

Swiss Vodka - The Art and Science

The Swiss have perfected watch and chocolate making, and now [DIWISA](#) has perfected the art and science of making vodka.



On a recent trip to Lucerne, Switzerland in October 2006, we made a stop at the family-owned DIWISA (Distillery Willisau, SA), to learn how they make Xellent Swiss Vodka. Of particular note is that pre-1999 it was illegal to distill grains grown in Switzerland. DIWISA helped to change the law and they created Xellent Swiss Vodka the first and only Swiss vodka.

DIWISA, founded in 1918, located north of Lake Lucerne, Switzerland in the town of Willisau has a long history of producing spirits. Today, under the guidance of Andreas Affentranger, the company continues his grandfather's fine tradition.

Type of Rye Used



When DIWISA contemplated making vodka, they first tried potato and different grains. After a trial and error period, they settled on disease resistant winter rye, which gave the best taste with a slight sweetness.

Xellent Swiss Vodka uses two types of bread-quality Swiss rye, Matador and Picasso (Picasso is the dominant rye), grown in Willisau at high altitudes of 500 - 800 meters in hilly fields no larger than two hectares. The weather in this area is rough and often windy, which helps to make the rye strong. DIWISA contracts with seventeen farmers to help control the quality of the rye. Luxury Experience Magazine goes to all to lengths to learn about all aspects of spirit distilling, and we even made a visit to one of the farmer's fields to see where they grow the rye.

Milling Time



Harvest time comes in August when the rye quality is at its best. Once the rye is harvested, the farmers bring the rye directly to the mill located nearby. The rye is then inspected for quality, taste, appearance, humidity level, (the maximum acceptable level of humidity is 14.5%), and hectoliter weight (the minimum acceptable weight is 69 kg, as the higher the weight the better the energy level). Both the humidity and the hectoliter weight affect the sweetness of the grain. Now that the rye has passed all the required quality tests, the next step is grinding the rye.

Mashing

The rye is mashed in special 500-liter mashing tanks where the rye is warmed from 15° C (59° F) to 90° C (194° F) in around 25 minutes, and then heated to 90° C (194° F) for 30 minutes. The next step is the cool down period, cooling the mash from 90° C (194° F) to 58° C (136° F) in 30 minutes. The last cool-down period takes the mash from 58° C (136° F) to 30° C (86° F) in 60 minutes.

Fermenting

After the mashing process, the rye is fermented for 7 days in tanks.

Distilling



The mash is now transferred to 17 traditional pot stills with a capacity of 500 liters. The mash is carefully heated by steam, and a stirring wheel maintains the heating process. When the alcohol reaches around 78° C (172° F) evaporation begins, and after the first distillation the alcohol level is between 70-75 % volume.

DIWISA uses pot stills with three bubble plate drains, one dephlegmator, and two catalysts. They have one of the most sophisticated distilleries in Europe, and over 85-years experience distilling high-quality spirits.

After the initial distillation, a second distillation occurs in a 45-plate column to eliminate the methanol, and the alcohol level remains the same. A third distillation in another 45-plate column purifies and results in an alcohol level of 96% volume.

Cellaring or "Nap time"



The next step is resting in tanks for several months.

The Swiss Step

After resting for several months, DIWISA adds water from the highly oxygenated and mineral rich Titlis Glacier in Central Switzerland to dilute the vodka. Water is then added at intervals throughout the process to reduce the alcohol to 40%. Xellent Swiss Vodka then rests for an additional six months to bring out the distinct flavor.

Filtering

The vodka is now filtered several times using an active carbon filter and their own secret filtering technique. Hey, they have to keep some knowledge a secret!

Finishing Steps



The last stages are the bottling, capping, and hand boxing the product. Luxury Experience Magazine goes to all ends, and even carefully supervised the hand boxing of Xellent Swiss Vodka.

Tasting, the Best Part

We found Xellent Swiss Vodka to have herbal, mineral, and even a hint of cocoa notes on the nose, to be slightly sweet and with an inherent full-bodied creaminess on the palate.

Although DIWISA is not open to the public for tours, the Distillery Tasting Room and Sales Office is open Monday - Friday from 8:00 am - 12:00 pm, and from 1:30 pm - 6:00 pm. On Saturday, they are open from 9:00 am - 1:00 pm.

If you are planning a trip to Lucerne, DIWISA is definitely worth a visit. In addition to producing the only Swiss vodka, DIWISA also makes many other exceptional spirits.

For additional information and recipes, please read the article [Xellent Swiss Vodka](#).

Xellent Swiss Vodka is available from [The Spirit of Hartford, LLC](#).



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