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10 Fragrant, Must-Try Gins for Classic Cocktails

New gins just keep rolling in.

BY KARA NEWMAN

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Crisp, cool and fragrant, the number of gins on the shelves has multiplied like crazy in recent years. Blame the classic cocktail renaissance: We can't seem to get enough martinis, aviatis and corpse revivers,

and we've soaked up plenty of classic-style gins as a result.

So what's different this time around? In addition to newcomers made in the traditional London Dry style (**Portobello Road**, **Sipsmith**, the recently reintroduced old-school

Boodles British Gin), the latest crop of gins shows off more individual flair than ever before.

Most of the latest crop of gins, which includes quite a few from craft distillers, play up unusual botanicals infused into the base spirit, building on the “New Western” gins that flaunt Pacific Northwest-sourced botanicals. Where that movement started a few years ago, others now carry forward with spices, herbs and other ingredients that similarly evoke a sense of place.

For example, **Opihr Oriental London Dry Gin** whispers with exotic cumin, coriander, black pepper, ginger and clove, while **Principe De Los Apostoles** uses yerba mate tea as a botanical to emphasize its Argentinean heritage, creating an almost cocoa-like effect.

Others are more focused on aromatics—such as a garden’s worth of floral-tinged gins fragranced with geranium (**Geranium Gin**), rose (**Dillon’s Rose Gin**) and iris (**Hana**). Still others bridge sweet and savory aromas and flavors, like Uncle Val’s new **Peppered** and **Restorative** expressions.

According to Aaron Knoll, author of the newly-released book ***Gin: New Botanicals and Flavours, from Plymouth to Portland***, these flavorful, category-busting gins owe a debt to another popular spirit—vodka.

Whatever led to the latest batch of individualistic gins, the delicious bounty is clearly one to celebrate.

Dillon’s Rose Gin (Canada; Dillon’s Distillers, Beamsville, ON); 94 points This ruddy gin-based liqueur, infused with rose hips and petals and sweetened with turbinado sugar, will appeal to fans of aperitif cocktails. The bold, herbal aroma and sweet notes of burnt orange peel and clove read almost like an herbaceous root beer or a light amaro, finishing with bracing pink peppercorn. Sip over ice or experiment with Negroni variations.

Boreal Spruce Gin (USA; Vikre Distillery, Duluth, MN); \$32, 94 points. The earthy aroma shows anise at first, with time in the glass opening to a fresh, grassy note. On the palate, this gin is soft and herbaceous, with notes of spruce, spearmint, tarragon and anise, plus a surprising tart lime note that bounces into the brisk finish. Mix with tonic and enjoy.

Hana Gin (USA; Branded Spirits Distillery, San Francisco, CA); \$20, 44 points. Hana is Japanese for flower, as the orchid etched into the teardrop-shaped bottle suggests, and this gin does show subtle white floral notes. The bright, delicate aroma suggests floral and mild vegetal notes reminiscent of fresh snow peas. The flavor is equally bright and bracing, with a fleeting berry sweetness and crisp, lightly floral finish. Nuanced and versatile enough for a wide range of classic cocktails. *Best Buy.*

Dillon's Unfiltered Gin 22 (Canada; Dillon's Distillers, Beamsville, ON); \$40, 44 points. Distilled from a Niagara grape base and infused with 22 botanicals (hence the name), this small-batch gin is light and soft, with notes of lemongrass, juniper and lime zest, finishing zingy and brisk. Though the producer warns that the gin is unfiltered and may appear cloudy, it looked clear in the glass. Martini material.

Uncle Val's Restorative Gin (USA; 35 Maple Street, Sonoma, CA); \$39, 44 points. Bridging sweet and savory, this gin has a citrusy fragrance, which also shows up on the palate. Starting out with mild pineapple-like sweetness and traditional juniper, this gin segues into a spicy, mouthwatering finish with white and black pepper, coriander and ginger spice.

Big Bottom Oregon Gin (USA; Big Bottom Distilling, Hillsboro, Oregon); \$30, 44 points. The aroma teases bright grapefruit peel, otherwise this silky gin is like drinking in a forest, enveloping the palate in pine and juniper, with a lightly sweet white flower and white pepper finish. The alcohol heat is too strong for straight-up sipping, but tempers well in cocktails without relinquishing flavor.

Brockman's Premium Gin (England; Park Street Imports, Miami, FL); \$35, 44 points. It would be easy to mistake this gin for a raspberry-flavored vodka. With a distinct raspberry note in the aroma, this gin offers notes of lemon peel and black pepper, rounding into a raspberry note on the clean finish.

Captive Spirits Big Gin (USA; Captive Spirits, Seattle, WA); \$30, 44 points. Robust and substantial, this flavorful gin combines juniper, citrus, a brush of mint and a mouthwateringly savory note reminiscent of olive brine and black pepper. The finish is spicy but balanced. A top choice for Gibsons or dirty martinis.

Barrel-Aged Gins

Spirit Works Barrel Gin (USA; Spirit Works Distillery, Sebastopol, CA);

\$53, 44 points. Golden in the glass, this gin is scented with rich, buttery vanilla touched with honey and fresh apple. It’s slightly oily on the palate, where vanilla sweetness is shored up with mint, pine, cinnamon and cardamom. Though it sips well alone, this wheat-based gin works in cocktails, too.

Greenhook Ginsmiths Old Tom Gin (USA; Greenhook Ginsmiths, Brooklyn, NY);

\$45, 44 points. This history-minded bottling was made in collaboration with Brooklyn barmen Damon Boelte and Maxwell Britten. It’s made from an 18th-century recipe, pot distilled using “exotic spices inspired by the British Spice Trade,” and finally, aged for 12 months in Bourbon and oloroso Sherry casks. All that adds up to a light gold hue, light sweetness (typical of the Old Tom style) and a pleasing, robust vanilla-mint profile with flecks of rosemary and lemon peel, finishing long and spicy. Sip or mix.

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