



Unforgettable Gins

THE SHEER VARIETY OF BOTANICALS AVAILABLE TO DISTILLERS FOR CRAFTING THIS ELEGANT SPIRIT MAKES EACH ONE DISTINCT AND COMPLEX IN ITS OWN RIGHT.

BY ROBERT PLOTKIN

PHOTOS BY JON VAN GORDER

The resurgent popularity of gin is surely a sign that society's tastes are evolving. Legions of parched Americans, disenchanted with vodka's austerity and carnival-like parade of flavors, are finding sanctuary in gin's affordable elegance and unrivaled complexity. Crafted according to a secret blend of aromatics, every brand is endowed with an engaging personality as individually distinctive as DNA, which explains why no two premium gins taste the same.

The most telling distinction between brands is the irresistible nature of their bouquets. An exceptional gin makes its presence immediately known with an outpouring of fresh, celery-crisp aromas elicited from botanicals such as juniper berries, citrus peels, herbs, roots and spice. The effect is mesmerizing and lingers on the mind like an unforgettable perfume.

The Chanel No. 5 of the category is **Plymouth** English Gin. Made for two centuries at Black Friars

The Winkle and Salt and Pepper Cocktail



The Mekong Martini can be garnished with a lemon twist or a jalapeño slice.

Distillery, the ultrasophisticated spirit is distilled in a copper alembic using pure grain spirits, soft Dartmoor water and an infusion of seven highly aromatic botanicals. A quick sniff explains Plymouth's enduring popularity. The gin has an exuberant citrus, spice and juniper bouquet, and a light, seamlessly smooth body. Its vibrant, skillfully balanced palate fills the mouth with the flavors of strawberry, coriander, orange and lemon zest, which gradually tapers into a graceful, distinguished finish.

One of the pillars of the British Empire, **Beefeater** London Dry Gin, is made in the same manner and according to the family-held recipe first devised in 1820. The renowned brand is exquisitely dry with a lavish floral, juniper and spicy bouquet, and a layered, long-lasting palate of citrus, lavender and pepper. Bottled at a lip-tingling 94-proof, Beefeater and the dry martini have been an item since Prohibition.

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Bestselling **Tanqueray** Special Dry English Gin is distilled in Finsbury, England, which at one time was world famous for its spa and rejuvenating waters. The gin has a creamy, medium-weight body and a captivating bouquet redolent with the piney aroma of juniper and delicate lemon and orange notes. Its palate is deeply saturated with tart, slightly bitter citrus flavors that have made Tanqueray the preferred choice to mix with the bittersweet flavor of quinine and lime.

The successful franchise now also includes Tanqueray No. Ten, an exceptionally fresh and unforgettable gin. Instead of relying on dried botanicals for its flavor, the spirit is distilled using tree-ripened grapefruits, oranges and limes; ripe juniper berries from Tuscany; and herbs such as coriander and chamomile. Tanqueray No. Ten has an immense citrus and spice bouquet and a broad array of succulent fruit flavors.

Self-described as the "world's most peculiar gin," **Hendrick's** is imported from Scotland and crafted from a blend of small batch spirits produced in two types of stills, each of which produce distinctively different styles of spirits. Particularly unusual is the gin's botanical mix that includes juniper, coriander, citrus, rose petals and cucumber. Hendrick's is refreshing and delightfully eccentric.

Few spirits have gone to greater lengths to achieve their world-class status than artisan **Martin Miller's** Reformed London Dry Gin. Every drop of this small batch marvel is shipped 3,000 miles from Langley, England to the remote, glacier-fed Selyri Springs in Ireland. Its pure, soft waters are used to lower Miller's alcohol content, which for the classy and altogether breathtaking Westbourne Strength is 90.4 proof.

When it comes to making a good first impression, drop-dead gorgeous **Magellan** London Dry Gin wins hands down. The superpremium brand from France is triple-distilled in small batches employing 11 botanicals, including cloves and deep-blue Iris petals. Imbued with a lilting bouquet, shimmering light blue tint and crisp, spicy palate, Magellan Gin is a feast for the senses.

Handcrafted classics

Scour the Earth if you must, you'll find no other dry gin like **Cadenhead's Old Raj**, or one as pricey (around \$65). This extraordinary 110-proof spirit is

alembic-distilled and has an exotic botanical blend that includes the rare and expensive spice saffron. Saffron gives the gin an intriguing pale yellow tint and a sensational citrus and spice bouquet. Its palate is a collection of soft, dream-like flavors that slowly fade into a dry and luxurious finish.

Long famous as the brewer of Anchor Steam, this San Francisco powerhouse has turned its attention to handcrafting impeccable, small batch spirits such as **Junipero** Gin, a magnificently dry, assertive and aromatic spirit distilled with over a dozen botanicals. It is a crisp and eminently flavorful gin with a lightweight body, and spicy, juniper-laced bouquet. Although bottled at 98.6 proof, Junipero is too silky smooth for you to notice its elevated alcohol content.

Equally unforgettable is **G'Vine** Gin, a chic French import quadruple-distilled in copper alembics from Ugni Blanc grapes, nine botanicals and fleur de vie, the essential oils of the Ugni Blanc flower. This supremium gin has a generous bouquet of lightly spiced, woody and floral aromas, and a voluptuous, medium-weight body. The palate fea-

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tures a semisweet set of spicy flavors with prominent notes of orange blossoms and lime zest. G'Vine is a sensuous experience from start to finish.

Full-bodied and precisely balanced, newcomer **Aviation** Gin makes an ideal entry to the category. No learning curve is required to thoroughly enjoy this decidedly spicy, herbal and tangy spirit. Made from 100 percent rye, the Oregon native was obviously devised with a chilled cocktail glass in mind.

The final stop on the tour is **Whitley Neill** London Dry Gin, an adventurous spirit produced in England yet inspired by the bold flavors of Africa. The award-winning small batch gin is made with an international cast of botanicals featuring wild gooseberries from the Cape, and the tart,

acidic fruit of the Baobab tree, a taste similar to oranges. The brand's citrusy bouquet, although unfamiliar and clearly not from around these parts, is luscious with flavors vibrant and delicious.

When it comes to enchanting the senses, gin is in a league of its own. ■

Gin Cocktails

FRENCH PEARL

Specialty of **Audrey Saunders**, Pegu Club, New York, New York

- 2 ounces Plymouth English Gin**
- ¼ ounce Pernod**
- 8–10 fresh mint leaves**
- ¾ ounce fresh lime juice**
- ¾ ounce simple syrup**

Pour the Pernod, lime juice, simple syrup and place 8–10 fresh mint leaves into an empty mixing glass and muddle ingredients. Add the Plymouth Gin, ice, and shake contents vigorously. Double strain into a chilled cocktail glass.

WINKLE

Specialty of **Francesco LaFrancioni**, master mixologist, Las Vegas, Nevada

- 2 ounces Plymouth English Gin**
- 1 ounce fresh lime juice**
- ¾ ounce agave nectar**
- 3 whole raspberries**
- 3 fresh sage leaves**

Pour the lime juice and agave nectar, and add the raspberries and sage leaves into an empty mixing glass and then muddle ingredients. Add the Plymouth Gin and

ice then shake contents vigorously. Double strain into a chilled cocktail glass and garnish with a lemon twist.

SALT AND PEPPER COCKTAIL

Specialty of **James Meehan**, author/master mixologist, New York, New York

- 2 ounces Beefeater Gin**
- 2 dashes of tincture of black pepper***
- ¾ ounce fresh lemon juice**
- ¾ ounce Velvet Falernum**

Pour ingredients into an iced mixing glass and shake vigorously. Strain the contents into a chilled cocktail glass and garnish with salted, thinly sliced cucumber wheel.

*To make tincture of black pepper, put 2 tablespoons whole black peppercorns in a glass jar filled with Absolut 100-proof vodka and store for 5 days. Agitate the mixture daily. Strain contents into a dropper bottle.

PEPPER DELICIOUS

Specialty of **Ryan Magarian**, master mixologist, Portland, Oregon

- 2 ounces Aviation Gin**
- 2 red bell pepper rings, roughly ¼" thick**
- 10–12 fresh mint leaves, loose**
- 1 ounce fresh lime juice**
- ¾ ounce simple syrup**

Pour the gin, lime juice, and simple syrup, and add the mint leaves and red bell pepper slices into an empty mixing glass and then muddle ingredients thoroughly. Add the Aviation Gin and ice then shake contents vigorously. Double strain into a chilled cocktail glass and garnish with a mint sprig.

MAGIC HOUR

Specialty of **Ted Haigh**, author/master mixologist, Burbank, California

- 2 ounces Plymouth English Gin**
- ¾ ounce St-Germain Elderflower Liqueur**
- ½ ounce fresh lemon juice**

Pour ingredients into an iced mixing glass and shake vigorously. Strain the contents into a chilled cocktail glass and garnish with a lemon twist (do not twist lemon peel over the drink).

ROSE AND LYCHEE MARTINI

Specialty of **Charlotte Voisey**, Gramercy Park Hotel, New York, New York

- 1½ ounces Hendrick's Gin**
- 2 dashes Angostura Bitters**
- ½ ounce rose-infused simple syrup**
- ½ ounce fresh lemon juice**
- ½ egg white, pasteurized**
- 1½ ounces lychee juice**

Pour ingredients into an iced mixing glass and shake vigorously. Strain the contents into a chilled cocktail glass and garnish with a lemon twist.

MEKONG MARTINI

Specialty of **Bong Su Restaurant**, San Francisco, California

- 1½ ounces Tanqueray Gin**
- ½ ounce chopped cilantro**
- 2 jalapeño slices, ¼" thick**
- ¾ ounces simple syrup**
- 1½ ounces fresh lemon juice**

Pour ingredients into an iced mixing glass and shake vigorously. Double strain into a chilled cocktail glass and garnish with a lemon twist or jalapeño slice.