

The perennial
gin & tonic

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THE GIN YOU'RE IN

SWEET SENSATIONS OF SIPPING

By Craig R. Carey and Jerry P. Pietrzak

Though Dutch in origin, gin is now as English as cricket and the crown jewels. Brand names such as Beefeater and Bombay pay tribute to British culture (their labels affixed with the visage of the Yeomen Warders—guards of the Tower of London—and Queen Victoria, respectively) while also standing as staples of liquor shelves the world over.

Gin, in its most oft-marketed form, is a neutral grain spirit flavored with juniper berries and a combination of botanicals. The botanicals often include orange or lemon peel, cassia bark, anise, angelica root, cinnamon, and coriander. The exact combination and ratios of these additional flavorings is, for every manufacturer, a closely-guarded secret.

❖ **The original Dutch gin** (known as *genever*, which is Dutch for juniper and hailing from South Holland) arrived in London after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which unseated the Catholic king, James II of England (VII of Scotland), in favor of his Protestant nephew and son-in-law, Dutch aristocrat William of Orange. The production of gin was promoted as a means for the England grain farmers to compete with French brandy interests and boost the English economy. High tariffs were placed on brandy originating from all the Catholic wine-producing nations, and taxes and fees for the manufacture of local grain spirits (also known as corn brandy then) were lifted. Gin production—and its consumption—boomed.

“The proper union of gin and vermouth is a great and sudden glory; it is one of the happiest marriages on earth, and one of the shortest lived.”

—BERNARD DE VOTO

Once the spirit had become engrained as part of English culture, it was referred to colloquially as Madam Geneva. By the early 18th century, gin's naturally addictive properties, coupled with its incredible accessibility (both physical and fiscal), had created the 'gin craze'—an epidemic William Hogarth described as “idleness, poverty, misery, and distress” fueled by a potent spirit that could almost literally be had on every street corner in London's poor and working-class neighborhoods. Long before opiates and coca derivatives engendered the American war on drugs, “gin was the original urban drug,” writes Jessica Warner in her social history *Craze: Gin and Debauchery in an Age of Reason* (2002). The efforts Parliament and concerned members of English society made to combat the scourge were eerily parallel to current American efforts (in both approach and, some would say, effectiveness) to combat the distribution and use of illegal narcotics on our shores.

It was a combination of legislation and luck that eventually saw gin go from social bane to respectable drink, and its place in English culture was secure and its legitimacy undoubted. In *Gin: The Much-Lamented Death of Madam Geneva* (2002), Patrick Dillon partly attributes gin's legitimization to the government's default solution for many issues it can't readily resolve: legalize it, regulate it and tax it. King William's market tactics were no longer, but demand was high and the industry continued to thrive.

Over time, gin went from a public policy headache to the drink of gentlemen and loyal Englishmen the world over. Gin and tonic, concocted by British military colonials, was conceived as a method by which soldiers could ingest the bitter doses of quinine used to combat malaria in the tropics. While modern tonic water has nowhere near the amount of quinine needed to be considered therapeutic, it still retains enough flavor to work well with the botanicals found in gin. Indeed, the gin and tonic has since gone on to be arguably the most famous drink associated with gin.

❖ **The modern G&T** is a refreshing mix of one part gin with one to two parts tonic water, served with lime. The other libation synonymous with gin is the martini—a simple drink of ice-cold gin and vermouth served in a chilled martini glass. There are a wide range of opinions on the amount of vermouth in a good martini; one part vermouth to four parts gin is fairly common, but some palates prefer a little less vermouth. It is often related that Winston Churchill mixed the driest martini: He poured four parts gin, glanced at a bottle of dry vermouth, then garnished with

an olive. Gin drinks however are not limited to only the martini or a Tom Collins: cocktail recipes abound. Gin gained much popularity during Prohibition for its ease of production—cheap grain alcohol was mixed with flavoring such as juniper oil—and remained the mixer of choice until vodka gained popularity in the 1960s.

Aside from mixing in a bathtub, there are several methods of producing gin—but only two of these are both widely used and recognized by European Community regulations governing spirit drinks. The lesser of these methods is called compounding, where a suitable neutral spirit is flavored with natural flavoring additives, which in the end impart a predominant taste of juniper.

The primary and most important method is distillation. The details and exact methods vary by distiller, but the basics remain similar. The spirit, which starts at approximately 96% alcohol by volume, is diluted to approximately 45%. It is transferred to a still, the botanicals are added, and the mix is allowed to soak before being redistilled. Some producers, rather than placing the botanicals directly into the spirit, place the botanicals in a tray or screen above the spirit, allowing the alcohol vapors to pass through the various botanicals during the distillation process. The early part of the distilling run (foreshots) and end of the run (feints) are diverted to be redistilled—only the middle run is used to produce higher quality gin.

On a sweltering day on the African plains, a gin cocktail was the perfect 19th-century refreshment—so too on a foggy and wind-blown Carnoustie round. No wonder, then, this refreshing spirit has proven so resilient, long after the sun has effectively set on the empire with which it is so commonly associated.

Cheers! 🍷



Martini with
a twist of lemon