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Wow, a lot of bottles in this gin joint: That's Flintridge Proper



More than 200 kinds of gin are kept behind the bar at Flintridge Proper in La Cañada Flintridge. (Kirk McKoy / Los Angeles Times)

By [S. IRENE VIRBILA](#)

At Flintridge Proper, gin is the name of the game. The 3-year-old bar's collection of 200 plus, and growing, makes it the biggest gin bar in the country. And owner Brady Caverly is determined to keep it that way.

No downtown L.A. speak-easy, the Proper is a neighborhood bar in sedate La Cañada Flintridge. By the time Caverly and his wife, Mary Elizabeth, opened the Proper, Los Angeles had plenty of bars specializing in bourbon, whiskey or

tequila. But no dedicated gin bar. And so Caverly, who loves classic gin-based cocktails, went with a gin bar. Easy.

Gin is having a renaissance with new, small distilleries popping up all over, so specializing in the juniper-scented spirit makes sense. At Flintridge Proper, guests can sip and compare traditional old-school gins with the latest New World distillates coming out of the craft gin movement. Every month, four or five new gins show up on the shelves, says Caverly. The Proper stocks them all, including the U.K. version of London Dry Gin, which is different from the U.S. version. Who knew?

If you get wind of some obscure new bottling from London or San Francisco or Australia or Myanmar, chances are there's a bottle somewhere behind the bar. You can try gins by the shot, in a cocktail or in one of four flights focused on the history of gin, the styles of gin, rare gins and that month's featured flight. Right now that would be Bluecoat Gin, Plymouth Navy Strength, and America's first navy strength, Perry's Tot. It helps to think of it as education. (Bring a designated driver.)

Itching to try Nolet's Reserve dry gin made in small copper pot stills by a 10th generation distiller in Holland? It's the most expensive gin in the world, and it will set you back \$80 a shot. It's exquisite, but would you pay \$80 for a shot? More affordable is Nolet's Silver Dry Gin with a finespun floral nose that makes a beautiful martini. Most shots on the list run \$9 to \$12, with some as high as \$14 to \$18.

To find your way through this thicket of exotic new and old gin, you might want to come prepared with a copy of the new book "Gin: The Art and Craft of the Artisan Revival in 300 Distillations" by Aaron Knoll, who also blogs on the subject at www.theginisin.com. The Proper's bartenders are well versed in their gins too, and are ready and able to offer advice.

Gin is, of course, most associated with juniper. But its wild, piney taste doesn't have to dominate the spirit. In some of the newer gins, it's more whisper than shout.

It's fascinating to taste through the six Origin gins, each made with juniper berries sourced from a different microclimate across the planet. So you can compare, for example, a gin made with juniper from Arezzo, Italy, or Valbonë, Albania, with that from Veliki Preslav, Bulgaria, or Istog, Kosovo.

The Proper makes its own Flintridge Native Botanicals Gin, described as "the spirit of the foothills." Caverly foraged some of the botanicals for the first batch on his hikes in the foothills. More than 50% of the botanicals are grown or foraged within 15 miles of La Cañada Flintridge. The recipe includes sage, fennel, grapefruit, lemon, orange, cinnamon — and rose petals for the Rose Bowl and Descanso Gardens down the street.

The gin is a collaborative project between the kitchen and the bar staff. Technically, the Proper's is neutral alcohol infused with flavors rather than distilled, so what's called a compound gin. It makes a batch every two weeks or so, and constantly tastes and re-tastes blind for consistency.

You can sip this brambly, aromatic distillate on its own. But it shines best in "the Frank Flint" cocktail, named for the entrepreneur who tried to establish Flintridge as a resort in the 1920s. What's in it? Flintridge Native Botanicals Gin mixed with white sweet vermouth and Amaro Averna. And garnished with grapefruit rind — local, of course.

The Flintridge Proper, 464 Foothill Blvd., La Cañada Flintridge, (818) 790-4888, www.theproper.com.