

Interest in local craft gin blossoms

By [Ufieda Ho](#)

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The cool thing about a trend is setting it, not playing catch-up. And South African craft gins are right at the front of the pack, leading the revival of the white spirit.



Photographer: [Ruvan Boshoff](#)

Distilleries now sell handcrafted gins with infusions of everything from grapefruit, rosemary and lime peels to cream, seaweed, olives, basil and truffles.

For South Africa's small distilleries, infusions of buchu, rooibos, honeybush and fynbos make unique statements.

Rob Heyns, alcohol buyer for Yuppiechef, says interest in craft gins has exploded in the past year.

"It may be because we started off at a low base, but we have literally just seen sales take off - and this is for handcrafted premium products that are more expensive than ordinary gins," says Heyns, who is also the founder of League of Beers.

"I think the rise and success of craft beers over the last few years is one of the main reasons people have become accustomed to different taste profiles and are willing to experiment."

Heyns says South Africa has keenly joined the world's new gin craze. Interest in uniquely South African infusions is picking up. Cape Town has been at it longest and has many distilleries, dedicated gin bars and gin festivals, but Johannesburg is catching up fast.

Duncan Armstrong of Jenever Montane, a fynbos gin, says it's exciting that the local market is still small enough to allow new players to enter and experiment.

"Inverroche was the first and now we have several small producers making excellent products. Hope on Hopkins has gins with basil and olives, for example, and we see products coming onto the market all the time - it's great. We're even seeing the rise of different tonic waters that offset different gins. And, like all things, some will last and some won't," says Armstrong.

Armstrong's background is in brewing. His interest in tweaking taste profiles, as he learnt with craft beer, led him to try the same thing with craft gin and fynbos.

It's the right time for craft gin, the right time for South African products to be frontrunners, and the right time to settle down for a craft G&T.

Heyns has some tips on how to drink the new local gins:

Premium gins are "soft, warm and smooth", so you can drink them neat with a block of ice to cool it slightly and dash of water to cut the alcohol.

Gin, though, loves tonic. Heyns says the effervescence "wakes up" the gin, giving the G&T its reputation as a drink of refreshment. The next step is about mixology - playing around to make the perfect cocktail.

Wait, there's more

Inverroche and Hope on Hopkins are not the only artisanal gins on the block. Try these:

Musgrave Gin: Distilled by different owners on the Hope on Hopkins distillery, this gin has lovely ginger and cardamom notes.

Gin Mare: A product of Spain, this immigrant is distilled with black olives and rosemary.

Gin is Monkey 47: Hard to find and rather expensive, this German gin is made with 47 different botanicals.

Source: The Times

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