

# Back in fashion

A high-speed photograph of a martini glass filled with a clear liquid and several olives. A large splash of water is captured mid-air, splashing over the rim of the glass and creating a dynamic, energetic scene. The background is dark, making the glass and the water splash stand out prominently.

**Suneeta Sodhi Kanga** talks to Keshav Prakash, the Founder-Director of Vault Fine Spirits about the new artisanal craft gins that are putting the world's cognoscenti in high spirits

**G**IN has come a long way from being a medicine that cured stomach ailments in the Middle Ages to the British Raj where gin was used to mask the bitter flavour of quinine (the only effective anti-malarial compound), to its current avatar as a premium spirit that is the base of many stylish cocktails. Following in the footsteps of the craft beer movement, an exciting new crop of artisanal gins has been popping up across the world and educated tipplers are now turning their backs on the big name distilleries in favour of the smaller-batch, more cultured, home-grown craft or artisanal gins.

I had a chat with Keshav Prakash, the Founder-Director of Vault Fine Spirits, and asked him 10 questions that would educate us on the finer nuances of artisanal gins which are now gaining in popularity in Mumbai too.

**Keshav, tell us something about Vault Fine Spirits.**

The Vault, based in Mumbai, is a collective that represents artisanal distilleries from around the world. We offer access to over 24 brands of fine spirits and curate experiences around single malts, rum and gin.

**What is gin? What are the different categories of the spirit?**

Basically, gin is a neutral spirit (very similar to vodka) that is infused with juniper and other botanicals and distilled further.

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There are many styles of gin produced today—Xoriguer, Steinhager, Old Tom and Plymouth.

The most popular by far is the ‘London’ style distilled gin, where no added flavourings or colour is permitted post distillation.

**Where did this trend start?**

Gin is the derivation of a French word *genievre*, the juniper berry. The Dutch, who were master distillers, gathered from their travels that this magic berry was a cure for stomach ailments and would protect their sailors from diseases.

Gin was also known as Genever and Hollands and finds its mention in Jerry Thomas’s iconic cocktail book of 1872.

**What makes artisanal gins different?**

Mass market gins are a product of flavour concentrates while artisanal gins are meticulously made by a ‘single shot method’ where the entire produce is slow distilled and bottled.

Imagine adding a super coffee concentrate to a jug of hot water vs a slow drip to make a fine cup of coffee. Gin Mare & William’s Chase that we represent are examples of top class, artisanal gins.

**Do you see the popularity of high-end artisanal gins rising in India?**

The millennials of India are similar to their peers anywhere in the world; they follow global trends, although at times with a lag. Gin is now the darling of cocktail bars worldwide and is certainly catching up in India.

**Is gin usually drunk only in cocktails? Which are the two most popular preparations?**

Sailors added bitters to gin to enjoy the additional medicinal benefits of herbs and botanicals followed by tonic water which had quinine, a malaria battler.

The Gin and Tonic and Martini are perhaps the undisputed gin cocktails. The Negroni, with 1/3 gin, 1/3 sweet vermouth and 1/3 campari is perhaps the most recent gin cocktail that is gaining in popularity.

**What demographics of people enjoy these cocktails the most?**

Gin, once considered a ladies’ club drink in India post British rule, is now considered cool by the younger generation. The mixologists in India are also taking a keen interest in gin and I see a lot of creativity there.

**Which countries do the best gins come from?**

The Dutch have long been overshadowed by the English who were the dominators in gin making and consumption until recently. With a surge in the popularity of the category there has been an explosion of gin brands across the world from Japan, Tasmania, Spain, Scotland and also the USA.

**What food pairings do you recommend with gin?**

Gin can be used in cooking foods as well as pairings. Depending on the botanicals, gins pair well with seafood and European vegetarian cuisine.

**Some etiquette tips on the consumption of gin**

It is important to chill the gin well. I leave my bottles in the freezer permanently (they do not break as alcohol of this strength does not freeze at these temperatures).

Chill all the ingredients used for cocktails with plenty of ice. Artisanal gins can also be enjoyed over ice and a simple garnish such as a twist of lemon, basil or rosemary.

For Gin and Tonic it is important to get good tonic water. Brands like Fever Tree and East Imperial are currently available in Indian super markets.

**What are some of the gin brands available at Vault?**

The handcrafted and handpicked brands available at Vault are Sipsmith Gin, Williams Chase Gin, Citadelle Gin and Gin Mare. ☑