based on the average score determined by the following benchmarks:

- 70-79 = Bronze
- 80-89 = Silver
- 90-100 = Gold

The bottom portion of the score sheet asks the judges for input regarding the best qualities of the spirit, and also asks how the spirit can be improved.

**Awards:** Judges will award gold, silver and bronze medals for spirits based on the average panel score.

### **Stage III: Best of Class and Best of Show and Best of Innovation**

Once all judging flights are complete and scoring has been submitted to the recorder via the online submission the top scoring spirits from each category will be identified as the best in class. We have increased the overall number of judges to ensure a broad diversity of context and perspective to allow a more statistically significant scoring of spirits and avoid ties and outliers unfairly impacting spirits scores. Should a tie occur both spirits will be awarded for their excellence.

The top scoring spirit of the show will be named Best in Show, should there be a tie, both spirits will be awarded for their excellence. Again, additional judges have been added to create more detailed and meaningful scoring data outcomes and offer less opportunities for any ties.

The Best in Innovation also will be awarded in each of the spirits categories and based on the highest tally of innovation points.

### **Judging Director**

The role of the Judging Director is to oversee all judging operations and to see that all functions are performed smoothly and efficiently. The Judging Director's various duties include determining flights, tallying scores, answering judge's questions, assigning alternate judges to panels, and checking in on judging panels for completion of flights. The Judging Director runs the calibration seminar that opens the judging, it offers detailed instruction, competition standards, and answers any questions judges may have. FINALLY, the Judging Director is barred from entering their own spirits.

### **Stewards Director**

The head steward oversees the staging room operations, and determines that each flight is correctly selected with like spirits and properly poured into a 1oz bottle for shipping.

### **Recorder**

The recorder will receive the score sheets from and log the average scores, best of categories and medals earned. The recorder will compile a list of the full names of distilleries and spirits receiving medals and determined best of category.

Score sheets with tasting notes will be scanned for archives and possible distribution to the distillers.

Tasting notes will be kept grouped by flight in the order that the flight was served.

Stickers will be placed on each score sheet showing the full name of product and distillery and at the same time covering over the medal recommendations from each judge. Each medal-winning bottle will have an appropriate sticker placed on it to demonstrate the medal awarded.

### **Closing**

At the end of the competition all remaining bottles will be packaged and removed from Cardinal Spirits and transported and held at a secured bonded facility. The spirits are then transported to the ACSA National Convention, in Louisville KY.

Tasting notes and score cards will be presented along with medals at the ACSA National Convention, and all remaining tasting notes, medals, and non-medal tasting notes will be shipped directly to the entrant following the ACSA National Convention.