

of all the Gin Joints

craft distilleries gaining momentum in GTA

story Laurie Wallace-Lynch

Gin is in! Just take a look at the number of new gin joints (craft gin distilleries) popping up in Toronto's Distillery District, in The Junction, and throughout the GTA. Gin is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "a colourless alcoholic beverage made from distilled or redistilled neutral grain spirits flavoured with juniper berries and other aromatics (such as anise and caraway seeds)."

Today's gin distilleries have come a long way since the early days of Casablanca, the film starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman, when Bogart said "Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine." Today,

walk into any of these chic, classy gin joints and be delighted at the world of premium gins waiting to be discovered.

Reid's Distillery: Where Creating Premium Gin is a Family Affair.

Since Reid's Distillery opened late last year some 3,500 people have taken their distillery tour! That's according to Calvin Reid, of the Reid family who owns Reid's Distillery; Toronto's first distillery dedicated solely to the production of gin.

"Our tour runs for an hour and a half and costs \$25 per person and it starts with a Gin and Tonic and ends





with a drink of the customer's choice, with several botanical samplings in between," says Calvin.

Reid family members involved in the business include Calvin's brother Graham, sister Jacqueline and their father Martin Reid. Martin's parents hail from Scotland and during the Reid family trips abroad, they noticed a huge influx of creative craft spirit distilleries throughout the U.K.

"Gin in Canada was thought to be a rather antiquated drink with not a lot of change in the industry, but in the U.K. there was a lot of exploration in the craft gin industry, including new processes and collective young start ups experimenting with unique flavour profiles," says Calvin. "Juniper berries are the main botanical that qualify it as gin, but after that, the world is your oyster. We wanted to bring that artisanal craft gin excitement here."

Reid Distillery creates world-class gins made from

Canadian wheat, wild-foraged Canadian juniper and many other botanicals.

"Right now we are in recipe development for two new exciting gins including a citrus gin and a spicy gin, which we hope to launch in October," says Calvin.

Get into the Spirit—or Spirits—at *Spirit of York Distillery Co.* in the Distillery District

Spirit of York Distillery Co. gives a nod to Toronto's heritage in name and in spirit, producing premium vodka, gin and rye whiskey at their trendy distillery. Located in the Distillery District, visitors can see what is happening in the distillery through a massive floor-to-ceiling glass wall in the tasting room. Spirit of York products are also available at LCBO stores.

Spirit of York Hawthorn Berry Gin features the apple-like

fruit with a touch of Muskoka Maple Syrup infused into the rye-based spirit to create a unique tasting gin. Each bottle is filled and sealed by hand. From grain-to-glass, the spirits are produced onsite, creating premium spirits infused with flavour.

Self-guided tours are an option and then stop by the Tasting Bar and enjoy the Premium Spirits Flight of 3 Spirits starting at \$10 per person, or enjoy a 30-minute guided tour for \$20 per person which includes a Flight of 3 Spirits.

Bet you a Nickel you will love *Nickel 9 Distillery*

Located in Toronto's trendy Junction neighbourhood, Nickel 9 Distillery was established in 2017 with a mission to provide premium craft spirits to an "increasingly savvy and demanding market".

"In terms of gin, the first process was to test about 40 individual botanicals and flavours like coriander and lemon grass, and we would go out and talk to people in the community and eat at restaurants and decide which flavours we really liked, and only then, did we start blending," says Chris Jacks, Co-founder/Director.

Nickel 9 began producing Hidden Temple Gin last January, described on the website as "a traditional dry style; botanical forward with Spruce cedar notes give it a very soft forest feel while wild bergamot and grapefruit balance the taste beautifully." Chris adds: "Many companies use a grain-neutral spirit and add flavours, but we make our gin from our apple vodka, so we are one of the only grain-free gins on the market."

Gin and tonic and gin and soda remain the most popular ways to drink gin, according to Chris who states: "There is definitely a trend back to the classics and Gin and Tonic is so familiar and popular. We are also seeing a return of the Gibson Marini and Gin Gimlet. We also are working on a flavoured wild plum gin that's made with dark Canadian plums, which gives the gin a beautiful dark hue. We hope to release the plum gin next spring."

Nickel 9 Distillery products are available at select LCBO stores and the distillery also has a sample bar, bottle shop and offers distillery tours.

Maverick Distillery in Oakville Forages Juniper from the Niagara Escarpment for Their Gin

Maverick Distillery, as the name implies, is a pioneering distillery—and one of Ontario's first craft spirit distilleries. Founded in 2006, Maverick Distillery crafts high quality spirits which include their double-aged Barnburner Whisky and TAG No. 5 Vodka; with the much-anticipated release of their Ginslinger gin happening this fall.

"Our Ginslinger has a big, bold, fresh juniper taste resulting from the cold pressing of wild local juniper and the finest botanicals," states the Maverick Distillery website.

"It's a pure expression of Ontario; featuring juniper and other botanicals foraged from the Niagara Escarpment which are infused with other imported ingredients such as coriander seeds, cassia bark, angelica root, lemon and orange peel. Like cold pressed coffee or juice, we use lower temperatures and pressure to extract the flavour from the botanicals which results in a more intense harvesting of the botanical flavours."

Collective Arts Brewing in Hamilton is now in the Gin Game

Renowned for their artisanal beer, Collective Arts Brewing is also now distilling Artisanal Dry Gin and Collective Arts Rhubarb and Hibiscus Gin.

"We founded Collective Arts Brewing on the fusion of craft beer with the inspired talents of artists and musicians and we think the gin and spirits world is ready for the same approach," says Toni Shelton, Collective Arts Brewing communications manager.

"We always knew our vision would expand beer into other creative beverages, and gin is about as close as you can get to craft beer in the spirits world as it's all about botanicals, spices and how that combination comes to life. We started distilling in late 2018 and launched our first gins in May of 2019."

The Collective Arts Artisanal Dry Gin is crafted in small batches with juniper berries and a unique house-made botanical blend. Creators Matt Howell and Graeme Bell used a collection of botanicals including juniper, coriander, fresh orange, lemon and lime peel, anise, grains of paradise, cinnamon, cloves, fennel, pink peppercorn, ginger and orris root. The gin comes in a reusable bottle with illustrations by artist Tobias (Toby) Brunson of Bristol, U.K.

The Rhubarb Hibiscus Gin is part of a seasonal, one-off gin series featuring a whimsical blend of botanicals including rhubarb, hibiscus, juniper, coriander, fresh orange, lemon and lime peel, ginger and orris root, creating juicy and floral notes. The colourful collector's bottle features illustrations by artist Kate O'Hara of Reno, Nevada. Collective Arts Distilling won a Silver award in the World Spirits Competition in San Francisco; a 2019 Gold Sip Award.

"We think the more creativity in the world, the better, and it seems that drinkers are looking for a more creative, artisanal and craft product," says Toni. "It's a traditional spirit, but we're taking a modern approach to it and our drinkers are embracing that." 🍷