


# Taking Flight

The image features two glasses of cocktails. The top glass is filled with an orange-colored drink, garnished with a slice of red bell pepper and a sprig of green herb. The bottom glass is filled with a red-colored drink, garnished with a blackberry and a sprig of thyme. The background is a light, neutral color.

STORY BY KATE VEROTSKY

*In an unprecedented partnership, distiller and mixologist team up to create a uniquely Northwest gin that is restoring this spirit's tarnished reputation*

R

Ryan Magarian likens gin to that girl in high school who got a bad reputation for being too popular with the football team. As a partner in Portland based Aviation Gin and founder of Liquid Relations beverage consulting firm, he's made it his mission to set the record straight. He recognizes that gin's image started to slide as a result of the bathtub swill produced during Prohibition, and that it never quite recovered its potential glory. "For most of our generation, our first experience with gin was grabbing a warm bottle of London Dry off the top of the fridge that our parents were drinking, taking a swig of it and thinking it was the worst thing ever," he admits.

Recognizing an injustice to his favorite spirit, this former bartender is now an enthusiastic partner in the manufacture of a gin that he claims will change lives. At the very least, it will restore the integrity of this often-overlooked spirit in the minds of the general populace. "It's like when you meet someone who has a very bad reputation and they turn out to be one of the most delightful, humble, authentic person you've ever met, you like them that much more. It's like a psychological slingshot and it's the same thing with gin. People have a negative connotation, and then they have a life-changing experience with it and they become so passionate about sharing it."

Indeed, his own passion borders on idolatry. Call it serendipity then that he happened to be offered a taste of a unique, custom gin while at a Seattle food writer's party three years ago. "I tasted it and was just blown away. I said I've just got to meet the guys making this." Those guys were

Christian Krogstad and Lee Medoff, artisan distillers with a tiny company called House Spirits in Portland. Fortunately, their obsession with culinary excellence in spirits matched Magarian's own, as the trio discovered over dinner and vintage gin cocktails at Portland's Park Kitchen restaurant. "I could tell right away that they had an intense passion for making great spirits," recalls Magarian. "They also wanted their spirits to be part of a larger experience, part of a culinary experience — not just an alcohol delivery system." A partnership was born, a match made in heaven for three liquid epicureans.

The result was Aviation Gin, which has since started to make quite a splash in the cocktail world. Inspired by the oldest Dutch style gin (called *Jenever*), the flavor relies less on juniper than the more commonly known dry gins. With a 100 percent neutral grain rye spirit and a carefully selected botanical blend of cardamom, lavender, coriander, anise seed, Indian sarsaparilla, dried orange peel, and juniper, Aviation Gin is styled to be enjoyed neat as well as being a perfect base for cocktails. "What I found when I started playing with gin as a bartender is that just about any cocktail made with vodka tastes better with gin," claims Magarian, who actually conducted blind-taste tests to prove this theory. "Everything that I made with gin, people just seemed to like better because when balanced with a well chosen set of ingredients, the flavors within the gin really spread their wings and the gin itself became more of a "spicing" element adding a unique and delicious layer of flavor that wasn't there before." He points out that the neutral grain spirit used to make gin,



blanketed with a perfectly balanced set of botanicals, is bound to be more pleasing to the palate than the empty taste of vodka. "Believe it or not, gin is actually little more than an infused vodka," he continues. "It's really important that we clear up the mystery about this being a 'Christmas tree' spirit — it is flavored with juniper, but also any other botanical that you want to use — we have real artistic freedom with gin."

Therein lies the beauty of Aviation Gin — it is thought to be the first product ever designed by both a distiller (typically a purist) and a mixologist, who by definition mixes spirits with all manner of substances to create cocktails. "I don't think there's a more authentic product on the market. As far as we know, it's the first partnership between a bartender and a distillery in



## THE HOUSE SPIRITS AVIATION COCKTAIL RECIPE

Carefully measure the following ingredients with a jigger into a pint mixing glass:

- 2 oz. Aviation Gin
- $\frac{3}{4}$  oz. Maraska Maraschino Liqueur
- $\frac{5}{8}$  oz. Freshly squeezed lemon juice

Shake vigorously for 6 seconds

Strain into a chilled cocktail glass and serve up with a Luxardo cherry on a pick

## BLOOD SAGE (ORIGINAL)

- $\frac{1}{4}$  Blood orange piece
  - 2 Sage leaves
  - 2 oz. Aviation Gin
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  oz. Freshly squeezed lime juice
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  oz. Simple syrup
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  oz. Pasteurized egg white
- Muddle, shake up, add a sage leaf

## PEPPER DELICIOUS

- 2 thin red bell pepper rings
- Loose third pint full of mint
- 2 oz. Aviation Gin
  - 1 oz. Freshly squeezed lime juice or  $\frac{3}{4}$  oz. freshly squeezed lemon juice
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  oz. Simple syrup (1 part granulated sugar to 1 part water)
- Muddle, shake up, add a red bell pepper slice and mint sprig

*(Ryan Magarian)*

American history," says Magarian. "That's so critical because it takes advantage not only of the maker's ability, but of the user's ability. I can't think of a better partner in creating a spirit than the person who knows how it is going to be used."

*"I love gin..."*

It's the American dream refreshed, and Margarian hopes that other hopeful distillers (that's "distiller" and "mixologist") follow their lead. "I'm tired of seeing spirits coming off the boardroom tables, I'm tired of executives looking at pie charts trying to figure out what will be the next flavored vodka on the market. I'm much more excited about some bartender who has bartended for ten years and has a passion for it and says I want to create THIS. It's not just a spirit created for the spirits sake, it's a spirit created by someone who lives in the company of cocktails."

Speaking of cocktails — which do you think of in the company of gin? If you're like most people, your repertoire ends at the gin martini and the gin and tonic. Too bad, says Margarian, who isn't all that fond of either drink. "Both of these are drinks one must truly acquire a taste for. I love gin — I love the way gin plays off citrus, I love the way gin plays off liqueurs." Who knew? In fact, the company's name was inspired by the quietly classic "Aviation" cocktail. Perhaps you'll mix one up and give gin another chance at a good name. ❖



050108HL281213

COLUMBIA HOMES

NORTHWEST, INC.

www.columbiachomesnw.com 360-828-7



**It's Simple . . .**

**Hear Better, Live Better.**

A Miracle-Ear hearing aid can help.<sup>†</sup> It all starts with a free, friendly, no-obligation hearing test.\* Come see us today!

**Call 1-800-NEW**

(1-800-639-4327)

The store closest to you will

Aberdeen, Chehalis, Lacey, Shelton, Vancouver, Kennewick, Ellensburg and Wenatchee

2871817HL008008

\*Hearing tests always free. Not a medical exam. Audiometric test to determine proper amplification needs only. †Hearing aids do not restore natural hearing. Miracle-Ear hearing aids are designed to improve hearing and provide better communication. A Miracle-Ear representative can determine which models and options may be right for you.