



## The Revival of the Classic Spirit Calls for a Primer on How to Use its Diverse Incarnations in Traditional and Contemporary Creations

By Kelly A. Magyarics

# Gin Goes Global

**D**uring America's Golden Age of Cocktails in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was common and even expected for bartenders to use different gins in different cocktails to assure synergy of flavors. Though both Prohibition and the growth of the vodka industry after World War II squashed gin's popularity, the resurgence of classic mixology in the last decade has seen the spirit rebounding with a vengeance. Today, traditional London Dry gins and their sweeter counterpart Old Tom gins are joined by the relaunched Plymouth gin and modern New World styles, whose botanical formulas tone down juniper in favor of other aromatic components.

The myriad gins available mean bartenders need to know each style's flavor profile and intricacies, as well as the most sublimely compatible ingredient matches that articulate the included botanicals. We asked leading mixologists, distillers and brand ambassadors to decipher the process of selecting the right gin for the right drink.

Overtly and unapologetically juniper-dominated London Dry remains the classic standard for the category. Brands including

Beefeater, Tanqueray and Bombay Dry, for example, work best with traditional drinks that emphasize a dry characteristic, explains Bobby Heugel, owner of Anvil Bar & Refuge in Houston. "Their strong juniper backbones and dryness allow them to balance other ingredients that would otherwise overpower cocktails." Thus, he uses London Dry gins in Martinis, but also speaks to their ability to offset richer and sweeter drinks. The inclusion of liqueurs Green Chartreuse and Luxardo Maraschino in Anvil's Last Word cocktail, for example, is tamed by the potent dryness of Bombay.

Brian Miller, head bartender at New York's Death & Company, agrees. "I think the three biggies are Plymouth, Beefeater and Tanqueray," he says. "They all play well with the classics, are very well balanced and fill just about every need I have in a gin. They are the epitome of what gin is — juniper and aromatic."

In the same vein as London Dry is Old Tom gin, similarly flavored but sweetened, rendering it richer and rounder. This style of gin was the 19th century standard, seen in drinks such as the Martinez and Tom Col-

lins. Hayman's reintroduced the style, but it's not yet widely available in the U.S.

First distilled in 1793, Plymouth is the only legally protected style of gin in the world, produced solely within the city limits of Plymouth, England. Before Prohibition, Plymouth was the best-selling gin in the United States, but it saw a decline during World War II. The company relaunched it in the U.S. in 2002, and it's been a staple ever since in classically minded drinks programs.

"For me, Plymouth starts with some bright citrus notes from the lemon and sweet orange peel. However, the earthy botanicals like angelica, orris root and coriander soon show up with the juniper. Angelica provides a slightly sweet note balanced by cardamom pods," explains Simon Ford, director of trade outreach and brand education for Pernod Ricard USA. He describes

(Clockwise, from top left): The backbar at San Francisco's 15 Romolo and NYC's Death & Company offer numerous gin expressions; 15 Romolo's interior; Scott Baird and Aaron Smith, managing partners of 15 Romolo; Death & Company's interior; First Growth cocktail at Houston's Anvil; and inside Anvil.

Plymouth as a rounded, balanced gin where all botanicals are evident both on the nose and palate, with none being overbearing.

Mixologists like H. Joseph Ehrmann, proprietor of San Francisco's Elixir, cite Plymouth's soft, smooth character as the reason it's so versatile and easily mixable — it's his go-to choice for a Martini in its many guises.

New and exciting on the gin scene is the

New Western Dry category, represented by brands like Hendrick's, Aviation, No. 209, North



**"The same drink is completely different depending on the gin you use. Play around with different gins and find the perfect match for each."**

—**Brian Miller, Death & Company**

Shore Distiller's Gin No. 6, Right and G'Vine. These spirits typically downplay juniper — whose "pine needle" comparisons can be off-putting to some consumers — in favor of alternative and at times eclectic aromas and flavors like rose, lavender, citrus and cardamom.

"New Western gins generally have unique identifying traits that are their signature, and these traits should be considered for cocktails," Heugel believes. Because the personality differences between, say, the noticeably spicy North Shore No. 6 and

the lighter, more citrus-forward No. 209 are much more pronounced than between London Dry styles, New Western gins need to be carefully considered individually rather than lumped together into a category.

Scott Baird and Aaron Smith, managing partners at San Francisco's 15 Romolo, suggest getting to know each New Western product by first blind tasting the spirits side by side. Note the standouts, and use each in a traditional Gimlet and Martini. Finally, mix them in traditionally vodka-based drinks like Lemon Drops and Cosmopolitans "to see where the gin stands." Baird and Smith admit it's a time-consuming process that's more work for bartenders, but one that can't be omitted because various brands in this style of gin are not easily or successfully interchangeable in cocktails.

Scotland's Hendrick's, released in 2000, is considered a pioneer in New Western gin. Charlotte Voisey, portfolio brand ambassador for William Grant & Sons USA, describes Hendrick's as a delicate spirit with "a focus on the fresh and delicate cucumber and rose [that] shows best when mixed with other delicate ingredients like lemongrass, pink grapefruit, rhubarb, light Vermouths, Amaros and bitters and cucumber, of course." Heugel's First Growth combines the gin with pineapple juice, sage leaves and a touch of floral St-Germain.

However, he points out that because the perceptible level of juniper in Hendrick's is so understated, some may not even classify it as gin. "Gin folks are often as set in their ways as single malt Scotch drinkers," concurs Arne Hillesland, Ginerator for No. 209 gin. "To some of these folks, the new gins are not 'ginny' enough for them." Regardless of semantics or strict categorical definitions, Voisey notes that modern gins with smaller amounts of juniper open more doors to experimentation, while classic brands can provide the patron with a true cocktail experience from yesteryear.

No. 209's formula ventures down what Hillesland refers to as the "citrus/spice road," with cardamom, cassia bark and bergamot, and just enough juniper to make it recognizable as gin. Bartenders usually either highlight its citrus in drinks like the Tom Collins, Rickey, and the White Lady, or hone in on the cardamom by making cocktails with infused syrups or savory spice bitters.

"If the wide world of gin were a solar system, Tanqueray London Dry and Beefeater Gin would definitely be the sun, Plymouth might be Mercury, and without a doubt, Aviation would be one of the furthest outlying planets," waxes Ryan Magarian, co-creator of Aviation Gin, distilled in Portland, Ore. Magarian remains one of the biggest advocates of New Western Style Gins, and he strives to promote the category by educating consumers and operators.

In creating Aviation, Magarian studied the American definition of gin and found that while juniper can be predominant, it need not be overwhelming. In Aviation, cardamom and lavender are most prevalent, which easily mix with lemon and lime.

For bartenders looking to expand their gin program, Magarian recommends offering an adequately round selection to maximize versatility, including crowd-pleasers like Tanqueray, Beefeater and Bombay, along with Old Tom, Plymouth and two to three modern gins. Once the bottles are on the backbar, he suggests making each gin-based cocktail on the menu with each brand, noting which seamlessly match — and which clash. "Each gin is different and brings something unique to the cocktail," adds Miller. Since "new" cocktails are just twists on old ones, first add several classics to your menu: the Gimlet, Martini, Martinez, Negroni and the Aviation. "Don't run before you can walk," cautions Magarian.

Successful gin programs involve tasting, testing, tweaking and fine-tuning. Elixir's Ehrmann reminds bartenders that the process isn't unlike what takes place in the kitchen. "Just as a chef knows which ingredients to go to to find the flavors and textures they want in a recipe, the mixologist has to understand every spirit on their backbar and know what to grab in order to achieve their goals." In essence, each gin is like a unique spice mixture, waiting for the right dish to make it sing. **NCB**

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