



Huffington Post  
June 2013  
United Kingdom

THE HUFFINGTON POST  
BREAKING NEWS AND OPINION

*"Citadelle is one of my favorite gins-that-don't-really-taste-like-gin."*

## This Father's Day, Give the Gift of Gin

Written by Tony Sachs

Posted: 06/13/2013 10:14 am

When my wife was pregnant and I was panicking about anything a stay-at-home dad-to-be could possibly panic about, three words kept me sane. In fact, they became a mantra of sorts, which I delightedly repeated whenever thoughts of dealing with years of poopy diapers, baby puke and other assorted infant effluvia became too much to bear:

Martini-soaked playdates.

The plan was to find some other stay-at-home dads, arrange get-togethers with them and their little sprogs, and get plowed on "olive soup," while the babies did, you know, baby things. Slept or pooped or gurgled happily or what have you. Everything would be fine and dandy with a glass of restorative gin and vermouth and the company of my fellow dadly dudes.

Well, it didn't turn out quite that way. Despite our seeming ubiquity, at least in the blogosphere, I never ran into many other stay-at-home fathers. The various mommy and nanny cliques at Gymboree and the playground wouldn't have me, either. Drinking anything, let alone several ounces of gin and vermouth, while chasing after a toddler is not at all recommended. And don't get me started on the cocktail glass -- a vessel that is clearly, based on my experience, not designed to hold its contents while playing kickball. Of course, downing a 'tini or two after her bedtime is somewhat easier, but the aftereffects (read: hangovers) and ass-crack-of-dawn wakeup times make it... slightly less appealing.

Nobody ever tells you how hard it's going to be to drink martinis on a regular basis after you have a child. I wish someone had told me. Not that I would have changed my mind about bringing my daughter into the world, mind you. I just wish I'd been a little more emotionally prepared and a little less deluded.

It's with this in mind that I encourage moms, over-21 kids and other father-friendly types to salute Dad this Father's Day with a bottle of gin. You may be saying, "What about vodka?" Well, your dad made sure you didn't drink bleach or furniture polish when you were a toddler. Return the favor by making sure the fathers in your life don't drink vodka martinis.

There are approximately 12 zillion gins on the market in this miraculous day and age. Your average drinking dad has probably tried a handful of the usual suspects: Beefeater, Bombay Sapphire, Tanqueray, Gordon's. Good gins they are, and I'm sure Dad would love a bottle. But the 11 I've recommended are a little off the beaten path. Fatherhood is one great big adventure, after all, so why not get a little adventurous on his day?

My criteria for a good gin: Does it taste good in a martini? Does it taste good in a gin and tonic? If the answers to both are "yes," then that's good enough for me, and everything else is a [bonus](#). Most people aren't

going to take their gins neat, after all, and while Negronis and Ramos Gin Fizzes and Last Words are great cocktails, chances are most drinkers don't imbibe them as often as good old 'tinis and G & T's.

No matter what gin you get Dad this Father's Day, you must also get him another gift to go with it. No, I'm not talking about vermouth, although that's a dandy idea too. I mean you must give him some uninterrupted 'tini time, away from the kids and the day-to-day grind, as well as a few hours of post-imbibing recovery time. It's a gift you can't wrap, but believe me, it'll be treasured. (If my wife is reading, yes, this applies to you too.)

**BOMBAY DRY GIN** (England; 40 percent alcohol by volume, suggested retail price \$30). In 1987, Bombay Sapphire changed the world of gin forever by adding botanicals like grains of paradise and cubeb berries and dialing down the distinctive juniper flavor to make it a little easier for palates accustomed to vodka. It became a huge success, which is why today we've got gins that are closer to flavored vodkas than to classic London Dry gins like Beefeater or Tanqueray.

What many Bombay Sapphire drinkers don't know is that they also make a classic-style gin too. Bombay Dry is available at most liquor stores, but its advertising budget is close to zero, so it flies a bit under the radar. Personally, I think it's better than Bombay Sapphire -- it's a simple, straightforward gin, with pretty standard botanicals (orris root, lemon peel, coriander and angelica root, to name a few) supporting and enhancing the juniper without any of them hogging the spotlight. If the Dad in your life is a no-nonsense kind of guy, this is the gin for him.

**THE BOTANIST ISLAY DRY GIN** (Scotland; 46 percent ABV, \$45). Islay is known worldwide as the home of peaty, smoky, put-some-hair-on-your-chest single malt Scotch whiskies such as Laphroaig and Lagavulin. But the folks at Bruichladdich, one of the more endearingly oddball Islay distilleries, decided to make a gin as well. And not just any gin, but a gin with botanicals sourced from Islay itself. You're not going to find many other brands out there with mugwort leaves and Lady's Bedstraw flowers, that's for sure. The Botanist contains 31 botanicals where most gins contain between five and a dozen, but it's no gimmick. The Botanist is fantastic, with juniper dominating but by no means overpowering the other flavors and scents. It's actually quite dry, without the sweet piney notes of many juniper-forward London Drys. I still couldn't tell you what the mugwort leaves bring to the mix, but who cares? Dads will love it in a martini or G & T, and it makes a nifty [Last Word](#) cocktail as well.

**CAORUNN GIN** (Scotland; 41.8 percent ABV, \$40). Another Scottish gin using Scottish ingredients, but Caorunn (pronounced "ka-roon") keeps it simpler than The Botanist, employing a mere five oddball botanicals (along with a half-dozen traditional ones): rowan berries, bog myrtle, dandelion, heather and Coul Blush apple. The apple is what I notice most, both neat and in a martini. Thankfully it's distilled carefully enough so that it's not too sweet and it also doesn't overwhelm the juniper flavor. It's very fine in a martini, excellent in a gin & tonic (Caorunn suggests adding an apple slice instead of the traditional lime wedge), and light enough to drink by itself with a couple of ice cubes. Recommended for dads who are the "off-the-beaten-path" kind of guys.

**CITADELLE GIN** (France; 40 percent ABV, \$25). When it comes to gin, I often find myself acting like Old Man Grampus, bitching about these kids today with their crazy gins that taste like cucumber or orange zest or limes or what-have-you, when back in my day our gin tasted like juniper and, by golly, that's the way we liked it. But even a grampus must admit that gins like Hendrick's and Tanqueray Rangpur are damned tasty, regardless of whether they taste the way purists think they should taste. Citadelle is one of my favorite gins-that-don't-really-taste-like-gin. It's quite floral and equal parts sweet and spicy, with the juniper in the mix even if it's not in the spotlight. It makes a great martini (I like it with a lemon twist instead of olives) and a superb gin-and-tonic. And isn't that what matters? For classy dads who don't mind bucking tradition. (Citadelle also makes a nifty Reserve Gin that's been aged in wood for six months; it tastes a little like a less sweet [Old Tom gin](#).)

**EDINBURGH GIN** (Scotland; 43 percent ABV, \$40). In the late 18th century, Scotland made a lot of gin -- there were eight licensed distilleries (along with hundreds of illegal stills) making the stuff in Edinburgh

alone. Edinburgh Gin is probably along the lines of what they were making back then, using your basic array of botanicals with a few homegrown additions -- namely milk thistle, heather and pine. Juniper already has a piney aroma, so the addition of actual pine makes it even more so. I can't remember the last time I walked through a forest on an autumn day after the rain, but tasting Edinburgh gave me that sensation. It's crisp, it's clean, it's refreshing, and it makes a very good martini, though I'd advise cutting back just a bit on the vermouth. If Dad likes nature hikes, owns a kilt, or both, this is the gin for him.

**[HALF MOON ORCHARD GIN](#)** (New York; 46 percent ABV, \$37/1 liter bottle). In the last few years New York has become Gin Central, with a whole lot of distillers making a whole lot of gins, some of which have become among my very favorites (that's right, [Greenhook Ginsmiths](#) and [Dorothy Parker American Gin](#), I'm talking about you!). Tuthilltown Spirits, which in 2004 became one of the first New York distilleries to operate since Prohibition, rolled out its own gin last year. Unlike most other gins which use "neutral grain spirit" (read: vodka) as their base, Half Moon uses a "near-neutral" base, meaning the flavor -- it's distilled from locally grown wheat and apples -- hasn't been totally cooked out of it. The botanicals are thus kept to a minimum to let the base spirit shine through. Which it does. For a gin, it's quite odd -- fruity but dry, a little spicy, and very full-flavored, with subdued juniper notes. But it makes a mean martini or G & T, and it's very nice on the rocks with or without a splash of soda. Perfect for iconoclastic dads.

**[MARTIN MILLER'S WESTBOURNE STRENGTH GIN](#)** (England; 45.2 percent ABV, \$35). Created by an independently wealthy, apparently slightly eccentric Englishman with a passion for gin -- I wish that more millionaires put their money to use for such noble purposes. Mr. Miller's gin places the juniper a little lower in the mix of botanicals than many classic London Drys, and it also uses soft Icelandic water which hasn't been demineralized. The result is a lush, velvety, gin that makes a hell of a martini. This one goes down dangerously easy -- make sure Dad doesn't guzzle too much in one sitting. (Martin Miller's standard gin, which comes in at 80 proof rather than Westbourne Strength's 90.4 proof and has a somewhat lighter flavor, is also available.)

**[MYER FARM GIN](#)** (New York; 42.7 percent ABV, \$32). Myer Farm is a relatively new upstate New York distillery; as a native New Yorker, this appeals to me. And their White Dog Wheat Spirit is one of the best I've ever tasted, which also appeals to me. So I was gung-ho to give the gin a try. The Myer Farm folks advertise this as a London Dry-styled gin, which I found a little misleading; I don't know what botanicals they use, but to my taste buds the juniper is pretty subdued. London Dry or not, however, it's damn good. Notes of peppery spice, cinnamon, citrus zest and fragrant herbs mix and mingle and tantalize both nose and palate beautifully. I like it on the rocks or even neat, but it does make a very fine martini, and it's quite interesting in a Negroni (equal parts gin, Campari and sweet vermouth). For dads with a sensitive soul and taste buds to match.

**[SACRED GIN](#)** (England; 40 percent ABV, \$45). Created at a kitchen table distillery in a London home by a refugee from the world of finance, Sacred is a knockout of a gin, with all the hallmarks of a classic London Dry, but with its own unique vibe. Part of the secret to Sacred is the botanicals, which include nutmeg, cardamom and frankincense; the cardamom in particular comes through loud and clear alongside the juniper. But the real key to its genius is how well the botanicals (twelve in all) are balanced. This is one of the smoothest, most supple gins I've ever tried -- my taste buds all but jump for joy when I take a sip. You can enjoy Sacred neat, on the rocks, however you like, but I prefer it in a Gibson. Mmm mmm good. For dads who know their gin and appreciate a good one.

**[SIPSMITH LONDON DRY GIN](#)** (England; 41.6 percent ABV, \$45). My wife, upon returning from a business trip to Merrie Olde England, asked if I'd ever heard of Sipsmith, because her British colleagues were almost universally raving about it. I didn't know a thing about it, in part because it's not even available in the States yet.

But if you know a dad who's a spirits geek, a martini classicist, or simply loves being the first guy on the block to have something, put in the extra effort and score a bottle using whatever means necessary. Sipsmith is a London Dry gin in the classic style but it's also got a flavor all its own, with subtle notes of lemon, orange and cinnamon toning down the juniper's piney notes but not overwhelming them. It's incredibly clean

and smooth even when taken neat, but in a martini it's damn near perfect, the Platonic ideal of what a gin should taste like. It also makes a great gin & tonic and is worth trying neat or on the rocks as well.

**[SMOOTH AMBLER "STILLHOUSE COLLECTION" BARREL AGED GIN](#)** (West Virginia; 49.5 percent ABV, \$43). Some really creative, inventive spirits come out of some unlikely places -- like West Virginia, for instance, where the folks at Smooth Ambler have been turning out first-rate whiskeys and white spirits for a couple of years now. The Barrel Aged gin is just that -- their own (very fine) Greenbrier Gin, finished for three months, half in new bourbon barrels and half in barrels previously used to age their Old Scout Bourbon. Taken neat, it seems pretty sweet and juniper-heavy at first, until wood and grain notes come barreling in. It's reminiscent of genever without the malt flavors and Old Tom gin without the sweetness. In a martini the wood notes are surprising and delightful; in a G & T it adds depth and dryness. In a nutshell, it's a great addition to any bar. This is the one to get for gin-loving dads who think they've tried it all, and don't mind being proven wrong every now and then.

To make sure Dad has all the fixin's for a martini or gin & tonic, I also recommend the following:

**For Martinis:** [Dolin Dry vermouth](#), [Regan's Orange Bitters No. 6](#) (that's right, gin martinis *require* a dash of orange bitters!)

**For Gin & Tonics:** [Fever Tree Tonic Water](#), [Tomr's Tonic Syrup](#)