

Don't pass on these gins

There's no need to gamble when building a perfect cocktail

It began in 17th-century Netherlands, but gin production is now an international game. Today, like Atlantic City, the floor is crowded with players vying for a spot at your table. Gin's history is colorful for an alcohol that is typically colorless: from the medicinal uses of the British to combat malaria in India, to the infamous "bathtub gins" of the Prohibition era (bootlegging was easier because aging is not a factor). Although Juniper berries are the common denominator to this white spirit, it's the addition of botanicals – some exotic and some eccentric – that determine flavor. Altering this delicate nature as little as possible is why it's preferable to stir, rather than shake, a martini. Prices are based on 750 mL bottles and each is rated on a 10-point scale. Whatever your choice, odds are you'll pick a winner.

SELECTIONS BY EVANGELOS MIHELIS & HARRIS SIEGEL PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL J. TREOLA

Bulldog (England)
A new shooter to the table. The bottle may exude attitude, but don't let the spiked collar scare you off – this London dry gin is surprisingly tame on the palate. Poppy and Dragon Eye add to the charisma, and it's a good bet you'll find this a perfect drinking companion.
Price: \$28
Rating: 9.0

Old Raj (Scotland)
The yellow tint (from Saffron) may catch your eye, but the 110-proof will keep your attention. Long finish, hint of spice.
Price: \$60
Rating: 9.6

Bluecoat (United States)
The harmony of sweet versus tart is appropriately distilled in the City of Brotherly Love. Although the limited distribution of this Philadelphia contender makes it scarce around the tables, we'll wager you'll be seeing this plenty in the future.
Price: \$25
Rating: 9.1

Plymouth (England)
England's oldest gin distillery is home to the field's smoothest player. Distilled from 100 percent wheat.
Price: \$20
Rating: 9.4

Tanqueray No. Ten (England)
Tanqueray's money player leads your olfactory senses through a pine forest. Only fresh fruit botanicals gain entry to "Tiny Ten" (the aptly named still), and the silky result is an upgrade from the original.
Price: \$30
Rating: 9.3

Kensington Reserve (Scotland)
This golden, 3-year-aged gin is as rare as the hand-blown crystal that houses it.
Price: \$200
Rating: 9.8

Bombay Sapphire (England)
Almonds, liquorice and bark (yes, bark) add to the complexity, and the robust flavor is as distinctive as its blue bottle. A good bet.
Price: \$26
Rating: 9.3

Boomsma Oude (Netherlands)
Malty with an enticing floral nose, this genever (Dutch word for juniper) is a throwback to the spirit that Holland claims as its own. Similar to whisky, it is distilled from barley and aged in oak. Served chilled without the distraction of vermouth or garnish.
Price: \$19
Rating: 8.9

G'Vine (France)
The grapes – and their flowers – are the basis for this unique offering born of France's Cognac region. Herbal and minty, this is an exhilarating spirit. If you're feeling lucky you should put your money on this bold newcomer.
Price: \$34
Rating: 9.1

Hendrick's (Scotland)
The container, modeled after an old apothecary bottle, is as unusual as the choice to infuse the spirit with Bulgarian rose petals and cucumber. The magical elixir is sweet, crisp and uncommon – unrivaled by many of its tablemates.
Price: \$30
Rating: 9.1

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