

# PLAYBOY

## Join the Barrel-Aged Gin Revolution

By Jason Horn  
May 18, 2016



Photo courtesy of Beekeeper

Bourbon, Scotch, other whiskies, cognac, aged rum and tequila—all spirits that spend time in barrels. But gin?! You may know it as only a clear spirit, but when you age the stuff in wood, it creates all kinds of unique and interesting flavors that make for delicious cocktails.

Though it's only recently become a trend in the craft-spirits world, there's actually a long history of barrel aging gin. What was barely a handful of bottlings just a few years ago has blossomed into a whole new category in and of itself in the last three years or so, with dozens now available. A barrel-aged gin can certainly work in a classic like

the Martini or Negroni, but it offers incredible cocktail versatility: Try one in a traditional whiskey drink—a Manhattan or Old Fashioned—and your mind might just be blown. We've gathered 10 bottles that we think represent the best of the new breed of aged gin.

### **BOLS BARREL AGED GENEVER (\$45)**



Photo courtesy of Bols

Try this one for a real taste of the past. Made from grains and distilled at low proof, Dutch genever is gin's ancestor. And Bols has been making the stuff since 1575, when barrels were the state of the art for transporting liquid of any kind. This particular spirit uses an authentic 19th-century recipe of botanicals including hops, clove, anise and ginger, and then ages in French oak for 18 months. It's malty and mellow, and all those baking-spice notes make it a real holiday treat—try it in Egg Nog!

## CHIEF GOWANUS NEW-NETHERLAND GIN (\$27)



Photo courtesy of New York Distilling Company

Way back in the 1600s, before New York was part of the British Empire, it belonged to the Dutch, and surely those colonists drank a lot of genever. Inspired by this, Brooklyn's New York Distilling Company used an 1809 recipe uncovered by drinks historian David Wondrich to create this concoction. It's a rye whiskey base distilled with juniper and Cluster hops, then aged for three months in oak. It goes especially nicely with citrus—like in a Tom Collins or Gimlet.

## BEEFEATER BURROUGH'S RESERVE GIN (\$70)



Photo courtesy of Beefeater

The venerable Beefeater is perhaps the archetypal London dry gin, with intense juniper flavor and almost no sweetness: not the kind of gin that plays well with barrel-aging. This bottling completely reinvents the brand, using a new set of botanicals, distilling on the tiny original copper still owned by Beefeater founder James Burrough in the 1800s, and aging in casks that held red and white Bordeaux wine. It's a complex sipper, best enjoyed neat alongside fine cheeses or fresh fruit.

## AVIATION AMERICAN GIN OLD TOM (\$50)



Photo courtesy of Aviation

One of the biggest success stories in the craft-spirits world, Aviation American Gin has become a bottle you'll find behind most every great cocktail bar in the country. This special limited edition ages the delicious Aviation formula for a year in barrels that previously held Westward Oregon Straight Malt Whiskey, another tasty product from Portland, Ore.'s House Spirits Distillery. Sadly, you can only get it in Oregon, but that's a great excuse to visit House Spirits' new distillery.

## KOVAL BARRELED GIN (\$49)



Photo courtesy of Koval

A pioneer of Chicago's craft-distillery scene, Koval has been known for whiskey for years but came late to the gin game, releasing its Dry Gin just last year. This brand-new edition ages that spicy-and-floral spirit in Koval's used whiskey barrels, leading to a big punch of oak flavor that's almost difficult to identify as gin. It screams for a spirit-forward cocktail that highlights its taste, like a Manhattan.

## ST. GEORGE DRY RYE REPOSADO GIN (\$50)



Photo courtesy of St. George Distillery

St. George Spirits in Alameda, Calif. is among the most creative distilleries out there, creating a wide variety of tasty booze. It makes three different gins: the more traditional Terroir and Botanivore, as well as Dry Rye, a rye whiskey-based spirit with nice malty character and a mix of peppery spice and fresh citrus from the botanicals. The pink-hued Reposado edition ages in used wine casks, which adds a deep fruitiness. Batches are released roughly annually, so it might be hard to find until the next one comes out in the fall, but it's well worth seeking out.

## RANSOM OLD TOM GIN (\$37)



Photo courtesy of Ransom

Old tom is a sweeter, often (but not always) barrel-aged style of gin that was popular back in the 1800s but almost didn't survive Prohibition. Oregon distillery Ransom was at the forefront of the barrel-aged-gin revolution when it launched this spirit way back in 2009. It's made from a malted-barley wort, which contributes, well, malty flavor, and infused with rich spices like cardamom and angelica. This one will completely change your mind about how a Gin & Tonic is supposed to taste.

## FEW BARREL GIN (\$50)



Photo courtesy of Few Spirits

Few Spirits has only been in business since 2011, but its barrel-aged gin was one of the first on the market in the recent rebirth. This spirit uses botanicals chosen to pair well with the oak and vanilla flavors that come from aging in a mix of new oak and used Few bourbon and rye barrels, including coriander, fennel and a gentle hit of juniper. The result is a spirit that's just about exactly halfway between gin and whiskey. My favorite way to enjoy it is in a Martinez.

## JOURNEYMAN BILBERRY BLACK HEARTS BARREL AGED GIN (\$40)



Photo courtesy of Journeyman

A cousin of the blueberry, the bilberry has a darker color and more intense flavor (thus the nickname black hearts). Michigan distillery Journeyman spotlights the fruit in its Bilberry Black Hearts Gin, but only a small amount gets the honor of barrel aging, spending time in new American oak to create this rich variation. Mix it in any kind of fruity cocktail.

## WIGLE'S BARREL-RESTED GINEVER (\$51)



Photo courtesy of Wigle's

As you might have guessed from the name, this Pittsburgh-distilled spirit is sort of a mix between old-school genever and modern gin flavors. It's distilled from a grain mash, which contributes malty sweetness, and it uses a big burst of juniper along with peppery spices and a little bit of lavender. It's a good one for lighter-bodied traditional whiskey cocktails like a Sour or Buck.

*Jason Horn is Playboy.com's spirits columnist. He lives in Los Angeles and you can follow him on Twitter @messyepicure.*