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“When I finally presented my father with his drink — Citadelle paired with Tomr’s [...] He admitted it was good.”

Spirits: Pimping Dad’s gin and tonic



Deb Lindsey/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST - Dad's Pimped-Out Gin & Tonic.

Looking at Bernbach’s gussied-up beauty, I have a hard time seeing the resemblance to my parents’ G&T — or to the slovenly understudies served at middling bars, where I’ve occasionally gotten soda water subbed for tonic. The green wing of basil, the ringlet of grapefruit, the pale citrus tonic tinting the Tanqueray 10 around its single clear rectangle of ice — I can no more picture my father making it than putting on bloomers and yodeling in the street.

To be fair, it’s not like Bernbach is whipping up this G&T at home. But, he says, a good G&T should be bright and have a hook to it, and one thing the Spanish have gotten right in their G&T culture is the necessity of the right coupling: “You don’t pair just any gin with any tonic.”



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Indeed, Nicole Hassoun at the Gin Joint was stocking nine tonics of her own creation (her tonic line, Chronic Tonic, will be available at the Gin Joint and several D.C. stores in July). When it comes to tonics, you want something that “pulls out the flavors of the gin without covering anything up,” she says. Sometimes her tonic concepts start with a particular gin, but other times, “I’m just at the farmers market and get ideas based on what’s fresh.”

I picked up ready-mades like Fever Tree and Q and artisanal tonic syrups like Jack Rudy, Tomr’s and Liber & Co., to play mix-and-match. On its own, D.C.’s Green Hat spring/summer batch was floral, buttery and appealing, a good gateway gin for those who might fear the more juniper-forward editions. But paired with Liber, they became one of those couples I hate being around, the tonic dominating the conversation and the gin timidly trying to interrupt. But mixed with apple-sage tonic at Red Apron in Union Market, the gin chimed in charmingly.

It reminded me of times I’d developed an impression of someone based on having known them in a bad relationship. That Green Hat’s not a nervous little mouse at all, I realized. It just didn’t belong with Liber. Liber needs to date someone who can handle him without disappearing. Maybe he could date that citrusy Tanqueray 10 chick. Or maybe a strong, juniper-forward guy like the Beefeater. I mean, why am I assuming that Liber is straight?

I should mention I had tried several G&Ts by this point.

When I finally presented my father with his drink — Citadelle paired with Tomr’s,

adorned with a curl of lemon, a sprig of tarragon and honeysuckle — he inhaled the aroma and drank. He admitted it was good.

“Would you make it for yourself?”

He hesitated before confessing that no, he probably wouldn’t, that he liked the easy prep of his usual routine. He looked at me with sheepish amusement. “I’m sorry you have a father with such unsophisticated tastes,” he said.

He thought he had disappointed me, but I was secretly a little pleased. A beautiful, sexy, floral gin and tonic cannot sway my father into being someone he is not. My dad is a creature of habit, and when it comes to the “finer things” in life, I know where he stands: Inexplicably, he thinks they’re us.

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