

Notes: Gin's image change helps new Scottish production

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Gin's image change helps new Scottish production

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It's seen as quintessentially English, but gin is now being produced by a number of Scottish distillers, as Jay Thundercliffe reports

It has taken close to three centuries but gin has finally lived down its reputation as the scourge of society and a ruin of mothers. Today, the spirit is enjoying a renaissance. As Arthur Motley of Royal Mile Whiskies in Edinburgh points out: 'The market for small batch, carefully crafted gins has exploded over the last few years, and many top bars now have a huge range of specialist gins.'

For many, gin will be forever associated with England and London in particular – although 'London Dry' denotes a style of gin, not necessarily its origin, rather than the earlier and maltier genever gin of Holland. However, gin has been produced in Scotland for centuries, often in the form of distilled neutral spirit being sent down to England for redistillation, or rectification, with botanicals.

Given the Scots' heritage as master distillers it wasn't going to be long before they made a significant step onto the burgeoning marketplace. 'Our gin is based on recipes from 250 years ago when spirit was distilled in Edinburgh and then rectified with exotic flavourings and botanicals,' explains Jane Nicol of the Spencierfeld Spirit Company, whose new Edinburgh Gin harks back to this earlier period as well as the Golden Age of cocktails in its 1920s-style labelling.

Gin lends itself to regional variations thanks to the various botanicals that can add distinction to the neutral spirit. Alongside the traditional juniper berries, citrus peel, coriander and cardamom seeds, angelica and orris root, many of today's producers are using Scottish ingredients. Edinburgh Gin includes Scottish juniper, heather and milk thistle, while the recently launched Caorunn gin features rowan berry and bog myrtle among others. Blackwoods gather all their botanicals from Shetland, and Boë Superior Gin from Stirling-based VC2 includes wild cassia bark from Skye.

Today's growing market in Scotland owes much to William Grants & Son, the family-owned distillers who pioneered the single malt industry when they bottled and marketed Glenfiddich in the 1950s. Their Hendrick's Gin, first produced nearly ten years ago, uses an infusion of rose petal and cucumber, and has proved very popular with its quirky branding and niche marketing. Hendrick's set the stage for the current market: 'I can't believe they have done it again,' says Arthur Motley. 'Other Scottish gin makers have a lot to thank Grants for.' With rumours and plans afoot regarding other local producers joining the trend, it might be time to raise the martini glass to a new wave of Scottish spirit.