



As Seen In  
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NOTEBOOK

# The Gin Crowd

RETHINKING THE G&T, ONE NEW AND SURPRISINGLY TASTY GIN AT A TIME

**G**IN IS A SURLY AND STAND-alone spirit. Basically neutral grain alcohol redistilled with juniper berries, citrus peel, roots, and spices, it has few flavor reference points outside of itself. (In what other context have you ever had juniper?) It's also the only major liquor to which a not-insignificant percentage of people harbor a violent allergy. All of this, combined with a disorientingly perfume-like aroma, makes it one of the most inscrutable liquors on the shelf — a paradox, considering how casually we drink it. Raise your hand if, like me, your first-ever cocktail was a gin and tonic. Raise the other if gin was responsible for your worst hangover.

If you've ever considered figuring gin out, however, now's the time. After years of paltry, Brit-centric choices bookended by Gordon's and Beefeater, there's a veritable explosion of indie gin production going on — and it's coming from everywhere but England. In the States alone, Kentucky, Oregon, Washington, Wisconsin, and even Brooklyn have thrown their bowler hats in the ring, and worldwide some of the most exciting gin is being made in Austria and the Benelux countries. Some are going for the purest expression of juniper; others, following the current vogue for apothecary-like flavor, are jacking up new botanicals; still others experiment with stuff like pine needles. We haven't seen this much gin variety since Prohibition's bathtubs.

The king of the new class is Hendrick's, a strong-flavored gin that's wormed its way into almost every respectable bar. Most of its



small-batch competition shares its price point: Almost all go for a couple of dollars north or south of \$30. In a way, this makes choosing harder. After trying a dozen of the most promising varieties with friends, however, three favorites quickly emerged.

—MICHAEL IDOV

THREE UPSTARTS WORTH TRYING



**BREKELLEN** My informal focus group was evenly divided between gin lovers and gin agnostics, and the latter uniformly flipped for this New York spirit. To be honest, I bought this gin almost as a gag — oh, great, some Brooklyn hipsters must have gotten their mitts on a still — but it's a powerful contender. Thin, sweet, and tasting strongly of anise, it reminded me of grappa and others of sake. It's easily the most sippable gin I've ever tried.

**BEST IN:** A G&T with a strong, lemony tonic like Fever-Tree (see "Two Tonics to Try," below).



**CITADELLE RÉSERVE** was on the opposite end of the spectrum. Aged in oak casks, which is unusual for gin nowadays, it's instantly distinguished by a yellowish hue. Citadelle, distilled in France, is a gin fanatic's gin; it won't turn any novices. My friends found it nearly undrinkable straight — but tamed with a splash of Dolin's dry vermouth in a martini, it immediately behaved much better.

**BEST IN:** An old-school, honest-to-goodness martini with a lemon twist (no olive for this one).



**AVIATION** is a smooth, citrusy gin made in Portland, Oregon. It's unsurprisingly terrific in its namesake cocktail, but it's easy to sip as well. When I mixed it with Fever-Tree tonic water, the resulting G&T had a strong and interesting whiff of fennel. Another great gin in this family is Greylock, distilled in Massachusetts and boasting an added smokiness.

**BEST IN:** The Aviation cocktail, of course, served martini-style with maraschino and lemon juice.

TWO TONICS TO TRY



Talking about gin without a discussion of tonic is like reviewing the first hour of a movie. Fortunately, mixers have been getting the same upgrades as spirits have. So aside from the obvious stuff — Canada Dry and Schweppes, both of which contain unmistakably artificial high-fructose corn syrup — there are two

great tonics on the market: **Q Tonic** and **Fever-Tree**. The former comes from New York and is more concentrated and acidic; the latter, which is English, is sweeter and subtler. I would use it to goose up smoother gins, like Aviation or Brekelen, and use Q to calm down funkier ones, like Hendrick's or Citadelle.

photograph by JEFF HARRIS

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*"Citadelle Gin Reserve is a gin fanatic's gin... Best in an old-school, honest-to-goodness martini with a lemon twist"*

— Michael Iдов

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