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Gin, Rediscovered

With hundreds of brands to choose from, there's a gin—and a gin cocktail—to please every palate

BY SALLY KRAL

To many mixologists, gin is the ideal cocktail base. While vodka's character may get muddled or lost in a drink, and whisk(e)y can overpower other ingredients, gin shines in a plethora of tipples.

"I always talk about gin as being the middle sibling between vodka and whisk(e)y," says Jose Cordon, beverage director at Community Tavern in Chicago. "It has the clean body of vodka, but with much more flavor. And it can have the sweetness of whisk(e)y—especially in barrel-aged expressions and Old Tom gins—but it's never overpowering. It's so much smoother, and it plays really well with other ingredients."

Mixologists are particularly drawn to gin for its mixability and versatility. "I like everything about working with gin in cocktails," says Matt Amann, beverage manager at Chicago

restaurant Ceres' Table. "There's an amazing versatility of gin styles that can complement a refreshing cooler or a rich and dense spirit-forward drink—and everything in between."

Rachel Ford, national gin ambassador for Diageo, also speaks highly of gin's ability to work in a wide range of cocktails. "Rather than competing with other flavors, the botanicals in gin complement and add layers of complexity to drinks," she says. "I often joke that gin is the 'little black dress' of cocktails." Diageo owns several gin brands, including Tanqueray, Gordon's and Booth's.

Cocktail culture has bolstered gin's popularity substantially. As more mixologists and consumers explore classic cocktails, they discover that gin-based drinks make up a sizable number of those recipes. The craft distilling boom has also been particularly kind, as hundreds of New American—also known as New Western—gin brands have entered the market in recent years. From St. George in California to North Shore in Chicago and Bluecoat in Philadelphia, these young brands feature a different flavor profile than London Dry and have opened up a whole new world for mixologists and consumers to explore.


Quality Matters

While gin's popularity today is widely evident on bar menus, mixologists and industry professionals note that some consumers are still resistant to the juniper spirit. "The hardest thing about working with gin is the public's resistance to revisiting it," Amann of Ceres' Table says. "More so than any other spirit, many of my clients have a memory from long ago featuring a bottle of bottom-shelf gin and a dreadful hangover. To these people I offer my coy encouragement that gin is like sex: If you don't like it, you're doing it wrong." Amann adds that the most popular gin cocktail at Ceres' Table is his Illuminati (\$10), which comprises sansho pepper-infused Hayman's Royal Dock Navy Strength gin, Cocchi Americano aperitif, fresh lemon juice and simple syrup. "A regular of mine swears he hadn't touched gin in 20 years until he tried the Illuminati," Amann says. "Now he starts every meal with one."



Mixologists are putting their own spins on classic gin cocktails. The California Negroni incorporates poppy liqueur and grapefruit juice.

PHOTO BY (THIS PAGE) KATIE BLANDIN SHEA

A photograph of two martini glasses filled with a clear liquid, likely gin and tonic. Each glass is garnished with a thin, spiral ribbon of cucumber. The glasses are set on a wooden surface. In the background, there is a bowl of fresh fruit, including blueberries and strawberries. The lighting is bright and natural, creating a fresh and elegant atmosphere.

The diverse flavor profiles of different gins create a wealth of possibilities for cocktails. The Origiamiami plays on the cucumber notes of Hendrick's by adding sake and house-made cucumber bitters.

Community Tavern's Cordon similarly notes that consumers who shy away from gin typically haven't been exposed to good-quality offerings, let alone well-made gin cocktails. "The education that has happened over the last decade, particularly the last five years, has been crucial," he explains. "Mixologists have become increasingly inspired by gin, so it's being used more and more. That has translated into educating consumers about the spirit and changing the average drinker's perception of gin. Many consumers have this idea of gin being an old man's spirit, or they had bad experiences with it in college, so showing them that gin can be delicious has been really important."

Indeed, the best way to dispel myths about gin is to serve it in a delicious cocktail according to the consumer's specific taste preference, which is easy to do thanks to the wide range of styles available. "The great thing about gin today is that there's a gin cocktail for everyone," says Kelli Rivers, gin sommelier at the gin-focused San Francisco bar Whitechapel. Cocktails at the venue range from \$10 to \$18. "Whether you're new to gin or a long-time drinker, Whitechapel has a gin-based cocktail for you to enjoy," Rivers explains. "If you like something spirit-driven, I'd recommend the Queen Mother, made with Bombay Sapphire London Dry gin, Dubonnet Rouge aperitif, The King's Ginger liqueur and house-made lemon-celery bitters. If you prefer citrus-forward and refreshing drinks, I'll make you a Gilbert's Melodeon with Sipsmith London Dry gin, Green Chartreuse liqueur, Small Hand Foods pineapple gum syrup, lime juice, mint and soda water."

Gin cocktails today run the gamut, allowing consumers to discover for themselves what style of gin they prefer. "With so many gin cocktails to choose from today, consumers are starting to find that gin is more approachable than they perhaps once believed," Diageo's Ford says.

Calls For Classics

As consumers have warmed up to gin in recent years, they've learned more about the traditional pre-Prohibition cocktails that feature the spirit. "Our consumers are really intrigued by and enjoy classic gin cocktails that had been forgotten, but are now making a comeback," says James Bolt, manager at The Gin Joint in Charleston, South Carolina. "They're calling for time-honored drinks like the Southside, the Clover Club and the Bijou."

For many mixologists and consumers, the classics will always reign supreme. "Although there are many excellent new gin cocktails on bar menus across the country, I always love to focus on the classics," Ford of Diageo says. "I think it's important for consumers to understand that gin was the spirit called for most often in numerous classic cocktails. These are the drinks that truly started it all." Ford's Negroni comprises Tanqueray London Dry, Campari aperitif and Cinzano Rosso sweet vermouth, while



Even the simplest gin cocktails, like the Gin and Tonic, are getting updated for a new generation of consumers. The G & Tea features The London No. 1 gin, St-Germain elderflower liqueur, cold Earl Grey tea and tonic water.

her French 75 blends Tanqueray No. Ten—the brand's citrus-driven, New Western-style variant—with Prosecco (brand varies), fresh lemon juice and simple syrup.

"The best classic cocktails are made with gin—from the Last Word and the French 75 to the Tom Collins and the Dry Martini," says Art Tierce, brand mixologist for Ransom Wines & Spirits. The company produces a Dry and an Old Tom gin. Tierce's Ransom Reviver is based on the classic Corpse Reviver No. 2 and comprises Ransom Old Tom gin, Ransom Dry vermouth, Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao, fresh lemon juice and fresh orange slices, while his Martinez features Ransom Old Tom gin, Ransom Sweet vermouth, Luxardo Maraschino liqueur and Regans' No. 6 Orange bitters. At Community Tavern, Cordon's Martinez, Revisited (\$12) features Liberator Old Tom gin, Cocchi Americano Rosa aperitif, Dolin Rouge sweet vermouth, Luxardo and Fee Brothers Orange bitters.

"The rise in popularity of the classics has shown long-lasting influence on how we approach drinks from behind the bar and how we order them on the other side," Tierce says. "There's beauty in these simple cocktails."

Classic recipes also provide a base to which adventurous mixologists can add their own personal flair. "Gin cocktails are evolving from the path of tried-and-true offerings to inventive house spins on the classics," says Andie Ferman, brand ambassador for St. George Spirits. The craft distillery makes three distinct New Western-style gins, as well as other spirits. At Barmini in Washington, D.C., the Aromatherapy (\$12) is a



The plethora of gin types is yielding a wide range of cocktail flavor profiles. The Aromatherapy (left) features a delicate, herbaceous gin. Robust Old Tom gin anchors the Velvet Glove (center), and malty genever lends a strong foundation to the bittersweet Vandalo (right).

twist on the Tom Collins created by head bartender Jose Rivera. It comprises St. George Terroir gin, Dolin Blanc vermouth, lemon juice, simple syrup, Scrappy's Lavender bitters and soda water.

At the Bernardus Lodge & Spa's Lucia bar and restaurant in Carmel Valley, California, the California Negroni (\$15) comprises St. George Botanivore gin, Greenbar Grand Poppy liqueur, Vya Sweet vermouth, fresh grapefruit juice and Bar Cart Cocktail Co. Spring bitters. The drink was created by Kate Blandin Shea, founder of cocktail catering service Bar Cart Cocktail Co. Also putting a regional twist on a classic, Philadelphia Distilling touts the Philadelphia Clover Club. The drink comprises the company's Bluecoat American Dry gin, Dolin Blanc vermouth, fresh-pressed lemon juice, home-made raspberry syrup and egg white.

"For me, a Gin Sour or Gimlet is always a popular profile because it's a comfortable, refreshing drink that you can accent with liqueurs, bitters, syrups or other modifiers," says Allen Katz,

cofounder of New York Distilling Co. and director of spirits education and mixology for Southern Wine & Spirits of New York. New York Distilling has three gin brands: Perry's Tot Navy Strength, Dorothy Parker and Chief Gowanus. The Shanty, the company's full-service bar, offers the 700 Songs Gimlet (\$10), created by bar director Nate Dumas and featuring Perry's Tot, fresh lime juice, simple syrup and house-made cinnamon syrup.

Another classic and simple gin cocktail recipe, the Gin and Tonic, has been experiencing a resurgence lately. "The growth of premium tonics shows that the Gin and Tonic still rules," says Andy Taylor, director of marketing for Vin Divino. The company imports The London No. 1 gin, which touts a twist on the Gin and Tonic called The G & Tea, featuring the brand with St-Germain elderflower liqueur, cold Earl Grey tea and tonic water. Langley's No. 8 gin offers the Grapefruit and Basil Signature Serve: Langley's No. 8 and Fever-Tree tonic water, garnished with a wedge of fresh grapefruit and basil leaves.

Gin-Based Cocktail Recipes

AROMATHERAPY By Jose Rivera

Ingredients:

1½ ounces St. George Terroir gin;
¾ ounce Dolin Blanc vermouth;
¾ ounce fresh lemon juice;
¾ ounce simple syrup;
1 dash Scrappy's Lavender bitters;
1 ounce soda water;
Lavender flower.

Recipe:

Combine gin, vermouth, juice, syrup and bitters in an ice-filled cocktail shaker and shake vigorously. Fine-strain into an ice-filled Collins glass and top with soda water. Garnish with a fresh lavender flower.

VELVET GLOVE By James Bolt

Ingredients:

1 ounce Ransom Old Tom gin;
1 ounce Vago Espadin mezcal;
¾ ounce Green Chartreuse liqueur;
¾ ounce Dolin Blanc vermouth;
½ ounce Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao;
2 dashes Angostura bitters;
Lemon peel;
Cucumber ribbon.

Recipe:

Combine gin, mezcal, Chartreuse, vermouth, Curaçao and bitters in an ice-filled mixing glass. Add ice and stir until slightly diluted. Strain into a chilled Nick and Nora glass, express a lemon peel over the drink and discard peel. Garnish with a cucumber ribbon.

VANDALO By Matt Amann

Ingredients:

1¾ ounces Distillerie de Biercée
Peket de Houyeu genever;
¾ ounce Cynar amaro;
½ ounce honey syrup¹;
3 dashes Regan's No. 6 Orange bitters;
Lemon peel.

Recipe:

Combine genever, amaro, syrup and bitters in an ice-filled mixing glass and stir until properly chilled. Strain into a cocktail glass. Express the oil of a lemon peel over the drink and use peel as garnish.

¹Mix equal parts honey and water by volume.

Complementary Flavors

Thanks to the range of different botanicals that can be used to make gin, the ingredients that blend well with the spirit are seemingly endless. "Citrus, herbs, liqueurs and savory ingredients all work wonderfully with gin—and that's just to name a few," The Gin Joint's Bolt says. "The sky's the limit with flavor combinations." His Death Grip (\$10) features Bristow gin, Rothman & Winter Orchard Apricot liqueur, Jeppson's Malört wormwood liqueur, Kina L'Aéro d'Or aperitif, Tippleman's Ginger Honey syrup, lemon juice, honey, muddled gooseberries and Peychaud's bitters.

"If a gin features a particular aromatic ingredient—like Hendrick's with rose and cucumber or Sacred with pink grapefruit and cardamom—it's a good idea to play along with those flavors to accent the spirit's major components," says Amann of Ceres' Table. At Driftwood Room, a restaurant and bar inside the Nautilus Hotel in Miami Beach, Florida, the Origiamiami (\$15) blends Hendrick's with Soto Junmai Daiginjo sake and house-made cucumber bitters, while The Botanist (\$15) features Aviation gin, fresh celery and lime juices, and agave nectar.

Taking a chef-like approach to making cocktails is not uncommon today—in fact, the trend of using fresh fruits and vegetables and other culinary ingredients has been on the rise of late. At The Gin Joint, Bolt's White Collar (\$10) blends St. George Terroir gin, Yellow Chartreuse liqueur, egg white, parsnip and lemon juices, house-made orgeat and vanilla syrups, and house-made wormwood bitters. At the San Francisco restaurant Monsieur Benjamin, the Way Back When (\$11), created by chef Jason Berthold, features St. George Dry Rye gin, Luxardo Maraschino liqueur, Yellow Chartreuse, and celery-mint-dill and lemon juices.

"More bartenders think of gin as part of their spice arsenal," St. George's Ferman says. "If vodka is the salt in a cocktail, then gin is a cabinet full of amazing spices that can tantalize and inspire."

Room To Grow

Perhaps the gin category's most defining feature is how rapidly it has expanded in recent years. "Thirty years ago, there were just eight or so gin brands; today there are hundreds here in the United States," Diageo's Ford says. "With such variety, bartenders are making decisions based on flavor profiles to create different effects in their gin-based drinks. The result is an assortment of gin cocktails with a variety of nuances."

Indeed, as the gin category grows, so does the range of cocktails that can be made with gin—and the number of fans. Vodka loyalists can become gin drinkers thanks to New American styles

that work well in delicate, refreshing cocktails. "Explaining that London Dry isn't the only style of gin and that modern American gins have more complex notes has opened the palates of average consumers and helped push the popularity of the spirit," Community Tavern's Cordon says. He adds that the bar's most popular cocktail is the 37th Chamber (\$12), which comprises Thai basil-infused North Shore Distiller's No. 6 gin, St. George Spiced Pear liqueur, palm sugar simple syrup and fresh lemon juice. At The Shanty, Dumas' The Acerbic Mrs. Parker (\$11) features Dorothy Parker gin, Combiér L'Original Orange liqueur, house-made hibiscus syrup and fresh lemon juice.

Adventurous drinkers, meanwhile, can explore Old Tom gin, Navy Strength gin, barrel-aged expressions and genever in bolder, more spirit-driven concoctions. At Whitechapel, owner Alex Smith's The Modern Prometheus (\$14) features Hayman's Royal Dock Navy Strength gin, Diep 9 Oude genever, Plymouth Sloe gin, John D. Taylor Velvet Falernum liqueur, Absente absinthe, simple syrup, cinnamon-infused Angostura bitters, and grapefruit and lime juices. At The Gin Joint, Bolt's Velvet Glove (\$10) comprises Ransom Old Tom gin, Vago Espadin mezcál, Green Chartreuse, Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao and Angostura bitters.

"I enjoy a spirit that stands up for itself and isn't afraid to be aggressive in its qualities," says Amann of Ceres' Table. His Vandalo (\$10) blends

Distillerie de Biercée Peket dè Houyeu genever with Cynar amaro, house-made honey syrup and Regans' No. 6 Orange bitters. Bols genever, meanwhile, touts the Full Disclosure Falco, featuring the brand with Cognac Park VSOP Cognac, Noilly Prat Dry vermouth, Yellow Chartreuse and Regans' No. 6 Orange bitters. The drink was created by Cognac Park brand ambassador Naomi Schimek.

"Our taste buds have matured over the last 40 years to find bitter, herbal and otherwise non-sweet flavors pleasing to the palate," New York Distilling's Katz says. At The Shanty, Dumas' The Superfund (\$11) highlights Chief Gowanus gin. New York Distilling based the product on historical recipes, resulting in a brand that Katz refers to as a "whiskey-gin hybrid." The drink also features Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao, Pernod absinthe, simple syrup and Fee Brothers Whiskey Barrel-Aged bitters.

"Gin is a dynamic spirit category," St. George's Ferman says. "It's constantly challenging imaginative bartenders to create cocktails that allow for a symphony of flavors, spices, herbs and botanicals to fill a vessel with song—not just a single note."

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The Death Grip is wildly complex, blending gin, apricot and wormwood liqueurs, bitter aperitif, ginger, honey, lemon, gooseberries and bitters.