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Really What You Need to Know About > Gin

How do you know these days that you're at **A Bar That Takes Its Cocktails Seriously?**
When its **LIST OF GINS IS LONGER** than its **LIST OF VODKAS**.
Here's a guide to that **MOST SOPHISTICATED, WONDERFULLY COMPLEX** of **SPIRITS**

WHAT IS GIN, EXACTLY?

A seventeenth-century Briticism derived from *genever*, the Dutch word for "juniper," gin is a clear grain spirit enhanced by the highly fragrant juniper berry. "Basically," says Todd Leopold, master distiller at Leopold Brothers in Ann Arbor, Michigan, "it's juniper-flavored vodka." It's not made in bathtubs; that's a myth. Rather, gin is blended in copper-pot stills. The botanicals—any herbs, spices, and fruits you can imagine are fair game, including nutmeg, orris, angelica root, orange peel, sarsaparilla, and ginger—are either added directly to the boiling spirit or, in a few choice distilleries, suspended over it in copper baskets (imagine a sauna for plant life) and vapor-extracted. "You get a more delicate gin that way," says Leopold, who first distills his own spirit and



then, using the direct-boil method and select American botanicals, concocts a luscious and articulate gin.

WHAT MAKES A QUALITY GIN?

The best gins come from distillers who make their base spirit on-site or get it from other artisans. Smart distillers then blend the freshest botanicals with curatorial discretion. They strive for balance, complexity, and a drink that smells more like your garden than like your great-

uncle Stewart's piney aftershave. "Good gins have good aromatics," says Leopold. He suggests adding a few drops of water to your gin—treating it like a scotch—to



release the aroma. "You should be able to pick out the different parts," he says. "The balance

is normally between citrus, sweet, and savory." Avoid gins with long laundry lists of ingredients; there shouldn't be dozens of botanicals. "A good gin," says Leopold, "has one or two signature taste characteristics. If it's a big bland jumble of ingredients and you can't tell what the hell they are, it's probably not a premium gin." Last, avoid gins that aren't labeled "distilled." They're compounded swill (tanker-truck booze, lab-manufactured flavors), and

they'll light your lungs on fire.

SURE, THERE'S TONIC...

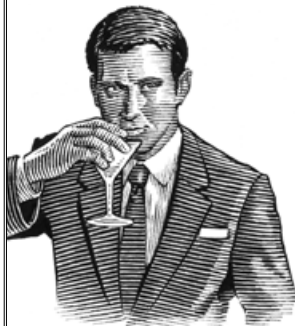
But tonic, which often tastes like licking tin, can ruin a perfectly good small-batch gin, masking all of its handcrafted subtlety. Consider not mixing your gin at all. Make a martini, but skip the vermouth. "I don't know why you'd add flavored wine to your gin," says Leopold, who calls gin the Rolls-Royce of cocktail spirits but advocates drinking it slow and straight,

or strained after some easy shaking over ice (the shaking introduces oxygen, which makes the botanicals pop). Dropping a crisp cucumber slice into your Hendrick's Gin adds a little special something, and a couple of pearl onions, Gibson-style, in your Plymouth Gin is a Bond-worthy classic.

By
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Six Premium Handcrafted Gins Worth Tasting

GIN DOESN'T FOLLOW STRICT RECIPES—IT REQUIRES JUNIPER, THAT'S IT—SO DISTILLERS CAN GET CREATIVE WITH THEIR BLENDS, THOUGH THIS ISN'T THE WORLD OF BLUEBERRY VODKA. PREMIUM DISTILLERS MAKE MIXES THAT MAKE SENSE. THESE HAVE SOME UNCOMMON INGREDIENTS, BUT THEY'RE BLENDED WITH SKILL AND INTENTION, REVEALING A THOUGHTFULNESS AND COMPLEXITY YOU WON'T FIND IN MOST SPIRITS



1 BLUECOAT	2 BULLDOG	3 NO. 209	4 AVIATION	5 LEOPOLD'S	6 HENDRICK'S
A little sugary. Candied-lemon-peel flavor lingers. In essence, light, floral, and pure.	Drier than most and exotic in taste, perhaps due to the addition of a botanical called dragon eye.	Feels thick on the tongue, with a classic juniper tang. Helps clear the nasal passages.	Sophisticated and spicy. Cardamom, anise, and coriander bring masala to mind.	Beautifully balanced—a memorable combination of citrus and spice.	Infused with cucumber, it's one of the most unusual and drinkable gins in the world.