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Gin for a New Generation

By F. Paul Pacult



Of the four distilled spirits categories—rum, vodka, Tequila and gin—that are collectively called “white spirits,” gin is my hands-down favorite. Why gin over these other admittedly superb white spirits? I choose gin as my pet cocktail base because it is mixable, distinctive and highly adaptable. Unlike vodka, gin rarely goes missing in action in cocktails. Unlike rum, gin isn’t sweet. (Beware of sweetness since it easily overshadows other flavors.) Unlike Tequila, gin isn’t overtly vegetal, herbal or earthy. Gin is, at its best, delicately perfumed with seductive botanicals like juniper berries, nutmeg, lemon peel, ginger, orange peel, cumin, caraway seed, angelica, fennel, cinnamon, coriander and licorice. Gin is about subtlety and harmony, not overstatement or dominance. In its finest expressions both classic and new, gin is more elegant, clean and refreshing than other white spirits.

Audrey Saunders agrees. Saunders, of downtown Manhattan’s hot cocktail lounge, Pegu Club, is one of America’s top professional master mixologists. “Gin is my favorite white spirit because the botanicals stimulate and enliven the palate,” she says. “When used in drinks as a mixer, these botanicals have the ability to cut through the sweetness of liqueurs and sugar. But gin also pushes fruit flavors ‘forward,’ much the way a squeeze of lemon does without altering the flavor profiles. Even a Ramos Fizz with egg and cream doesn’t cloy the way a piña colada can. That’s because the botanicals cut through the sugar and fat while continuing to keep everything else in check.”

Moving beyond the classic dry martini



The Fiancé Cocktail

With vodka owning over a quarter of all distilled spirits sales in the U.S., who exactly is turning on to gin? Mixologist Jacques Bezuidenhout, bar manager at Tres Agaves and Harry Denton's Starlight Room in San Francisco, says he knows: "I've seen a nice shift towards drinking gin in the bar. It's all been...baby boomers growing up and moving towards something with flavor. Almost like the shift from white Zinfandel to stronger, more interesting grape varieties."

The Gin-Gin Mule

Created by Audrey Saunders, master mixologist, Pegu Club, New York City.

2 mint sprigs (1 for muddling, 1 for garnish)

3/4 ounce freshly squeezed lime juice

1 ounce simple syrup

1 ounce ginger beer, preferably homemade [see below]

1-1/2 ounces Tanqueray London Dry Gin

Muddle 1 of the mint sprigs. Mix it with the lime juice and simple syrup. Add the ginger beer, gin and ice. Shake well and strain into an ice-filled, 10-ounce highball glass. Garnish with the remaining mint sprig.

Homemade Ginger Beer

1 cup water

2 tablespoons finely grated fresh ginger

1/2 ounce freshly squeezed lime juice

2 tablespoons light brown sugar

Boil water, remove from stove and add ginger and lime juice. Cover and let stand for one hour. Add sugar and stir. Strain through a fine mesh sieve, pushing down on ginger solids to release ginger extract. Bottle and refrigerate; will keep one week. —F.P.P.

Passion

Created by Jacques Bezuidenhout, bar manager, Tres Agaves & Harry Denton's Starlight Room, San Francisco.

1-3/4 ounce Plymouth Gin

1/4 ounce Campari

1/4 ounce Mandarine Napoleon

2 ounce passion fruit juice or coulis

Many of today's top gin-loving bartenders promote scores of gin-based cocktails other than the dry martini and its manifold variations. Some even advance the argument that young, hip consumers are better introduced to gin through gin cocktails other than the martini because the martini is showing its gray hair.

Building on the not-martini movement are the so-called new-era gins that break away from the traditional London Dry image espoused so successfully by the likes of Tanqueray Special Dry, Beefeater London Dry, Boodles

British London Dry, Gordon's London Dry and Bombay Dry. The new gins, like Tanqueray No. Ten, Hendrick's, Wet by Beefeater, Citadelle, Damrak, Quintessential, Miller's Westbourne Strength Reformed London Dry, South Premium, Old Raj, Sarticious, Broker's, Bombay Sapphire and Zuidam Dry, reach beyond the customary style that tightly focuses on the juniper flavoring element.

Hendrick's claim to fame is its cucumber and rose petal infusions. Wet by Beefeater highlights its unique pear flavoring. Zuidam Dry is intensely orange peel-like while Old Raj has saffron as a primary flavor component. Tanqueray No. Ten is citrusy and clean. These contemporary variations of gin appeal to the Gen-Z audience that, let's face it, is hardly aware of the likes of *The Thin Man*.

What do professional bartenders think of these new-era gins? "I like Hendrick's simply served straight up, with sliced cucumbers and kosher salt on the side," says Jonathan Pogash, owner of Jonathan Pogash Consulting in New York. "It's 'new era' yet with a classic feel. Wet by Beefeater is one of the best contemporary gins and I believe that it will set the trend for future flavored gins."

Pogash believes that gins with heightened flavors that sometimes eclipse the juniper will continue to enter the marketplace. "Flavors, flavors, flavors," he says. "The trend with vodkas and flavorings has seeped their way through not only to rums, but now to gin. I'm not in the least opposed to it. Gin needs a boost...and hopefully this will do it. Spirits companies are listening to consumers' requests and in my experience behind the bar, consumers still want new flavored cocktails and spirits."

Roger Kugler, beverage director at Suba, a contemporary Spanish restaurant in New York, has enhanced a classic gin cocktail, the gimlet, by adding apple purée and

Shake and strain ingredients into a highball glass over fresh ice. Garnish with a lime peel spiral.

The Fiancé Cocktail

Created by Jonathan Pogash, special events bartender and bar consultant, Jonathan Pogash Consulting, New York City.

2 ounce Hendrick's gin

1/2 ounce Darbo Elderflower Syrup

Splash of Moët et Chandon Nectar Impérial Champagne

Rose petal for garnish

Stir the Hendrick's gin and Darbo Elderflower syrup in a metal cocktail shaker. Strain into a chilled Champagne glass and top with Champagne. Garnish with rose petal.

simple syrup to lime juice and Hendrick's Gin, calling it Gimi Hendrick's. Word is that this cleverly named concoction is tearing up the bar at Suba.

But, can today's bartenders see through the forest of vodkas? "I see more and more bartenders challenging themselves and working with gin and then spreading the word," says Bezuidenhout. "I'm not sure if gin will ever reach [the level of] vodka's sales, but I hope for it to grow a lot more and become a bigger player."

Then there's the matter of proof, meaning the rate of alcoholic strength. Gins typically range from 40 percent alcohol (80 proof) by volume on the low end to 47 percent (94 proof) on the high end. Potent Old Raj is 55 percent (110 proof), but that's the exception. Traditional London Dry is around 47 percent.

Saunders points out that the alcohol-by-volume level should dictate how a gin is employed. "In addition to the flavor profiles of each gin, I also take into consideration the proof," he says. In softer cocktails, such as an Aviation, French 75 or a Corpse Reviver, I lean toward an 80-proof. For bolder cocktails such as a Last Word, a Gin-Gin Mule or a Jasmine, I like to use a bolder gin with higher proof. A gin that's 94 proof is a better match for a pungent cocktail [that includes ingredients like] ginger or Chartreuse than an 80-proof gin. Also, if you are going to dilute with club soda, as in a Tom Collins, a higher proof gin works well, too, since it can withstand the dilution without tasting watery or losing its flavor profile."

Learning to taste gin: What's your pleasure?

So many decisions, so many factors, so many gins. What it all comes down to for you, the consumer, is this: treat yourself to a tour through the realm of gin. First experience the stunning range of flavors and styles from among the classics and the new generation of gins by tasting several neat, meaning unadulterated. For example, sample one-half ounce of Tanqueray Special Dry, the iconic classic, followed by one-half ounce of Tanqueray No. Ten, the new expression of Tanqueray. Or, continuing on that theme, compare original Bombay and its new generation sibling, Bombay Sapphire; or traditional Beefeater with Wet by Beefeater.

To understand the different styles of gin through alcoholic strength, pour a one-half ounce flight of Quintessential (40 percent), Plymouth (41.2 percent), Zuidam (44 percent), Beefeater London Dry (47 percent) and Old Raj (55 percent). The higher the proof, the more substantial is the texture of the gin.

If you think that all gins taste alike, you're in for a serious surprise. With every sip, you'll find that each gin is unique because each one owns a distinct recipe of botanicals. Select one or two that enliven your senses, then try them in cocktails. As in all beverage alcohol endeavors, be moderate and use good sense. You'll find that the delight is in the journey; not the goal.

Saunders summed up the case for gin by saying, “You can’t confine gin singularly; each one is different. We all understand that gin must contain juniper as its main ingredient. However, different combinations of botanicals create different flavor profiles, and the distiller decides what he wants to express by careful blending. Without them, you would be drinking vodka.”

Perish the thought.