

“Frankly, this is the kind of gin that can stand on its own.”

Sales of premium gin going straight up

How brands like France’s Citadelle are redefining the spirit

By [Charles Passy](#)



The bottle: [Citadelle Reserve Solera 2013 gin](#), **\$34.99**

The backstory: We tend to think of gin as a British thing, and for good reason: The botanical-flavored spirit (heavy on the juniper, naturally) has a long history in England — to the point that London dry gin is a category unto itself (and one that’s recognized by the European Union). But gin has a history in other European countries: Holland, Belgium and even France, a nation otherwise best known for wine and Cognac. In fact, Citadelle, a French brand introduced in 1997, comes courtesy of Cognac Ferrand, a well-known producer of the classic sip.

But that’s not the only thing that makes Citadelle stand out. In recent years, the brand has also taken to issuing a “reserve” version that’s

slightly higher priced than the standard one (\$24.99). Just like whiskey, this is a gin that has been aged in wood barrels, resulting in a slightly different flavor profile than the norm (and a slightly different color). Each year, Citadelle has tweaked the formula for its reserve release, playing with the types of botanicals that are used (everything from violets to cornflowers), the degree of aging (typically, from five to seven months) and even the degree of charring in the barrels. The company makes the point that the concept has a precedent, since gin was originally stored and transported in wooden barrels (it was an incidental type of aging, but it was aging just the same). “This is going back to the original style of what was known as ‘yellow gin,’ made 120 years ago,” says Citadelle producer Alexandre Gabriel.



Weekend Sip: Citadelle redefines premium gin

We tend to think of gin as a British thing, but French brand Citadelle, courtesy of Cognac Ferrand, is a standout producer of the classic sip. Charles Passy joins the News Hub with a sip of a new release that's been aged like whiskey.

Photo: Citadelle.

For 2013, Citadelle has added another tweak: It's doing its aging using the solera method, which essentially means blending spirits of different ages within a single cask. Gabriel says it's “the best way to age gin.”

Key stat: While sales of gin have been relatively flat in recent years, the one part of the category that's shown solid growth — with product volume up 19.2% in the U.S. market from 2011 to 2012—is the premium category of gins priced around \$20-30. The original Citadelle fits in that range and the reserve is just slightly above the mark.

What we think about it: Citadelle Reserve is about as sly and seductive as gin can get. Which is to say it has the classic gin profile of a drink that's crisp, herbaceous, bitter and spicy all at once (the brand says you should pick up everything from notes of citrus to coriander to baking spices). But the aging adds a subtle, woody sweetness. The result is gin, version 2.0 (or perhaps 3.0, since Citadelle has been doing this reserve thing since 2009). And at \$35, the bottle is priced such that it fits the definition of an affordable luxury.

How to enjoy it: Frankly, this is the kind of gin that can stand on its own—as in the classic dry (make that very dry) martini, with little to no vermouth. But if you insist on a gin and tonic, the Citadelle folks are fine with that,

though they suggest you might upgrade your tonic. A good step up from the mass-market variety is the Fever Tree brand.