

PUTTING THE SPIRIT

IN HOLIDAY SPIRIT

BY ALEX NOTMAN

Let's face it: A good bottle of booze makes the holidays that much merrier, and what could be easier than a quick pop in to the liquor shop on your way to a party or a family gathering? *EW* caught up with Elliot Martinez, of BoozeWeek and Izakaya Meiji bartender-dom fame, to pick out his dirty half-dozen for the holiday. Just don't ask him to recommend a "good" vodka, unless you want him to collapse into a pile of giggles (and that's before the tasting, sniffing and swirling began).

Hardy X.O, cognac, approx. \$134.95

"Smooth as smooth can be."

This cognac goes down so easy, you better watch your bar tab. "If you've got the cognac lover in your life, forget the Courvoisier, forget the Hennessy, this ain't no rapper's cognac, this is the legit shit," Martinez says. With wisps of ripe fig and a velvety finish, this will slip easily into a stocking hung with care. Don't want to break the bank? Entry-level Hardy VS starts at \$22.95.

Fernet Branca, herbal liqueur, \$29.95

"I have one every day."

This invigorating bitter Italian liqueur was once used for "medicinal" purposes, which made it a popular legal option during Prohibition (they even set up a temporary production facility in New Orleans during the '20s to capitalize on the dry populace). "It's made with 60 different ingredients," says Martinez, who prefers it on the rocks with a splash of Aperol and a lemon twist. "One of which may or may not be coca leaf."

Ransom Old Tom Gin, \$34.95

"It's herbal, it's piney, it's local."

According to Martinez, legend has it that Old Tom refers to a tomcat door

woodcarving on the outside of drinking establishments in Amsterdam — stick a penny in old Tom's mouth and a shot of gin would pour down his paw right into a patron's mouth. Forget the pennies and splinter mouth, and buy a bottle of this old-style gin (versus the more common London style), which is distilled in an alambic pot with lots of malted barley and an infusion of botanicals.

Redbreast 12 year, Irish whiskey, \$49.95

"The quintessential Irish whiskey."

"It's just perfect, it's just perfect," Martinez says. "There's no flaw to it." Jameson Irish Whiskey may be many boozies (you know, like foodies) go-to whiskey, but perhaps they haven't discovered Jameson's other Irish fun juice, Redbreast, aged 12 years in sherry casks and bourbon barrels.

Hakushu 12 year, Scotch, approx. \$60

"Smokey and clean."

While you're sipping on this delightfully clean and clear Scotch whisky, picture the snow falling on the Suntory Hakushu Distillery nestled deep in the cool forests near the Japanese Alps — the distillery's corporate philosophy is, after all, "In harmony with people and nature." It's also Martinez's favorite Japanese Scotch. "They take the Scotch tradition and do really well with it,"



ELLIOT MARTINEZ

PHOTO BY ROB SYDOR • DIGITALLATTE.COM

he says. "It's got all the smokiness you would expect from a Scotch but it's so clean!"

Eagle Rare 17 year, bourbon, approx. \$160

"Santa wants this."

This Kentucky Straight bourbon whiskey, part of the award-winning Buffalo Trace Antique Collection, emits spiced pear and cigar aromas with a dry vanilla palette and a lasting hint of toffee. "It has the baking spice, it has the chocolate chip cookie nose," Martinez says. "It's great for the holidays." This bottle is no longer locally available but can be bought online, however, the Eagle Rare 10 year can be found at local liquor stores (approx. \$26.95)

Someone clear the liquor store shelves before you could? Try these backups: Templeton Rye (\$39.95, newly available in Oregon); Krogstadt Aquavit (\$22.95, think anise and caraway seed); Hendrick's Gin (\$31.95, "the best gin around").



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*The big swarm is on the 22nd but grab cards and represent anytime!

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