

New Western Dry Gin Category Summary by Ryan Magarian/Co-Creator; Aviation Gin, Portland, OR.

What is New Western Dry Gin?

The New Western Dry Gin designation seems to have evolved over the past 8 years, as a result of efforts from both large brand houses and regional distillers in Europe and in the United States. In taking a good hard look at today's rather loose definition of dry gin, these distillers realized a greater opportunity for artistic "flavor" freedom in this great spirit and are creating gins with a shift away from the usually overabundant focus on Juniper, to the supporting botanicals, allowing them to, "just about", share center stage. And while the juniper must remain dominant in all dry gins to achieve definition, these gins are most certainly defined, not by the Juniper itself, but by the careful inclusion and balance of the supporting flavors, creating, what I believe to be, an entirely new designation of dry gin that deserves individual recognition.

Where did it come from?

As I see it, Tanqueray should be credited with bringing the first true New Western Dry Gins to market, initially with Malacca, which was quickly discontinued (perhaps because it was misunderstood), and later with Tanqueray Ten, an outstanding product, that I believe, really opened the door for free thinking gin makers around the world to allow themselves a lot more creativity in their interpretation of this spirit. Launched in 2000, the intent of this product was clearly to create a gin with a focus away from the Juniper and onto it's more mainstream citrus flavors, and along with its slick vodka centric packaging, it's purpose was clear; To infringe on the success of a much larger spirit, market; Flavored Vodka. This approach was next successfully realized when Hendricks Gin, also launched in 2000, made a huge splash worldwide, drawing in the very same drinker with it's promises of weighty flavors of cucumber and Bulgarian rose petal.

Alright, so I think it's pretty clear that the New Western Dry Gin designation was born out of a desire by larger brand companies and savvy beverage marketers to sell more gin by appealing to a less adventurous drinker, the very same individual that dominates world spirit sales. And while many gin "traditionalists" continue to frown upon these tactics, I believe these two products have done us a huge favor and, as I stated before, have opened a door into an entirely new world of flavor potential for gin makers worldwide. And this has led to the release of a wide variety of artisan products, developed to showcase both exciting new levels of creativity, along with unique regional approaches to the creation of this spirit. Today, the New Western Dry Gin designation continues to evolve and I am extremely pleased to see that several are entering the market, not to take to advantage of the habits and preferences of a particular imbiber, but to first and foremost showcase the whim, talent, passion, and context of their makers

How are they made?

So, after looking at the cross section of New Western Dry Gins, I think most of them would fall into the Distilled gin category, which insures a high quality and fully integrated palate, with a few brands, adding additional essences, here and there, to coax out unique flavors that can't be had through common distillation (Cucumber essence, for instance).

Key New Western Dry Gin Brand Descriptions:

Previous to our Juniperlooza Session in New Orleans this year, I laid out over twenty dry gins to figure out exactly which brands truly belonged to this new designation that I continue to feverishly attempt to better articulate. In doing this, I devised the simplest of equations in tasting through the bunch; If the first flavor I picked up was not juniper, but rather an alternative botanical, I placed it in the New Western Dry Gin Category. If the Juniper was the first thing I picked up and clearly dominated the flavor profile, front to back, then I classified it in the London Dry Gin category. In completing this task, I was surprised to find that several dry gins that I suspected were New Western's, were in fact what I would consider London Dry Gins, which really goes to show how susceptible any of us can be to packaging and word of mouth. The following are my findings:

Citrus-Forward New Western Dry Gins

Tanqueray Ten, Bluecoat, South, Right, and Bafferts

Floral, Savory, and Spice New Western Dry Gins

Aviation, Hendricks, G Vine, Zuidam, North Shore Distillers No.6, Martin Millers, and Blackwoods

Mistaken Identity/Modern Dry Gins that I had suspected were New Western Dry Gins, but in fact, I believe, fall into the London Dry category based on heightened Juniper presence.

No. 209, Magellan, Citadelle, Old Raj, and Damrack

Conclusion/Why is establishing this new category so important?

Since launching Aviation Gin, a gin just about everyone will agree, is way out on the fringe of modern gin making, my mind has been in overdrive not only working to truly understand the nuances of the long existing Dutch, London Dry, and Plymouth Gin designations, but in articulating a place for mine and other similar gins to reside.

Just over a year ago, this whole New Western Dry Gin notion became crystal clear to me and, I believe, the quick establishment of this category (whether the name New Western, itself, sticks or not) is extremely important for the future of gin for two reasons:

- 1) Identity - In order for any product to find a market, it must have a clear identity making it immediately recognizable to its potential consumers. In my opinion, for the Aviation's, Hendrick's, and other gins discussed above to have any chance at long term success, they need to have a recognized designation of their own, signaling their unique production and carving out a clear understanding of product for those potential consumers for years to come.
- 2) Protection - With so many New Western Dry Gins entering the market, many that may or may not actually be "gin", I remain concerned unless a clear designation is created for these gins, the entire category might find itself not only diluted, but more dangerously unrecognizable ten years from now. Creating the New Western Dry Gin designation protects all other styles and insures each one's individual growth for years to come.