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Gin in midst of spirited renaissance

Martini? Try cucumber, rose or chamomile gin

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Aviation Spiked Fruit Punch combines fruit juices, strawberry jam and a botanically balanced gin. (*Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post*)



The G'Vineflower Martini, served at the Après Ski Cocktail Classic in Snowmass, uses a grape-based gin in a floral twist on tradition. (*Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post*)

Gin is in the midst of a renaissance.

But before you say, "I don't like gin" and move on, [Steven Olson](#), a master in wine and spirits education, hopes you will give the oft-maligned spirit another shake.

"It's the juniper. People think they know," Olson said. "They've had a bad experience with a bad gin and they associate it with the smell of fake juniper syrup."

If you've tasted one gin, he said, you haven't tasted them all.

Over the past decade, the number of gins available in the U.S. has exploded.

In 2005, Olson said, there were 10 premium brands out there.



Gin is undergoing a makeover, with new brands and botanical blends that include grape flowers, cucumber, rose and Indian sarsaparilla. (*Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post*)

Today, there are more than 300 gins in all — including more than a dozen from [Colorado distilleries](#) — and they're not your great-grandfather's pine-heavy, bad-memory-inducing bathtub blend.

Yes, gins are still flavored with juniper, because it's required to be called gin. But myriad natural botanicals have been added to the mix — cucumber, Indian sarsaparilla, chamomile, lavender, rose petals and grapevine flowers among them.

New-style gins, often called New Western, are moving away from a laser focus on juniper — integral to the traditional London dry gin, the most popular style on the market — and toward a more balanced blend of botanicals.

"As the cocktail movement took off, the gin movement took off," Olson said. "Gin is the base for so many of the important classic cocktails."

Olson was in Colorado earlier this month for the [Après Ski Cocktail Classic](#), a four-day celebration of mixology and slopeside imbibing in Snowmass Village. Like a fully stocked bar, seminars covered absinthe, champagne, rum and more.



Think of a Cucumber Southside as a gin-based mojito. (*Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post*)

Gin took center stage during a panel led by Olson and brand representatives for four big names in new-style gin: [Hendrick's](#), [Aviation American Gin](#), [G'Vine Floraison](#) and [Tanqueray No. 10](#).

At its most basic level, gin is a neutral, typically grain-based spirit flavored with juniper and other botanicals.

By definition, gin has to be predominantly flavored with juniper — which gives gin its distinct, Christmas-tree flavor — but the term isn't specifically defined, Olson said.



Spirits educator Andy Seymour of Liquid Productions shakes things up in Snowmass. (*Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post*)

Neither is "botanicals," said Charlotte Voisey, company mixologist for William Grant & Sons, the maker of Hendrick's.

"It's really the joy of making gin. It means anything that grows naturally," Voisey said. "There's no limit."

Historically, that list has included juniper, as well as coriander seed, angelica, cardamom, citrus peel and orris root, Olson said.

Hendrick's, a new-style gin of Scottish origin, on the other hand, is famous for its cucumber and rose petal essences.

That makes it great for a drink like the Southside, a refreshing, minty Prohibition-era cocktail — especially with a cucumber twist, Voisey said.

Not so for a Negroni, though, another classic tippie that's equal parts gin, Campari and sweet vermouth.



Megan MacGregor-Levey, left, and Noelle Kodys taste rum cocktails at the tiki seminar during the Après Ski Cocktail Classic. (*Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post*)

"A classic Negroni with Hendrick's Gin tastes terrible unless you really like Campari and sweet vermouth, because that's all you'll taste," Voisey said. "You need to adjust."

Any list of classic cocktails is heavy on gin-based concoctions — the gimlet, gin fizz, gin rickey, Tom Collins, Singapore sling, negroni, bee's knees, and of course, the classic of classics, the martini.

The key to making the perfect gin cocktail today is understanding the botanicals in the gin you're using, said Brooke Arthur, director of education and outreach for the Portland-based House Spirits Distillery, maker of Aviation American Gin.

Just like you wouldn't expect a recipe for, say, Spanish paella to taste the same if saffron were replaced with cinnamon, the same goes for gin cocktails.

So, rather than swapping out a traditional London dry, like Beefeater or Bombay, for a new gin, like Aviation or the grape-based and very floral G'Vine Floraison, you're better off taking a twist on the classic recipe, Arthur said.

"You should never be tasting these gins in these classic, traditional ways," Arthur said. "We're not London dries; we're not Prohibition-style drinks. Listen to the botanicals that are in these gins, and create cocktails based on those things."

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Aviation Spiked Fruit Punch

From Brooke Arthur of House Spirits Distillery, serves 8.

Ingredients

2 ounces organic strawberry jam 2 ounces water

12 ounces Aviation American Gin

6 ounces freshly pressed lemon juice

4 ounces freshly pressed orange juice

6 ounces sparkling apple cider

6 ounces soda water

Garnish: sliced strawberries, orange wheels

Directions

To make organic strawberry jam syrup, in a small bowl, combine 2 ounces jam with 2 ounces water. Stir until jam dissolves.

In a large mixing bowl, combine gin, jam syrup, lemon juice and orange juice.

Cover and chill. When ready to serve, add ice, soda and cider to punch bowl. Garnish with sliced strawberries and orange wheels.