

AVIATION



American Gin
42% alc./vol. (84°proof)
Producer: House Spirits Distillery, Portland, New Oregon, USA
US agent: McClaskey's Wine Distributors
UK agent: None known

This gin is the result of an unusual collaboration between internationally known Seattle mixologist Ryan Magarian and the House Spirits Distillery in Portland, Oregon, run by partners Lee Medoff and Christian Krogstad, established in 2002 and responsible for the respected Medoff vodka.

The partners set out to create a gin that was not overly perfumed and would be perfectly suited to classics such as the Aviation cocktail, the testing platform for their various formulations - hence the name. To quote Ryan, their recipe is a "botanical democracy" of juniper berries, coriander, lavender, anise seeds, cardamom, Indian sarsaparilla and sweet orange peel, proportioned to balance the floral juniper base with herbal, citrus and spice components.

These botanicals are steeped in neutral grain spirit for 48 hours to allow extraction of flavours. The infused spirit is pumped into their copper pot still for a single distillation, then diluted to bottling strength with distilled water. The tall round bottle is topped with a brushed-steel skirted capsule and the label features a 1930 McDonnell Douglas airplane.

Taste: The label proclaims this "a daring mix of floral, spice, citrus and herb components". I find the nose more fresh than daring with hints of pine forest, eucalyptus, anise and orange. The very complex, integrated palate delivers the promised harmonious union of citrus, herbal, floral and spice. The juniper finally manages to rise above the other botanicals in the long, clean characterful finish.

The building's 1950s architecture still overshadows the surrounding Victorian terraced houses. (It was expanded in the mid sixties with a second still hall that more than doubled its capacity.) The Burrough family sold the company to Whitbread in 1987 and Beefeater is now part of the French Pernod-Ricard Group.

As well as juniper, Beefeater is flavoured with coriander seeds, liquorice, orris root, Seville orange peel, Spanish lemon peel, Spanish almonds, angelica root and seeds. These are steeped in neutral grain spirit sourced from London's Thames Distillery for a minimum of 20 hours, before heat is gently applied to the base of the pot still to start a distillation process that takes over seven hours.

In the early 1990s Gordon's and other competitor gins lowered their strength to the then newly permissible level of 37.5% alc./vol.. Beefeater defiantly held its strength at 40% alc./vol. and, to its credit, retains that strength to this day.

Taste: Clean, fresh lemon zest and juniper on both nose and palate. More orange notes come through on the palate as do more subtle hints of Parma violets and coriander. Orange notes re-emerge in a peppery, coriander finish.

BLACKWOOD'S VINTAGE DRY



Scottish Gin
40% alc./vol. (80°proof)
www.blackwood.com
Producer: Blackwood Distillers, Lerwick, Shetland, Scotland
UK agent: Blackwood Distillers
US agent: Blackwood USA

This gin is made using botanical ingredients from the Shetland Isles (to the far North of Scotland) as well as more traditionally sourced gin botanicals. Shetland's local crofters gather wild water mint from around the lochs, sea pink flowers (during their brief summer flowering period), angelica and juniper berries. These are distilled with botanicals imported from around the world: juniper berries from Umbria, lemon and orange peels, cassia bark, liquorice root, ground nutmeg, cinnamon bark and orris root to produce a clear distillate. Blackwood's acquires its slight green hue from infusion with violets and turmeric.

Unlike other gins which are blended to try and match the flavour given by botanicals in previous years, Blackwood's capitalises on its natural positioning by allowing the flavour to slightly vary and specifying the year the Shetland botanicals were gathered on the bottle's back label. It is currently made in Scotland's central belt but the company has plans to build a distillery on the Shetland Isles.

Taste: I tasted the Summer 2005 vintage. Hints of fudge, vanilla and malt are evident on the nose, while the vanilla and fudge flavours continue into a juniper led palate with pine and citrus freshness.

BEEFEATER



English London Dry Gin
40% alc./vol. (80°proof)
www.beefeater.com
Producer: James Burrough Ltd (Group Pernod-Ricard), Kennington, London, England
UK agent: Pernod-Ricard UK
US agent: Pernod-Ricard USA

Beefeater was originally known as Burrough's gin, but acquired its name in 1863, a reference to the Yeoman Warders who guard the Tower of London, presumably to emphasise its London heritage.

Founder James Burrough trained as a pharmacist and lived in Canada for six years before returning home to buy John Taylor & Son, a firm specialising in the rectification of gin and liqueurs. He used his training in chemistry to help perfect his recipes and the company still has one of his early recipe books, dating back to 1849.

In 1897 James Burrough's sons took over the running of the business and in 1908 they moved the distillery from Chelsea to larger premises in Lambeth. Eric Burrough began exporting to the United States in 1917 and by 1958 the business had outgrown the Lambeth site and moved to its current home near the Oval Cricket Ground, which had been vacated by Haywood's Military Pickles due to war damage.