



New School Gin

How a cocktail-friendly twist on a classic spirit helped to pioneer a brand-new style.

by Layla Schlack, from Fine Cooking Issue 135



Gin is a neutral grain spirit infused with juniper and other botanical ingredients. The most common style is juniper-heavy London dry—think Bombay Sapphire, Beefeater, and Tanqueray—but in the late 1990s, another type of gin emerged. This new style, which emphasizes other botanicals, started with rose-and-cucumber-scented Hendrick’s from England and orangy-floral French Citadelle.

In 2005, when Oregon-based mixologist Ryan Magarian and distiller Christian Krogstad set out to create a cocktail-friendly gin, they were the first Americans to pick up on this style. Their creation, Aviation American Gin, is infused with cardamom, lavender, sarsaparilla, coriander, anise, and orange peel, for a smooth, earthy, herbal flavor reflective of the Pacific Northwest.

“We didn’t intend to create a gin that tasted like Portland,” Krogstad says. “We wanted it balanced, not too bright or floral. Ryan describes it as ‘taking a hike in a Douglas fir forest,’ with round notes. Lavender is floral, but still very herbal; sarsaparilla gives it an earthy sweetness. It’s very smooth, so you can sip it straight.”

Other American distilleries like Bluecoat and Greenhook have since followed Aviation’s lead, adding flavors like fennel, lemon, nutmeg, cinnamon, clove, and rose. Whether you’re a gin enthusiast looking to expand your collection or a neophyte who’s iffy about juniper, you’ll cheer to these new American gins.

Jenever After

Gin evolved from the Dutch and Belgian liquor jenever, a malt spirit blended with juniper to improve the flavor.

Gin Family Tree

Old Tom is a type of gin thought to be a missing link between jenever and modern gin. It's sweeter and maltier than American or London dry but drier and more alcoholic than jenever. Then there's syrupy red sloe gin, a mix of gin and a small plum-like fruit called sloe or blackthorn.

A Tonic Tipple

The gin and tonic comes from 17th-century India, where British soldiers made their malaria-preventing quinine water, aka tonic, more palatable by adding their gin rations. There's no right or wrong ratio, but don't forget the lime.

Though bartenders love this pre-Prohibition gin drink, it was a mystery for many years why it was called the Aviation. Turns out one of the definitive sources had omitted an ingredient from the original: crème de violette liqueur. In addition to adding a nice floral note, the crème de violette turns the drink a pale blue, just like the sky. Cocktail mystery solved.

Aviation Recipe



Photograph by Scott Phillips

Aviation gin was inspired by a sky-blue cocktail of the same name that was invented in 1911 by New York City bartender Hugo Ennslin.

- **1-1/2 fl. oz. (3 Tbs.) gin**
- **3/4 fl. oz. (1-1/2 Tbs.) fresh lemon juice**
- **1/2 fl. oz. (1 Tbs.) maraschino liqueur**
- **1/4 fl. oz. (1-1/2 tsp.) crème de violette**
- **Cherry, lemon peel, or both for garnish (optional)**

Combine the gin and liqueurs in a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake to blend, and then strain into a cocktail glass. Garnish with a cherry, a curl of lemon peel, or both, if using.