CLAIMS:

1. A method for preparing an ethanol-containing beverage comprising subjecting a source of ethanol comprising an ethanol/water mixture, and at least one flavoring component to an extraction process under conditions to provide an ethanol-containing beverage under a rapid aging process compared to conventional methods of aging an ethanol-containing beverage.

2. A method of preparing an ethanol-containing beverage comprising:

subjecting at least one flavoring component to an extraction process with a source of ethanol comprising an ethanol/water mixture,

wherein the extraction process comprises at least one cycle of:

heating and refluxing the source of ethanol and a first portion of a flavoring component in a first vessel to produce a vapor;

condensing the vapor produced from the heated and refluxed source of ethanol in a condenser to provide a condensate;

collecting the condensate in a second vessel comprising a second portion of a flavoring component contained therein; and

remixing the condensate collected in the second vessel with the source of ethanol in the first vessel,

to provide an ethanol-containing beverage.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the source of ethanol in the first vessel is aerated with an aerator.

4. The method of claim 2 or 3, wherein the first portion of a flavoring component and the second portion of a flavoring component have substantially similar compositions, substantially identical compositions, or identical compositions.

5. The method of any one of claims 2–4, wherein the condensate collected in the second vessel is not remixed immediately with the source of ethanol in the first vessel.

6. The method of any one of claims 2–5, wherein the second vessel is partially filled with condensate prior to remixing with the condensate with the source of ethanol in the first vessel.

7. The method of any one of claims 2–5, wherein the second vessel is completely filled with condensate prior to remixing with the condensate with the source of ethanol in the first vessel.

8. The method of any one of claims 2-7, wherein the vapor and/or the condensate is passed through a catalyst and/or a filtering material and/or an absorbent material.

9. The method of any one of claims 2-8, wherein the condensate is passed through a catalyst and/or a filtering material and/or an absorbent material prior to collecting the condensate in the second vessel.

10. The method of any one of claims 2-9, wherein the vapor produced from the heated and refluxed source of ethanol is passed through a catalyst and/or a filtering material and/or an absorbent material prior to condensing the vapor in the condenser.

11. The method of any one of claims 2-10, wherein the condensate collected in the second vessel is passed through a catalyst and/or a filtering material and/or an absorbent material prior to remixing with the source of ethanol in the first vessel.

12. The method of any one of claims 2–11, wherein the second vessel further comprises a catalyst and/or a filtering material and/or an absorbent material contained therein.

13. The method of any one of claims 2–12, wherein the extraction process comprises more than one cycle.

14. The method of any one of claims 1-13, wherein the extraction process is a continuous extraction process.

15. The method of any one of claims 1-14, wherein the source of ethanol comprises about 35 % to about 70 % ABV.

16. The method of any one of claims 1-15, wherein the source of ethanol comprises about 40 % to about 60 % ABV.

17. The method of claim 1-14, wherein the source of ethanol comprises about 2 % to about 20 % ABV.

18. The method of claim 1-15, wherein the source of ethanol comprises about 20 % to about 35 % ABV.

19. The method of any one of claims 1-18, wherein the flavoring component comprises wood chips and/or wood staves.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the wood chips and/or wood staves are derived from wood selected from the group consisting of apple, cherry, hickory, mesquite, oak, and pecan, and combinations thereof.

21. The method of any one of claims 19-20, wherein the wood chips and/or wood staves are derived from a bourbon or whiskey barrel, or a wine barrel.

22. The method of any one of claims 19-21 wherein the flavoring component in the first vessel and/or the flavoring component in the second vessel further comprises at least one component imparting one or more of an aroma and/or a flavor selected from a group consisting of caramel, cinnamon, nutmeg, smoke, vanilla, maple syrup aromas or flavors, and combinations thereof.

23. The method of any one of claims 1-22, wherein the ethanol-containing beverage is a whiskey, bourbon, scotch, rum, brandy, cognac, gin, vodka, tequila, wine, sherry, port, mead or beer.

24. A system for preparing an ethanol-containing beverage comprising:

a first vessel;

a condenser and/or a reflux component;

a second vessel, wherein the second vessel is smaller than the first vessel;

a catalyst and/or filtering material and/or absorbent material; and

an aerator.

25. The system of claim 24, wherein the system comprises an extraction apparatus.

26. The system of claim 24 or 25, wherein the extraction apparatus is a continuous extraction apparatus.

27. The system of claim 25, wherein the extraction apparatus is configured to provide a substantially constant flow of a liquid throughout the process.

28. The system of claim 25, wherein the extraction apparatus comprises a distillation process wherein a source of ethanol is continuously added to the first vessel such that the volume of liquid contained in the first vessel during the process remains substantially constant, and the distillate is collected in the second vessel.

29. The system of any one of claims 25-28, wherein the system provides alcohol-containing beverages that have a chemical signature and/or sensory profile similar to or the same as alcohol-containing beverages obtained with conventional aging and/or finishing process.

30. A rapidly aged alcohol-containing beverage produced by the method of claim 1 or claim 2.

31. The rapidly aged alcohol-containing beverage of claim 51, wherein the rapidly aged alcohol-containing beverage is a whiskey, bourbon, scotch, rum, brandy, cognac, gin, vodka, tequila, wine, sherry, port, mead or beer.

32. The rapidly aged alcohol-containing beverage of claim 53, wherein the rapidly aged alcohol-containing beverage has a chemical signature and/or sensory profile similar to or the same as an alcohol-containing beverage obtained with a conventional aging and/or finishing process.

33. A method of producing a blended alcohol-containing product, the method comprising combining a rapidly aged alcohol-containing beverage of claim 30 with (a) an alcohol-containing beverage obtained with a conventional aging and/or finishing process, (b) a rapidly aged alcohol-containing beverage of claim 30, and/or (c) an alcohol-containing beverage obtained by a different rapid aging process.

34. The method of claim 33, wherein the blended alcohol-containing product is a whiskey.

35. The method of claim 34, wherein the whiskey has a sensory profile similar to or the same as a whiskey obtained by a conventional aging and/or finishing process.

36. A blended alcohol-containing product produced by the method of claim 33, wherein the blended alcohol-containing product is a whiskey, bourbon, scotch, rum, brandy, cognac, gin, vodka, tequila, wine, sherry, port, mead or beer.