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Bridging the Gap from Square One



Written by Natalie Bovis-Nelsen

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Vodka is defined as a "colorless, odorless neutral spirit." However, many mixologists know that this is not entirely true. Sure, there aren't overwhelming notes of juniper as with most gins; or smokiness like mezcal or peaty scotch; or the mysterious "hogo" in some rums. Still, when the vodka is NOT distilled ten billion times to strip away the congeners (true flavors or "impurities") of the spirit, the base ingredient from which vodka is made can leave its fingerprint (wheat = creamier, rye = spicier, for example), particularly.

I've been a Square One cheerleader from the beginning. My first interview with CEO Allison Evanow took place in 2006, not too long after the Novato, California-based organic vodka hit the market. "Doing it right from Square One" is one of the company's motto's, and they follow through by using organically-grown rye, and put it through a single, four-column continuous distillation process. Last year, SQ1 came out with its first flavor-infused product – a snappy cucumber which was part of The Liquid Muse Sustainable Sips® national eco-cocktail tour, and caught the attention of consumers and press around the country.

This year, Square One Botanical hits the market. It is quite spicy and herbal which makes it extremely mixable in cocktails (and frankly, quite drinkable chilled, neat). The infusion includes 8 organic botanicals: pear, rose, chamomile, lemon verbena, lavender, rosemary, coriander and citrus peel. Yes, I know what you're thinking... this is one botanical short of being gin. Personally, I see this as a huge benefit, because what better product to bridge the gap between the vodka drinker and the classic cocktail enthusiast?

Allison, herself, explains it this way: "While we are definitely not trying to be a juniper-less gin, I do think, for example, that our taste profile will bring non-gin drinkers into the botanical fold." She also feels that this mélange will continue to satisfy botanical spirit cocktail geeks with a new flavor profile not found in gins, aquavits and genevers.

I was actually inspired to taste Square One Botanical alongside Bols Genever (which I am nuts over) and see how the two measured side-by-side. Now, please know that nobody is making the comparison between these products at either Square One or Bols... this just sprang into my head as I found them reminiscent from my taste memory.

Truth be told, they are very different products. However, as someone who would like to bring more genever to the world of everyday drinking, I do see SQ1 Botanical as a more floral "kid sister" to the world of gin and genever... a starting point for the novice at the very least.

The botanical elements of Square One can be highlighted according to what it is mixed with. A more feminine, floral bouquet explodes in the glass when rose water or lavender syrup are included in the mix. Coriander and lemon verbena compare and contrast artfully when Averna, vermouth or absinthe come to play. I dare say that a myriad of cocktails can be derived from one bottle of Square One Botanical. And, I encourage you all to get creative with this one. I know I will.

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