

SIT, SIP AND SAVOUR

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT BLUE SKIES ON A SUN-SOAKED AFTERNOON THAT SCREAMS GIN. TAM SIN PEARCE GETS TO THE BOTTOM OF THE BOTANICALS OF SOME OF THE UK'S FINEST.

What a way to spend a day: the sun is shining; my table is laden with gin and mixers; I have ice in the freezer; and my taste-test companions are due to arrive shortly. What could be more perfect?

On the table, we have a variety of gins to try, representing distillers across the UK. The list includes LoneWolf by BrewDog; In the Welsh Wind; Eccentric Spirit; Henley Gin; and an extraordinary looking Pink Marmalade colour-changing gin. Gin is not one of my specialist subjects, but this is my preferred way of finding out more about it and developing my understanding of the subtleties of botanicals and the variations in flavour that tantalise the palate.

My warm-up drink while getting ready for my guests to arrive is the Signature Gin by In the Welsh Wind. In the Welsh Wind is a small-batch distillery overlooking Cardigan Bay. This inspirational little distillery, sparked by a 1,047-mile, three-month walk around Wales that became the catalyst for converting dreams to reality, distils their spirits in copper-pot stills adorably named Meredith and Afanc. I wonder which still created my current aperitif. I feel a spirit created in a great or noted ruler – the meaning of Meredith – might be a wiser start than leaping in with the aquatic monster of Celtic legend, Afanc. Whichever still it was created in, the In the Welsh Wind Signature Style Gin is exceptionally smooth with slightly smoky and sweet undertones that hit at the same time. The flavour profile is

that of oranges, cinnamon, cloves, ginger and tea-soaked currants. I am not even going to pretend to have a palate sophisticated enough to pick each of these out, but I can understand why it won the Gin Masters Gold Medal in 2021. If I did not have so many more gins to taste, and a generous-enough nature that I'm keen to share this tippie with my fellow tasters, I'd be tempted not to diversify and to pour myself another. And another.

Instead, I turn to Young Tom by Eccentric Spirit Co, distilled by In the Welsh Wind. This is a fascinating combination of gin with a splash of distilled IPA. Straight up, the taste is floral and slightly spicy. I can detect hints of fennel and star anise, which the drink is rested in for six weeks. I would like to say I can also detect the





sunflower root, but as I have no concept of what that might taste like, this would be an exaggeration.

The Eccentric Spirit website provides a suite of ideas for budding mixologists and we follow along, deciding on two options. The first is a simple enhancement – adding home-grown rosemary to our G&T. This brings the herbal flavour to the fore. For the second, we add star anise and bitter lemon, which somehow leads the drink to be sweeter, summery and light, a delight on this sunny day.

Hubby heads for BrewDog's LoneWolf Original Gin next, his choice no doubt inspired by his enjoyment of the company's beer and approval of its tree-growing ethics. The gin is produced in a carbon-negative distillery in Scotland, so we feel smug while drinking, knowing we are doing the planet good. Flavour-wise, the pine and juniper notes are pronounced, followed by the more delicate lavender, which is more subtle, yet prominent enough for us to easily identify it. This gin divides the crowd into aficionados and beginners. Those who are more serious about their gin take great delight in the blend.

It makes an interesting comparison with the LoneWolf Cactus and Lime offering, which, as the name suggests, is blended with lime and an exotic-looking cactus flower enigmatically named Queen of the Night. Naturally, the latter is not a flavour I could have identified without assistance, but it is light and floral, gently offset with that fabulous hint of lime. Mixed with a Mediterranean tonic and additional dash

of lime, this becomes a firm favourite of one of our tasters.

The preference of one of the tasters who is not normally a gin drinker is the Rhubarb and Orange gin by Henley, another small-batch distillery crafting artisan products using traditional methods. This drink is the epitome of a summer G&T. It is slightly fruity, but falls shy of being sweet, a delight filled with ice and a twist of orange zest. This particular tippie won the Masters Medal at the Gin Masters Awards 2021, and it's easy to taste why.

Henley also did rather well at the 2022 World Gin Awards, voted Best English London Dry. Some of the flavours of this Dry Gin are too sophisticated for me to identify individually, but it certainly has a hint of citrus and an underlying spiciness. It is at this point that I am glad we have been practising portion control, as otherwise I feel my tasting notes would be illegible.

We finish up with a gin we are all excited to try – the fascinating Pink Marmalade colour-changing gin. I mix this one at the table, so we can all appreciate the theatre of it. As advertised, the gin starts out a deep-blue colour and then, when mixed, it morphs to a delicate pink. This is apparently due to the butterfly pea flower and its reaction to a change in PH level. I plan on creating a couple of cocktails with this – the Basil Sour sounds particularly appealing – but that will have to wait for another day. For now, I will simply sit, sip and savour.



OUR GINS OF CHOICE



1

Henley Gin is a relatively new brand run by Jacob Wilson, one of the youngest master distillers in the country. Henley Gin is currently available in three expressions with the Henley Distillery soon to open a Gin School in Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire.

See thehenleydistillery.co.uk



4

BrewDog Distilling Co is the spirits' arm of well-known Scottish craft brewery BrewDog, distilling gin in a carbon-negative facility in Aberdeen. LoneWolf Gin is available in three variants – Original, Peach & Passionfruit, Cloudy Lemon and Cactus & Lime.

See www.brewdog.com



3

In the Welsh Wind distillery develops and distils distinctive gins using botanicals native to or synonymous with Wales. In the Welsh Wind Signature Style is a dry gin with aromas well known to the Welsh vernacular – cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and sweet orange.

See inthewelshwind.co.uk

2

Pink Marmalade Gin is a dry, zesty, 100% natural, colour-changing, premium gin. The process of making the gin begins with a secret ingredient, their signature salted pink marmalade. This is combined with another 12 botanicals to create this tasty tipple.

See pinkmarmaladegin.co.uk

