

Globe Life

MEET THE NEW VODKA

Time to gin and bear it

BY DAVID SZANTO MONTREAL

This New Year's Eve, keep your corks in the Henckel, skip the mulled wine and throw that "rum-flavoured" supermarket eggnog down the sink. Your drinking resolution for 2008 is gin.

Producers and consumers alike are discovering that gin is no longer just "the other white spirit," but a drink for all seasons and foods.

Gin may seem just a summer thing - chunks of ice in a tall glass, fizzy tonic, wafting lime essence - but its woody, citrus-and-spice aromas pair perfectly with winter food.

Traditionally, juniper berries give gin its distinctive flavouring, often joined by lemon or orange peel, coriander, anise or licorice, and other botanicals such as cinnamon or cassia. But as gin appreciation has matured - with consumers increasingly discovering imported and premium products - distillers are responding with intriguingly layered gins.

» SEE 'GIN' PAGE 2

Food & Wine

FROM PAGE 1 » GIN

Mix in ginger and you've got a cocktail with kick

Hand-craft spirits such as Bluecoat American Dry Gin from Philadelphia Distilling and Brokers London Dry from London, England, offer experimental and widely divergent tastes, broadening the aroma profile with unusual citrus essences, nutmeg, orris root and cardamom.

On Vancouver Island, wine producer Winchester Cellars is making its first foray into distilling with a soon-to-be-launched gin. "A good gin comes at you at least three different ways," says vintner Ken Winchester (invoking a wine perspective). The juniper should appear up front, with citrus and spice mid-palate, and a savoury finish.

Bartenders and mixologists are finding inspiration for inventive new cocktails and Canadian consumers are lapping it up. Since 2000, according to Spirits Canada, sales volume of high-end brands is up by more than 50 per cent, compared to a 5 per cent drop for those lower-priced.

Martiniboy.com editor-in-chief Don Ellis credits "bartender wizardry" with driving gin adoption in Toronto. "You just have to be invited into the gin world. And then there you are," he says.

At the Bengal Lounge in Victoria's Empress Hotel, manager Jennifer Woppenkamp says the Bengal Mojito is a favourite. Created by 40-year bartending veteran Tony Castillo, the drink swaps gin for rum, and introduces ginger to complement the traditional mint and lime.

Call it the maturing of the drinkers' palate. Brock Shepherd of Toronto's Rice Bar, who designed the Royal Ontario Museum's signature cocktail the Pink Trillium (using Plymouth gin, Cointreau, pink grapefruit juice and a little fresh ginger) says, "When your palate grows up from vodka and the sweet drinks, you start to appreciate bitter flavours."



Toronto's Brock Shepherd says gin is a mature drink for 'when your palate grows up from vodka.' PHOTOS BY FERNANDO MORALES/THE GLOBE AND MAIL



Brock Shepherd's signature cocktail for the ROM, the Pink Trillium: Plymouth gin, Cointreau, pink grapefruit juice and fresh ginger.

You don't need to go out to make like the hip new generation of gin drinkers.

The mix of those foresty spices with juniper's heady perfume makes a grand match for game meat. So instead of a Cabernet-Syrah blend with your traditional roast, opt for a classic Bronx Cocktail with bison tartare. The Bronx — made with Bombay Sapphire, sweet and dry vermouth and a splash of orange juice — brings out the earthy sweetness of the raw meat.

To warm up your year-end cocktail party, muddle some ginger root in the bottom of your glass, add a splash of pomegranate juice and a squeeze of lemon, and you have the base of a Ginger

Winter Tonic. Tanqueray, with its bold balance, works well in this drink, which pairs well with satay, winter rolls (seasonally updated Vietnamese summer rolls) and steamed dumplings.

Hendrick's, a Scottish import with perky florals and fragrant cucumber notes, makes a nice Gibson (three or four parts gin to one part dry vermouth) and pairs beautifully with freshly shucked oysters. Topped with a little sherry-vinegar mignonette granita, the oysters' brininess and sweet flesh mirror the old-school cocktail's pickled pearl onion garnish.

And what's more festive than white on white? » Special to *The Globe and Mail*

Get mixing

Pair gin with food that will allow the spirit's complexity to come through without getting beaten up by stronger flavours.

THE SALAD

A good cocktail with light snacks or pre-dinner hors d'oeuvres. Use Hendrick's or Bluecoat gin.

WHAT YOU NEED

10 parts gin
1 part cucumber juice (blend a cucumber and strain)
A dash of simple syrupbar syrup, basically boiled sugar and water
A dash of fresh lime juice
A pinch of ground cardamom
4 to 5 drops of maple syrup
6 to 7 fresh basil leaves

WHAT YOU DO

Muddle the basil with a pinch of salt. Shake all ingredients over ice. Strain, and serve with a twist of lemon.

GIN SAZERAC

Perfect for midnight on New Year's Eve (champagne goes flat). Use Gordon's, Beefeater or Tanqueray gin.

WHAT YOU NEED

3 parts gin
A splash of Triple Sec
3 to 4 drops of Pernod

WHAT YOU DO

Shake all ingredients and serve with a twist of lemon.

WHITE G'NIGHT

As the snow starts falling in the wee hours, reach for a bowl of chili and this "goodnight" cap. Use Broker's or Hendrick's gin.

WHAT YOU NEED

5 parts gin
1 part good-quality sake
A drop of Tabasco sauce
6 to 7 fresh mint leaves

WHAT YOU DO

Muddle the mint with a pinch of sugar. Shake all ingredients over ice and serve with a slice of pickled ginger.

» David Szanto