

RANSOM

Chicago Tribune
April 25th, 2010

by Josh Noel

Gin like great-great-great grandpa used to drink

A few years ago, the spirits nostalgia train brought the return of Old Tom gin, a style popular in the 18th and 19th centuries but so wiped out by the mid-20th century that, when distillers resurrected it, no one was sure how to make it.

Old Tom is generally agreed to be a sweeter gin, which, in some cases, simply means adding some form of sugar. But an Oregon distiller believes he has come up with the most accurate version yet — and he doesn't add a grain of sugar.

Tad Seestedt, owner of the Ransom distillery in Sheridan, Ore., says his Old Tom is most similar to the Dutch Genever style of gin, which begins by distilling a malted grain mash (similar to how a whiskey is born). Then, like a typical gin, he adds botanicals to neutral vodka-like distillate: juniper, orange and lemon peel, coriander seed, angelica root and cardamom pods. Finally he distills the two together and ages the product in old, scrubbed pinot noir barrels for about six months.

The barrel aging gives the gin a tint similar to whiskey, which makes it one of the few, if not only, brown gins on the shelf. Seestedt said he was aiming for historical accuracy.

"The gin would have been shipped in barrels and dispensed in the bars out of a barrel," Seestedt said.

But what sets this gin apart is what it does to the nose and mouth, not the eye.

First, the nose: It is full and robust and less piney than a typical London dry. The pine instead is sweet, with tiny citrus notes. The combination of botanicals, in my estimation, takes on a tad of peppermint, though Seestedt seemed to think I was nuts when I told him that. It smells akin to a smooth, light herbal whiskey ... or a wonderfully dynamic gin.

Now the flavor: My first taste was just the gin on one ice cube, and it was delicious — gentle, smooth and lightly floral. It has less pine than many gins and retains its grain character. The finish is balanced and warming. I was quite happy drinking it like that; Seestedt's favorite presentation is even more bare bones — neat.

Try it: For an Old Tom cocktail, Seestedt recommends a Martinez: 2 parts Ransom Old Tom, 1 part sweet vermouth, 1/2 teaspoon maraschino liqueur, dash bitters. Voila. You're back in 1794.

jbnoel@tribune.com



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