

AVIATION AMERICAN GIN TAKES FLIGHT IN HONG KONG

5th March 2015 by **Drinks World**

Aviation American Gin, the award-winning craft



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The event was well attended by food and beverage industry insiders, family, friends, press and, of course, gin enthusiasts from around Hong Kong, who enjoyed expertly executed Aviation American Gin cocktails prepared by Stone Nullah Tavern's top-notch barmen.

It didn't take long before the standing room only crowd spilled out of the bar's open french doors and onto historic Stone Nullah Lane creating an impromptu block party, albeit a stylish one... at least until Hong Kong's finest "encouraged" the enthusiastic crowd back inside.

Fortunately, this hardly dampened the mood as free-flowing gin cocktails and smooth beats by Hong Kong's favourite DJ ReFlex kept the bar packed and spirits high throughout the evening.

It's no wonder why this event was so highly anticipated and well attended. As it turns out, Aviation American Gin has quite a following in Hong Kong, especially among those with an appreciation for small-batch, craft distilling.

Hong Kong's love for Aviation American Gin might have begun when Ryan Magarian, the brand's co-founder, visited the Fragrant Harbour in late 2013 (see DWA Edition 6 / 2014) to spend time with a few of those who are helping to drive the craft cocktail movement here in Hong Kong, including the bar teams at Quinary, Fatty Crab, Origin, Ham and Sherry, Ronin, Butler, and more.

During our 2014 interview with Mr. Magarian, he commented on the emergence of Hong Kong as a top tier craft spirit and cocktail service destination. Obviously, his assertion has been proven quite right. Not based only on the continued success of the venues mentioned above, but also by the opening of so many new fine establishments since; bars and restaurants that truly recognise the value of craft spirits as part of any comprehensive beverage program.

Those close to the brand say that Aviation American Gin was founded during the summer of 2005 at a small tiki party in America's Pacific North West. Mr. Magarian, already a well known barman in Seattle, Washington, was handed a complex summer botanical infusion by a friend from Portland, Oregon. Finding it unlike anything he had ever tasted, he quickly sought out its maker: Portland's House Spirits Distillery.

Recognising a common interest in spirit, cocktail, and food interactions, the distillers at House Spirits shared with Ryan their idea for a renegade regional gin style. In June of 2006 – after nearly 30 rounds of trials – Aviation Gin took flight. Many believe this was the first brand partnership between a distiller and a bartender in American history.

Founded in 2004, House Spirits Distillery serves as the anchor of Distillery Row, an inconspicuous collection of small warehouses and light industrial buildings in Portland, Oregon. Here, seven independent distilleries produce some of the most highly regarded, handcrafted spirits in America, many available for the first time since the country's Prohibition period. It can be said that Distillery Row is the heart of America's craft distilling movement – and as far as House Spirits is concerned, it might as well be its brains too.

The distillery is independently co-owned and led by beverage industry leader and Harvard University scholar, Thomas Mooney, who serves as the company's CEO. The company's Master Distiller (and co-founder), Christian Krogstad, is well regarded as one of the visionaries behind America's craft

distilling resurgence. Even legendary American Footballer, Joe Montana, is involved, serving as an investor and member of the company's board of directors.

Master Distiller Christian Krogstad likes to say that, "Aviation American Gin favours a democracy of botanicals over a dictatorship of juniper", and one can certainly relate to this when drinking the spirit neat or as part of a cocktail. Aviation American Gin offers a truly balanced palate with notes of Indian sarsaparilla, cardamom and lavender, among others.

Aviation belongs to an entirely new category of dry gins. These gins embody a shift away from the usual overabundance of juniper toward a more forward balance of botanicals. Aviation explores the rich, floral and savoury notes of lavender, cardamom, and sarsaparilla to capture the lushness, spice, creativity, and freshness of the Pacific Northwest.

Today, Aviation American Gin is the top rated gin in the world according to Wine Enthusiast Magazine, which awarded the spirit with a score of 97 points.

As any proper gin drinker knows, the classic Aviation cocktail, invented by barman Hugo Ensslin at New York's Hotel Wallick almost a century ago, is a simple but unique balance of gin, maraschino liqueur and freshly squeezed lemon juice. Done right, it is one of the best cocktails in the world; proving, as Mr. Magarian says, that "gin, in the hands of a passionate and well trained bartender, just might be the world's most mixable spirit."

Naming Aviation American Gin after such a classic cocktail was obviously intentional – but not without risk. If Aviation American Gin were to miss the mark, it might have done a great injustice to the legendary Hugo Ensslin. Fortunately, I believe Mr. Ensslin would have been quite impressed with this modern craft spirit, named in his cocktail's honour.

Aviation American Gin can already be found at many of Hong Kong's finest bars, restaurants, nightclubs and hotels. In addition, Woodside Wine + Spirits, the brand's exclusive importer, marketer and distributor for Asia-Pacific, recently introduced the Aviation American Gin 'pop-up' airplane bar in Hong Kong. Made of antique aircraft aluminium and fully stocked, the bar will make appearances around Hong Kong at various events, venues, markets and fairs.

Check in with Woodside Wine + Spirits (www.WWSHK.com) to find out where and when the Aviation American Gin airplane bar will land next. It's a fine way to enjoy your first taste of true American Gin.