



# Mix it Up

MY BAR STOOL IS RESERVED FOR GIN DRINKERS

By Laura Panter and Michelle Hunt

**SOME PEOPLE JUDGE** a person by their car, or the way they dress or the music they listen to. Not me. My cool meter starts at the bar.

You see, what a person drinks is a direct reflection of themselves. Vodka drinkers are the people mimicking other people on the dance floor so they don't look geeky; they love Madonna but won't come out and admit it. They don't really like the taste of alcohol but will pay \$16 for a 10-times-distilled, filtered-through-virgin-imported-diamonds vodka Caesar. Simply put, not my type.

Now a gin drinker—that's the date I'm looking for.

Just look at the history of the liquids. Gin carries with it a deliciously storied history in North America, filled with gangsters and speakeasies, secret passwords and flappers. It was the spirit that inspired the creation of the ubiquitous martini, and from that, the three-martini lunch. Further back, gin nearly brought about the demise of the British Empire, as 18th century citizens drank so much they forgot to work, preferring to hang about drunkenly while the government watched the country's economy teeter on the brink of collapse.

Vodka, on the other hand, made its way into the hearts of North Americans via a massive marketing campaign, claiming to "leave you breathless," meaning you could drink three martinis at lunch and no one would be the wiser. Certainly the on-the-lam story of patriarch Pietr Smirnoff escaping the Bolshevik revolution to re-start the family distillery in the free world carries some nuance of intrigue, but it is no match for the history of gin.

By the 1950s, recipes for gin cocktails languished on dusty back bars while people began to drink vodka in earnest. Like a blank canvas, bartenders found they could add anything to vodka and vodka to anything. Vodka and orange, vodka and grapefruit, vodka and cranberry; it was as simple as picking your favourite flavour and adding vodka. The creativity that had led the early masters of mixology to create the Martini, the Gimlet and Gin and It, drawing out the subtle botanicals of the spirit by adding splashes of bitters, lime or vermouth, was lost to tip-hungry vodka slingers. Even James Bond switched loyalties, from his early martini—which combined gin, vodka, Kina Lillet and bitters—to his Dr. No "shaken, not stirred" Smirnoff martini.

Fortunately, good taste still trumps good marketing, and master mixologists like Dale DeGroff are mentoring young upstarts, while enthusiasts pour through classic cocktail books to revive the lost liquid masters. They know that gin is not meant to be slurped, or shot. It is multifaceted, imbued with herbs, fruit and spices. From classic juniper-forward gins like Tanqueray, Gordon's and Beefeater, to newer, fruity and flowery gins like Bombay Sapphire and Hendrick's, to the ultra-smooth "vodka lovers" Plymouth, more drinkers are appreciating the depth of character in gin and its endless cocktail possibilities.

So the next time you approach the bar, ask yourself this: Are you a simple, silent, closet-Sex-and-the-City kind of guy, or a savvy, debonair and sophisticated appreciator-of-the-finer-things person? If you're the latter, I've got a bar stool waiting for you.

*This is the debut column from Toronto's advocates of inner peace achieved via superior cocktails. They also run the Martini Club (martiniclub.com).*



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