

DRINK GIN DISTILLERS

Shene Estate & Distillery's Myfanwy Kernke walking past a historic stone building on the property, at Pontville in Tasmania. **FACING PAGE** Head distiller and heritage conserver at Shene Estate, David Kernke.



THE RISE OF GIN

FROM TASMANIA TO WESTERN AUSTRALIA, CRAFT GIN DISTILLERS ARE POPPING UP ALL OVER REGIONAL AUSTRALIA.

WORDS KYLIE IMESON



PHOTOGRAPHY MARK ROPER, ALISON COSKER

DRINK GIN DISTILLERS

Hartshorn Distillery is located at Grandewe Cheeses, a 32-hectare sheep farm in Tasmania. The gin made here uses sheep's whey, which is usually discarded in the cheesemaking process.

DAVID KERNKE MAY never have started making gin if he hadn't unearthed several old glass bottles as part of an extensive restoration of historic Shene Estate in Tasmania. Found buried in tonnes of soil on the verandah of the 1820s homestead, the bottles were sent away to be dated. A deep green one turned out to be a Dutch case gin bottle made in the 1850s, while a turquoise torpedo bottle with a London address on the base was also from the 1850s. The address on the bottle corresponded with Pitts, makers of the first patented aerated tonic water. "The original owner, Gamaliel Butler, had it shipped to Shene and enjoyed it on the verandah," explains Myfanwy Kernke, David's daughter and marketing manager and ambassador of Shene Estate & Distillery. "Gin was the first product we made. Sentiment was behind that decision."

David is head distiller and heritage conservator at Shene and he made the first batch of gin in 2014 when craft gin distilling was taking off around Australia — some called it the 'ginaissance'. It's hard to put an exact figure on how many distilleries are now producing gin in Australia, as a new label seems to pop up almost every week, but at the time of writing there were just over 150.

Australian gins are unique, often containing indigenous ingredients as well as juniper — a white spirit can not be called gin unless it contains juniper — and have taken out many international awards. For example, Shene Estate & Distillery's Poltergeist Gin Unfiltered has been awarded platinum status at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition — the only Australian gin to achieve this.

To earn this accolade Poltergeist Gin Unfiltered had to win double gold medals for three consecutive years, which it did in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Myfanwy, 31, describes the Unfiltered as their "hero product. It is Shene in a bottle. It's a bold, unique expression with a viscous texture." Its signature botanical is the indigenous Tasmanian pepperberry, which earmarks it as undeniably from the island state.

Every bottle of Shene gin—there are two types, the Unfiltered and another called A True Spirit — carries its address, just like the tonic bottle found buried in layers of soil. "Maybe one of our bottles will one day be found on a verandah somewhere in the world — that is why we put our address on every bottle," explains Myfanwy.

According to 67-year-old David, whose passion for Shene matches his ardour for gin making, there is a direct link between the history and restoration of the estate and the distilling process. "The art of alchemy means that I can distill the spirit of Shene. It's captured in a bottle and then can be shared anywhere in the world. The story of Shene can live on," he explains.

Another distillery making a unique gin from its home base just outside of Byron Bay, in northern NSW, is Cape Byron Distillery. After meeting master distiller Jim McEwan in 2014, Eddie Brook began utilising his family's macadamia farm and 39 hectares of regenerated rainforest in the creation of Brookie's Byron Gin. "Mum and Dad invested and planted 35,000 native rainforest trees around 30 years ago and now the farm is teeming with life once more," says >

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CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE Kylie Sepos working on her Autumn Dry Gin at The Farmer's Wife Distillery on her property in Allworth, NSW; distiller Ryan Hartshorn hand paints every bottle of his sheep's whey gin; Eddie Brook of Cape Byron Distillery explains the gin-making process; one of the stills at Four Pillars in Healesville, Victoria.

30-year-old Eddie. “Gin should showcase the landscape and the region from where it comes, and we wanted to craft our gin showcasing the rainforest that is unique to the Northern Rivers. We are lucky to be able to go into the rainforest, forage and harvest many unique native flavours to distill straight into our gin.”

The Brookie's Byron Dry Gin contains native raspberry, riberry, aniseed myrtle, cinnamon myrtle and white aspen berry, to name just a few of the 25 botanicals used. Their take on traditional English sloe gin made with blackthorn fruit, which they have renamed Slow Gin, is distilled with Davidson plums, a fruit native to the subtropical region of Byron Bay.

One of the newer gins on the market is made by Kylie Sepos on her 154-hectare Angus beef and free-range egg farm in Allworth, 61 kilometres north of Newcastle in NSW. After 20 years working in the corporate world and five years of research, the first batch of The Farmer's Wife Autumn Gin was bottled in September 2018.

“I love gin but going from drinking it to making it is a big leap,” explains Kylie. “I went to Tasmania and fell in love with artisan distilling. We did a few distillery tours and I decided to start the business.”

For her gin, the 43-year-old wanted to source everything as locally as possible. The still came from Tasmania after

an 18-month wait for it to be made. She uses native sage — “it smells like the Australian bush” — lemon myrtle, anise myrtle and pepperberry, with some botanicals grown on the Sepos' farm. But it is the sugarbag honey collected from native stingless bees that gives The Farmer's Wife Autumn Dry Gin its signature flavour. “People ask who helped me with the flavour profile and I can honestly say my friends. I've got them to taste a lot! There has been no outside influence. It took three years to develop the recipe,” says Kylie.

Her husband Gavin, 43, a third-generation farmer, kindly gave up his motorbike and machinery shed to house the still. Currently, this is where Kylie holds tastings, but they have plans to buy another 40 hectares on which they will build a distillery, cellar door, café and permaculture garden.

Kylie started The Farmer's Wife to supplement income from the family farm. It was also important to her to help others on the land and \$1 from every bottle of The Farmer's Wife Autumn Gin sold is donated to Rural Aid. “We want to support our farming community,” explains Kylie. *CS* *Shene Estate & Distillery, 76 Shene Road, Pontville, Tasmania, 0432 480 250, shene.com.au*
Cape Byron Distillery, 80 St Helena Road, Mcleods Shoot, NSW, (02) 6684 7961, capebyrondistillery.com
The Farmer's Wife Distillery, 166 Allworth Road, Allworth, NSW, 0473 001 033, farmerswifedistillery.com.au

OTHER GIN DISTILLERS

With gin distilleries setting up all over regional Australia, we looked at 10 and some of the gins they produce (below, from left):

HURDLE CREEK STILL

Visitors are welcome at The Stillhouse, the rustic converted farm shed near Milawa in Victoria's King Valley. Here four gins are produced, including one made using only locally grown juniper. *216 Whorouly-Bobinawarra Road, Bobinawarra, Victoria, 0411 156 773, 0427 331 145, hurdlecreekstill.com.au*

DISTILLERY BOTANICA

Walk through the one-hectare Fragrant Garden, where botanicals for the gins are grown by herbalist and distiller Philip Moore, to reach the tasting area of this distillery. *25 Portsmouth Road, Erina, NSW, (02) 4365 3968, distillerybotanica.com*

FOUR PILLARS

Healesville-based Four Pillars has been awarded the 2019 International Gin Producer of the Year at the International Wine & Spirits Competition in London.

Now collaborating with distilleries in Sweden and Japan, and offering seasonal releases, its range includes 12 gins. *2a Lilydale Road, Healesville, Victoria, (03) 5962 2791, fourpillarsgin.com.au*

APPLEWOOD

Tucked away in the Adelaide Hills, this distillery produces limited-release, small-batch gins, some with a hero indigenous botanical, such as strawberry gum, Geraldton wax and samphire. The core gin contains desert limes, wattleseed and peppermint gum. *24 Victoria Street, Gumeracha, SA, (08) 8389 1250, applewooddistillery.com.au*

HARTSHORN

This small distillery 40 minutes south of Hobart in Tasmania produces sheep whey gin — the first distillery in the world to do so. Distiller Ryan Hartshorn uses the sheep whey leftover from the cheese his mother, Diane Rae, makes on their 32-hectare property. The result is a smooth, unique gin sold. *(03) 6267 4099, 0416 289 786, grandewe.com.au*

MARGARET RIVER DISTILLING CO

Surrounded by peppermint trees in the picturesque Margaret River, this distiller is crafting unique gins under its Giniversity label. The botanical is infused with sandalwood, boronia, lemon myrtle and eucalypt. *Maxwell Street (off Carters Road), Margaret River, WA, (08) 9757 9351, distillery.com.au/giniversity*

LAWRENNY

On the banks on the pristine Derwent River in Tasmania is historic Lawrenny Estate, built in 1818. It is now home to an artisan gin distillery producing three gins, including Van Dieman's Gin, which won a gold medal at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition. *6485 Lyell Highway, Ouse, Tasmania, 0438 966 020, lawrenny.com*

OLD YOUNG'S

Bottling four gins at their distillery in WA's Swan Valley, the Six Seasons Gin is a tribute to the local indigenous Noongar people and includes native desert lime, lemon

myrtle, juniper myrtle, bush mint, sea parsley and thryptomene. *10581C West Swan Road, Henley Brook, WA, (08) 9296 6656, oldyoungs.com.au*

TWENTY THIRD STREET DISTILLERY

The multi-award-winning Signature Gin is one of three gins produced at Renmark, South Australia, in a modernised distillery that was originally built by Chateau Tanunda in 1914. They offer a range of tours and experiences. *Corner Renmark Avenue and Twenty Third Street, Renmark, SA, (08) 8586 8500, 23rdstreetdistillery.com.au*

NEVER NEVER DISTILLING CO

Three mates produce four juniper-forward gins at their distillery in South Australia. Their Southern Strength Gin recently won Best Gin of Show at the Australian Gin Awards in Sydney, but our favourite is the Triple Juniper Gin. *0424 446 737, neverneverdistilling.com.au*

“Gin should showcase the landscape and the region from where it comes...”



TOP TONICS TO MIX WITH YOUR GIN

The rise of craft gins being produced in Australia has led to the production of high-quality tonics to go with them. UK-based Fevertree was the first to make 'real' tonics that contain quinine, not just quinine flavouring, in 2004. Strangelove started making tonic in 2012 in Byron Bay, NSW, before moving their operation to Melbourne and expanding their range to include three different tonics as well as other mixers and sodas. Owned and operated by the Folk family, Capi produce their range of mixers in Kyneton, Victoria. The Capi Native Tonic is infused with native Australian botanicals to match many of the gins being made around the country. *For more information, visit fever-tree.com, strangelove.com.au, capi.com.au*

At Cape Byron Distillery, where Brookie's Gin is made, you can enjoy a gin and tonic on the deck overlooking the macadamia orchard and regenerated rainforest.