

Juniper - from Herbal Remedy to Popular Drink

Once valued for their medicinal properties, the dark berries have staged something of a revival in the world of liquor

by BERNHARD MIX

Gin is the trend quite literally on (almost) everyone's lips. Besides the omnipresent classic that is a gin and tonic, the legendary bar staple has become the star ingredient of a whole host of cocktails and has developed into a crowd-pleasing in-drink in recent years. The range on offer is particularly diverse, from established brands to limited editions from master distillers and innovative gin creations from across Europe, Asia and the USA. The world of gin boasts a portfolio of exclusive tastes for consumer markets and the bar trade alike.

Gin is currently in vogue, but the juniper and herbal ingredients it's made of are steeped in a deep-rooted history. Ancient sources cite the medicinal properties of the fruit of *Juniperus communis*, the common juniper bush, as a tried and tested remedy. Following the advent of the first rudimentary distillation techniques, this skill gradually began to trickle through Europe, meaning the healing power of medicinal herbs and roots could be harnessed in alcohol-



Analysis in the Lab

based distillates. As the art of distillation continued to develop throughout the Middle Ages, the healing elixir was refined by alchemists and scholars who welcomed its many uses. However, its growing recreational popularity meant the healing properties of the flavorsome liquor slowly faded into the background.

Borrowed from the Dutch for juniper berries (*Jeneverbessen*), Jenever was one of the first original juniper spirits. From the 17th century onwards, it spread rapidly throughout Europe and found itself in England, which initially only imported the liquor, where it developed into gin as we know it today.

Juniper berries stored



Jenever and gin still both exist today, with the latter having undergone various stages of development over the centuries before it finally reached a standardized high level of quality thanks to a collection of various laws, the Gin Acts. Along this trip through time, both the ingredients and the base alcohol changed, and as a result, the flavors and aromas did too. The journey to (London) Dry Gin, today's most popular juniper spirit, traveled past the sweeter Old Tom Gin as well as the higher proof Navy Strength Gin. Gin's popularity has also given these two liquors a leg up and expanding product ranges show this is currently clearly being taken into

account. Today's line-up of gins is broadly divided into the types mentioned above, as well as Jenever, but even more so by the individual flavors different versions of these products have to offer.

The liquor market is segmented into the range of products on offer from big-name manufacturers and their world-famous brands, as well as into gins from small and medium-sized distilleries. Large international suppliers have fashioned a brand message that includes quality, enjoyment, tradition and a sense of joie de vivre, while smaller producers know how to successfully position their products by adding an innovative flair. Craft gin, namely handmade juniper liquor bottled in smaller quantities, is another market that demonstrates the variety of products on offer, as well as the market success gin has met with.

It's up to the consumer to decide as their own personal taste dictates. A truly excellent gin is not only able to stand out from the sea of products on offer because of the aura of marketing that surrounds it, but also because it commands a distinctive profile of flavors as part of the tasting experience. It is these product-specific ingredients that are vital for holistic success. Regardless of whether it is a secret traditional recipe or a new development, it falls to the respective distiller to ensure their gin has a balanced composition. Creating a consistently high-quality product calls for the very best ingredients to be selected, thoroughly tested and processed with expertise and experience. It is the juniper berry that lends the gin its unmistakable bouquet,



Coriander seeds

before it is given an individual twist by other aromatic herbs. Respective selections can range from five to forty-two natural ingredients, with numbers sometimes reaching as many as seventy.



The quality of the natural ingredients used in the distillate is decisive and is based on the relevant raw materials and how they are refined. Sunny peaks across Italy, Macedonia and other countries on the Balkans are home to the evergreen with the needle-like leaves, the berries of which ripen over a period of up to two years. Depending on the weather, the wild fruit is harvested between early September

and late November. This means that the fresh berries are only briefly stored in their countries of origin before being transported to processing sites.

Manufacturing premium juniper berries is a process based on many years of experience, an understanding of sustainable production, and the specific equipment needed to gently refine the berries. Once the berries have been carefully dried, they are selected according to their color, cleaned for heavy materials, and sifted several times. To guarantee quality, both the semi-finished and finished products are subject to various controls throughout the process stages and are analyzed in accordance with chemical, physical and microbiological parameters. The finished product is marketed with the stamp of quality "triple sorted and thermo-dried juniper berries" before they join the liquor industry's value chain.

Another essential ingredient for gin is angelica root. The plant the angelica is



Lemon peels

Ingredients

extracted from is cultivated in Germany, France, Belgium and Poland where it takes between several months and two years to grow before the roots are harvested in late autumn or early spring, cleaned and industrially refined before finally enriching the alcoholic distillate in coarsely cut form. Coriander seeds are also key for gin and are harvested in the summer in Ukraine, Russia, Morocco, Spain and various countries on the Balkans. After being exported, they are processed and distributed by specialist production companies. Depending on the recipe, the gin arrangement is enhanced by adding a selection of delicious ingredients. Known as botanicals, these gins can include orris, gentian and ginger root, lemon and orange peel, cassia bark, sloe, cubeb pepper, star anise, thyme, rosemary, sage, rose flower, elderflower, chamomile flower, nutmeg, and much more.

The original recipes of individual gins cover an almost unbelievable spectrum on the flavor wheel, a standardized system for describing the sense of taste, individually sumptuously accentuated as they are by whole, cut or ground herbs and spices. Today, flourishing demand, new product launches, targeted marketing and interest generated by TV and print media, as well as by the Internet and book publications, ensure




Chamomile flowers



Orange peels

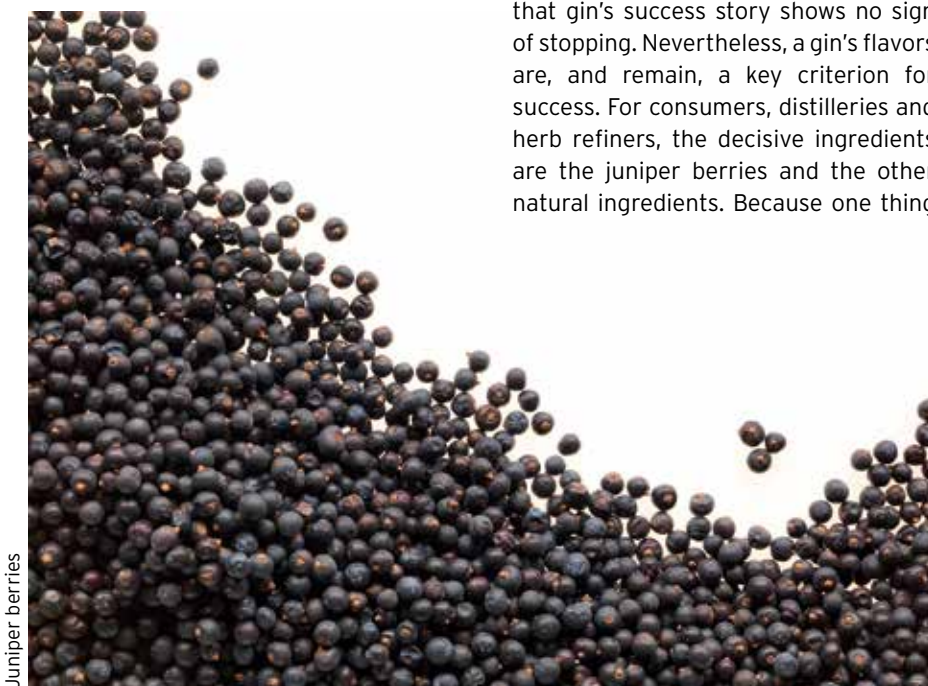
that gin's success story shows no sign of stopping. Nevertheless, a gin's flavors are, and remain, a key criterion for success. For consumers, distilleries and herb refiners, the decisive ingredients are the juniper berries and the other natural ingredients. Because one thing

is as clear as the spirit itself: Only the best for gin! 

The Author



Bernhard Mix is a managing partner for Kräuter Mix GmbH in Abtswind, Germany. The company specializes in producing dried herbs, vegetables and spices. Kräuter Mix dries and refines whole, cut, ground and germ-reduced juniper products for the liquor, spice and extract industries in its Juniper Center which boasts infestation-proof storage. A wide range of botanicals for distilling gins is also on offer.



Juniper berries