

GIN – a brief description

Definition

2 legal classifications of London gin – 'Gin' and 'Distilled Gin'

- 'Gin' is a flavoured spirit with a minimum strength of 37.5% abv with the main flavour being juniper.
- A 'Distilled Gin' must be made by a process in which the juniper and other natural flavourings are distilled with the spirit in a pot still
- There is also an Appellation around Plymouth Gin in that it must be made in Plymouth.

History

- It is believed that monks have been distilling spirits with juniper and other herbs since the 12th century
- Ancestor of gin is credited to a Professor of medicine at Holland's Leyden University called Dr. Sylvius. He was working on a treatment for kidney problems during the mid-1600's. He had heard of the diuretic qualities of juniper and was infusing it into alcohol with other herbs noted for their medical properties. The drink gained local notoriety under the name 'Genever' or 'Jenever' (which is how gin is still known in Holland).
- British soldiers fighting in Holland during the 17th century found the spirit, which they called 'Hollands'. It is the 'Hollands' that gained the nickname 'Dutch Courage' as it gave the English soldiers the heart and resolve to fight away from home.
- Its true English popularity came when William of Orange became King of England in 1689 (King William III). He declared war on the French and supported the war by banning all French imports, which included brandies and wines. With no Cognacs or wines, rums had not yet been established and whiskies being drunk only by the Scots and Irish, Genever (abbreviated to Gin) became the drink of choice.
- To re-enforce this, government passed a law 1690 encouraging the distillation in England of brandy and spirits from corn. This meant that anybody could distill grain spirit for an extremely low tax. Hundreds of back-street distilleries sprung up with only a handful making good products.
- By the 1720's, London's streets were awash with gin, much of it made with bad or poisonous ingredients and sold cheaply from street vendors. It was nicknamed 'mother's ruin' as many addicted women neglected their children in favour of getting dosed up on gin. It created a social problem that was rivaled by the crack cocaine problem of America slums in the 1980's. To tackle this problem, government passed a series of laws from 1729 to restrict the sale and distillation of gin while encouraging beer production and sale. By the 1760's the situation was under relative control with the poorer classes back drinking beer in back-street taverns
- In 1825, the government again tried to free the trade in spirits. This time, to compete with beer taverns, the gin sellers opened up large, opulent establishments known as 'Gin Palaces'. The hard liquor was a welcome change to the repressive factory conditions of the industrial revolution in England. Unfortunately, as before, entire families were getting drunk in these new venues so taxes were raised to make spirits expensive and beer cheap again.

Most gin is still made in the UK but Genever is still made in Holland and Spain makes a lot of gin with brands such as Larios and Xorigeur. Gin is also made outside of Europe. In California, Junipero is made by the Anchor Steam distillery and the vodka label 42 Below also make South Gin using botanicals native to New Zealand such as the Boa Boa Tree (SAM). There is a modern trend moving towards new 'boutique' gins to appeal to a broader section of the drinking market. Brands such as Millers, Blackwoods and Hendricks are using newer and softer, more feminine botanicals such as cucumber, rose petals and lavender to create a more cocktail friendly gin that can be easier to put into a vodka drinkers hand.

Production

There are several different ways of making Gin. In all these ways, the gin producer has to buy the neutral alcohol base from an outside supplier. If it is a grain spirit, it is usually from wheat or barley, however, the neutral spirit can come from any source. If a sweeter style (such as Old Tom Gin) is required, the distiller may opt to use molasses spirit for a sugared edge:

- **Cold Compounding** – This is the process used in making cheaper (supermarket) gins rather than distilled gins. A neutral spirit is used as a base to which oils and flavour essences are added to give the notes of juniper and other botanicals. The flavours are not 'fixed' into the spirit and are therefore lost very easily once the bottle is opened. This process makes a gin often referred to as 'bath-tub' gin
- **Distilled Gin** – The aim of making a gin is to extract the essence of the botanicals into the spirit and then reduce its abv with water before bottling. Different gin producers will use different botanical recipes and methods of infusion but they will use one of the following methods
- **One-Shot Method** – With the one-shot method, juniper and the other botanicals are macerated in the neutral spirit and water according to the distillers' recipe. This maceration may go on for up to 48 hours. The botanicals are strained off and the spirit is poured into the still. The distillation occurs in a copper pot still. Some producers will distill with the botanicals in the still to further fix the flavours in the gin. Water is then added to the gin before bottling
- **Two-Shot Method** – This is quicker method and saves on still usage (therefore more economically viable). In this method, a much stronger mix of botanicals is used in the maceration and distillation process. This is used as a concentrate and mixed with neutral spirit alcohol to increase the final volume. Water is then added to the gin before bottling. The main brand using this method today is Gordon's Gin
- **Vapour Infusion Method** – With this technique, the botanicals are not macerated with the neutral spirit. They are placed in a basket or cage in the neck of the still. The alcohol vapours pass over them during distillation and pick up the flavours for the gin. The main brand using this method today is Bombay Sapphire (the Carterhead Still)

Jenever

Jenever (also known as Geneva, Genever and Hollands), like gin, is a juniper flavoured spirit. It is made in a more complicated method that allows for more of the flavours from the original base spirit to come through in the final product. It is less neutral than London Dry Gins and is regularly sold with fruit flavourings – citrus is a popular choice.

Jenever is made in Holland (centered at Schiedam near Rotterdam) and Belgium (centred around

Hasselt and Ghent) and would have been the spirit nicknamed 'Dutch Courage' by the English soldiers fighting in Europe in the 1600's. It is also the spirit that would have come home back to England with the troops helping gin to gain its initial notoriety.

Jenever is made in a more complicated way to gin. It is made by blending two spirits together – 'Moutwijn' (malt wine) and botanically flavoured neutral spirit (gin). The malt wine is double or triple distilled in a pot still to a relatively low strength (approx 45-50%). It is made from a mixture of rye, malted barley and wheat and has the characteristics of an un-aged whisky. It is this malt wine that gives Jenever its distinctive flavour when compared to the English styles of gin. The botanically flavoured neutral spirit is essentially gin only using less conventional botanicals such as caraway and aniseed. The blend of the two spirits is determined by the producer according to the style of Jenever they are making – 'Jonge', 'oude' or 'kornwijn'.

Jonge Jenever

This style was developed during the 1950's in response to consumer demands for a lighter, more approachable style of Jenever. It typically has around 5% malt wine content and fewer botanicals in the 'gin' component. It is called 'jonge' Jenever as it is a 'young' style rather than being lightly aged.

Oude Jenever

'Oude' refers to the 'Old' style of traditional Jenever rather than the spirit being aged. It must contain a minimum of 15% malt wine and will often have more botanicals than the 'jonge' style. Heavier botanicals such as myrrh and aloe are often used to match the maltier note emerging from heavier use of malt wines.

Kornwijn

Kornwijn styles of Jenever are cask aged by law. They must also contain a minimum of 51% malt wine. This makes them much heavier and richer as the malty character from the malt wine ages in the cask making woody, wined flavours emerge.

Botanicals

There are over 300 different botanicals a gin producer can use. They will normally use between six and twelve different ones to give character to the gin as well as market differentiation. If more than ten are used, often the flavours of the gin are over-complicated and lost when mixed. Fewer botanicals give a greater definition to the character of the gin without losing its complexity. The three main botanicals used are juniper berries, coriander and angelica.

Almond

The almond is native to South West Asia. Both the bitter and sweet almond can be used in gin production. They are hard and so have to be ground into a powder before distillation of the gin. It gives a marzipan, nutty, spicy flavour to the gin.

Angelica

This is an aromatic root normally found in the northern areas of France, Belgium, and Germany, and

occasionally in southern Norway. It is used as a fixative for the flavours and aromas imparted by the other botanicals. It also gives a musky, nutty, woody, sweet flavour with a piney, dry edge.

Aniseed

Aniseed is the fragrant seed of the anise plant (*Pimpinella anisum*), which has been used for centuries as a spice for cooking and as a medicinal herb. It is a small plant found in North Africa and Southern Europe which tastes like liquorice candy. It is also used to flavour beverages other than gin, such as Anisette and Campari. The related star anise is employed for such spirits as Sambuca

Calamus

Aromatic herb from Asia, Calamus may be taken from climbing palm tree. It was known to the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates as a digestive tonic.

Caraway

This is a biennial European plant, a member of the parsley family. Its fruits are small, spicy, aromatic seeds, widely used in cooking and flavouring. These seeds have been found in archaeological digs in Switzerland where they were dated as early as 6000 B.C.

Cardamoms

Cardamoms are seeds taken from plants, members of the ginger family, which grow in India and China. Cardamoms are the third most expensive spice in the world after vanilla and saffron.

Cassia

Cassia (Chinese cinnamon) is derived from any number of shrubs or trees belonging to the Senna family. It is used as a flavouring agent, though the pulp of the seed pods is useful as a laxative. Primarily the dried buds are employed. Cassia is a member of the cinnamon family. It comes from the Acacia tree that grows in Vietnam, China and Madagascar. It gives a cinnamon note to the gin.

Cinnamon

Cinnamon is the spice we all know which adds heat and flavour to almost everything. It comes from the inner bark of a number of varieties of the laurel tree, and in the preparation of gin is mainly used as an undertone.

Citrus Peel – The peels are used rather than the flesh as they hold a larger portion of the flavoursome oils than the flesh. The fruit comes from Spain and is dried before use in the gin. Lemon gives a fresh, light, citrus note with the orange giving a bitter-sweet note.

Coriander

Coriander is a parsley-like plant (the fresh leaves are familiar as cilantro) whose pungent, strong-smelling seeds have longitudinal ridges. It's one of the oldest known spices, and has long been considered a medicinal herb which can strengthen the 'wind' or breath by its beneficial effect upon the lungs and respiratory system. The seeds come from Morocco, Romania, Moldavia and Bulgaria. The taste they give varies according to where they come from. The seeds give a mellow, spicy, fragrant and aromatic note with a gingery, lemon-sage t

Cubeb

These berries are the fruits of a shrub, a member of the "pepper family usually grown in Eastern India. They have been used for centuries as an herb for the treatment of urinary problems and bronchial ailments. In the last century and even continuing in some quarters as late as the 40s, they were smoked in the form of cigarettes. They come from Java and give a spicy, lemon-pine flavour to the gin.

Cumin

This spice is an annual of the carrot family with fennel like leaves. It is used mainly in cooking and in

Eastern; countries as a condiment. It's also a vital ingredient in the favourite dish of the South-Western United States- chilli.

Fennel

Fennel is a tall stout herb of the parsley family with yellow flowers whose seeds are highly pungent and used in many cooking sauces. It serves as an aromatic fixative when used in gin. The plant can grow quite large, sometimes reaching 15 feet in height. It is cultivated in the U.S. as an herb for its seeds, and to use as a spice in cooking.

Ginger

The spice ginger comes from a root structure, or rhizome, of the ginger plant. It's very commonly used in cooking and is regarded as a general tonic.

Grains of Paradise

These are intensely peppery berries from West Africa. The seeds of a plant (*Aframomum Melegueta*) which is a member of the ginger family, they can be used to intensify the flavouring effects of all the other botanicals in gin. These small dark brown berries are also a member of the pepper family. They give a hot, spicy, peppery flavour to the gin with hints of lavender, elderflower and mint.

Juniper

These berries are small, hard, and purplish-coloured. The use of these berries, or the oil pressed from them, imparts a piney, evergreen odour and taste; the smell sometimes even begins to hint at turpentine. The juniper bush is indeed a member of the pine family and has been known for centuries as a strong diuretic which has the affect of cleaning out the kidneys.

By law this is the main flavour element in gin. Juniper comes from Italy and the former Yugoslavia, with the best ones coming from Tuscany. They are handpicked between October and February. They give a fragrant, spicy, bittersweet taste with overtones of pine, lavender and camphor with a peppery finish.

Lemon

The peel of this fruit is used to impart the citrus astringency which gives gin its clean, dry nose and taste. Since only the zest or coloured portion of the peel is used as a gin flavouring agent, only the oil from the peel is actually transferred. The best lemons are grown in Italy and Spain.

Liquorice

is the root of a perennial herb found in central and southern Europe. It's used in both medicine and candy-making, and imparts the well-known piquant flavour, very similar to that which can also be obtained from aniseed.

Nutmeg

Nutmeg is an aromatic kernel of the fruit of various tropical trees (genus *Myristica*), especially those of the nutmeg tree, which imparts a musky flavour and aroma to gin.

Orange

The peel of both bitter and sweet oranges is used, bitter to lend astringency in a manner similar to lemons, and sweet to give an impression of sweetness. Since only the zest or coloured part of the peel is used, there is no transference of true sugars, only the 'impression' of these.

Orris

Orris is the root of the Florentine iris. It has a very perfumed flavour and helps fix the flavours in the gin. It is very hard and requires heavy grinding into a powder before use. It has an aroma of violets, earth and cold tea. It comes mainly from Florence in Italy, although it is also grown in Peru and Morocco

Rosemary

leaves are used as a spice and come from the rosemary plant, an evergreen fragrant shrub (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) of the mint family. This plant grows in southern Europe and western Asia and usually has small blue flowers. It has traditionally been cultivated for its stimulating and refreshing aromas.

Savory

Savory is a hardy, annual, aromatic herb of the mint family, used to bring out the flavours of the other herbs

Brands

Beefeater

This is the only London Dry Gin to still be made in London. James Burrough founded the company in 1863 whilst working as a pharmacist. The same recipe he perfected in 1863 is still used today. It uses only six botanicals and is seen as a classic style of gin.

Bombay Sapphire

Bombay Sapphire was developed in the 1980's from the Original Bombay Gin (which was developed from the original Greenalls Gin recipe). It has ten botanicals that they advertise on the side of the bottle. It is made in a Carterhead still using the vapour infusion method of distillation.

Gordon's

The recipe for this gin was created in 1769 and has not changed since (although the two-shot method is now used in its production). It is a low strength gin at only 37.5% abv, but is one of the largest selling gin brands in the world.

Greenall's

The recipe for Greenall's gin was created in 1761 by Thomas Dakin. It is triple distilled using the vapour infusion method (although in different stills to Bombay Sapphire) with eight botanicals.

Junipero

The Anchor Distilling Company makes Junipero in San Francisco. It uses over 12 botanicals and is made in small batches. It is one of the stronger gins at 49.3% abv. The Anchor Distillery is one of the few distilleries in the world that makes more than one spirit (they also make Old Potrero Rye Whisky).

Millers

Millers Gin was only founded a few years ago by the Reformed Spirits Company, London. It makes a new style gin in old-fashioned ways. They macerate the botanicals before and during distillation and then ship the distillate to Iceland where pure glacial water is added to bring it to bottling strength.

Plymouth

The Blackfriars distillery in Plymouth is the oldest distillery in England dating from 1793. It has its

own appellation protecting Plymouth Gin (as opposed to London Dry Gin). The water must come from a specific source, no bitter botanicals can be used and it must be made in Plymouth. There are a total of seven botanicals in Plymouth Gin (Juniper, coriander seeds, lemon and orange peel, angelica root, orris root and cardamom seeds). The still that makes Plymouth Gin has been in operation for over 155 years. The Pilgrim Fathers stayed at the Dominican Priory (where the distillery is situated) before leaving for the 'New World' in 1620 although the priory dates back to 1431.

Tanqueray

Charles Tanqueray founded this gin in 1830. It is widely exported over the world but has a huge market in the US. The bottle was designed to mimic the shape of a 1920's cocktail shaker. It uses eight botanicals and is quadruple distilled in Cameronbridge, Scotland, in the No. 4 "Old Tom" still. A deluxe version of the gin is also made called Tanqueray No. 10, which uses fresh botanicals and is distilled in a smaller still – the No. 10 still.

South

South Gin is made by the same company that makes 42 Below vodka. South uses botanicals native to New Zealand. It uses 42 Below wheat vodka as its spirit base.

Hendricks

Hendricks is made in Scotland and is a new 'boutique' style of gin. It lists rose petals and cucumber amongst its botanicals.

Xorigeur

Xorigeur is made in Menorca, Spain. It is bottled at the strength it comes off the still after the second distillation – 38%. It is the unusually low distillation strength that gives the gin its full character.

Larios

Larios is the best selling gin in Spain. It is packaged in the distinctive yellow label with red writing

Thanks

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Tanqueray No.10 by Frankie Walker @ Lion Nathan

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