



## Genever Timeline

**1269:** First major mention of juniper-based health-related tonics and medicines in a Dutch publication in *Der Naturen Bloeme* by Jacob van Maerlant te Damme.

**1552:** *Constelijck Distilleer Boek* by Philippus Hermanni mentions “genever aqua vitae” referring to juniper-infused brandy.

**1582:** First mention of grain being used as a basis for distilling in the Netherlands: *A Guide To Distilling* by Casper Jansz. Coolhaes. *Korenbrandewijn*

*“in aroma and taste is almost the same as brandy-wine”*  
and is

*“not only named brandywine but also drunk and paid for as brandywine”*

**1575:** Bols family, then named “Bulsius” arrive in Amsterdam, having learned distilling in Cologne and traveled up through Flanders.

**1585:** The Fall of Antwerp. Diaspora of Protestant refugees throughout Europe, with some interesting repercussions. Robert Stein, who first invented and demonstrated the continuous still, is documented as staying in Schiedam in the 1800s. Augier Freres, the oldest surviving cognac house, was founded in 1646 by a Frenchman married to the daughter of a Dutch banker, Elisabeth Jansen.

**1602:** The Dutch East India Company founded. Lucas Bols becomes a preferred supplier to it's inner circle, the Seventeen Gentlemen, and also got first crack at all the new herbs and spices flooding back to Europe. The sailors and officers spread genever all around the globe, and they received daily half-pint rations of genever in a specially measured pewter cup.

**1646:** Lucas Bols gets a licence to distill spirits in the city of Amsterdam.

**1658 - 1672:** Franciscus Sylvius de la Boe becomes professor of medicine at Leiden University, Holland. Nowadays he is widely, and incorrectly, credited as having inventing genever, which was already common when he was born in 1614. De la Boe's position in Leiden would have meant he used juniper for it's health-giving properties, building on the success of the health tonics distilled in Italy in the 1500s, most notably at Salerno University. De la Boe, incidentally, was German, born in Hanover.

**1672:** The van Dale dictionary, Holland's OED, notes the first published use of the word “genever” then spelled with a “g”.

**1688:** Willem II ascends to the English throne, and gin distilling really gets going. Initially gin is very similar to genever, but over time it develops a distinctive style, eliminating malt wine.



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**1831:** Continual distilling invented, but spreads relatively slowly.

**1862:** Jerry Thomas's *The Bartender's Guide* published. Except where "Old Tom" gin is specifically mentioned, all mentions of "gin" actually refer to genever, which would have been 100% malt wine genever.

*"In the nineteenth century, Holland or genever gin was imported [to the USA] at a ratio of 5 or 6 gallons to every gallon of English gin. This makes perfect sense: in the days before the dominance of the dry Martini, when gin was drunk in slings, simple punches (think Collinses) or cocktails (the original kind, with bitters and sugar), the mellow, malty roundness of the "Hollands," as it was known, was preferable to the steely sharpness of a London dry gin, or even an Old Tom, which stood somewhere between the two styles."*

*David Wondrich*

**End of the 1800s:** A process is created to extract molasses from sugarbeets, allowing for the creation of molasses alcohol much cheaper than previously. This isn't used widely until after the Second World War.

**1950 onward:** "Jonge jenever" made using less malt wine and more neutral spirits, typically grain alcohol for the better brands and molasses alcohol for the less expensive ones, enjoys unbelievable popularity. To this day, a Bols-owned brand of jonge jenever, Hartevelt, outsells the entire vodka category in Holland, selling more than 3 million standard cases per year in Holland.



## Making Genever

### **Basic process**

First, malt wine is distilled. This is distilled from a mash of cereals, typically rye, corn, barley and wheat; Bols uses all but barley for the Bols-brand genevers. Until the end of the 1800s, malt wine was genever. The creation of the continuous still in 1831 allowed for high quality neutral spirits to be made, which could be used to “stretch” the malt wine into (in descending malt wine content) malt wine genever, corn wine (Corenwyn), old (oude) genever or young (jonge) genever.

The fermented mash of grains is first stripped in a continuous still and then redistilled two to three times in linked pot-stills. It has to wind up between 46% and 48% ABV. Bols cuts (by the master distiller’s judgment) heads, hearts and tails. The first distillate that is stripped in the continuous still is called *ruwnat*, the second *enkelnat*, the third *bestnat* (which is in fact malt wine) and the optional fourth *korenwijn*; Bols distills four times, making *korenwijn*, the highest grade of malt wine.

Bols infuses botanicals into the neutral spirits for several hours and then slowly warms the still to pot-distill them with the neutral spirits (which are corn based). The botanicals are similar to the popular ones of London Dry gin: juniper, angelica, ginger, orris, coriander, liquorice. Unusual botanicals include hop. Genever is required to contain juniper, but does not have to have an apparent aroma or taste of it. As well as neutral spirits infused with botanicals, genever may contain “key concentrate” (a distillate of malt wine with many different botanicals) and *gebeide* malt wine, which is malt wine that has been redistilled with juniper berries.

The malt wine and botanical-infused neutral spirits will then be blended according to which type of genever is being made: a high percentage of malt wine for malt wine genever, and progressively less for corn wine, old and young genever. If the genever is to get some aging, the malt wine and the infused neutral spirits may be aged separately, then blended and married before bottling.

## Types of Genever

### **Malt wine Genever (*Moutwijnjenever*)**

Although this is a recognized term, there are no requirements for its use. It generally refers to a genever with a high malt wine content, in any case higher than 51%. This category has all but died out, yet it is malt wine genevers that Jerry Thomas was writing about, and mixing with, all those years ago. Malt wine genever was also almost certainly the base for the first Collins, said to date from 1800.

### **Aged Genever**

Apart from the fact that if a label mentions aging, it must have been for at least one year in a barrel of 700 liters or less, there is relatively little legislation governing genever aging. Bokma Five Years Old is an especially successful aging for five years in Limousin oak barrels. Bols have just released a Six Years Old Corenwyn to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rembrandt, who was a neighbour and frequent visitor to the Bols bar in central Amsterdam.



## Types of Genever

### **Corn wine (Korenwijn, Bols Corenwijn brand)**

This must contain at least 51% malt wine, be at least 38% ABV and contain no more than 20 grams of sugar per liter for sweetening. Like Old Genever, Korenwijn doesn't have to be aged but if it is, it has to be for a minimum of one year and in barrels of less than 700 liters. Bols Corenwijn contains 51% malt wine and *korenwijn*, plus a special "gebeide moutwijn" distillate; malt wine which has been distilled with juniper berries. The rest is neutral grain alcohol redistilled with botanicals. Bols Corenwijn is aged for between 2.5 – 3 years in used Limousin oak. Corenwijn is quite rare outside the Benelux countries and is excellent drunk on it's own, mixed into an Old-Fashioned or (because of the delicious maltiness) mixed into an Alexander instead of gin.

### **Old Genever (Bols Very Old (Zeer Oude) Genever brand)**

This must contain at least 15% malt wine, be at least 35% ABV and contain no more than 20 grams of sugar per liter for sweetening. Old Genever doesn't have to be aged but if it is, it has to be for a minimum of one year and in barrels of less than 700 liters. If the label mentions "graanjenever" or "grain genever", then the neutral spirits is 100% grain-based, such as the Bols and Bokma brands. Bols Very Old Genever contains malt wine, *gebeide* malt wine, and neutral grain alcohol redistilled with botanicals. Bols Very Old Genever contains 19% malt wine. Old genever is the most common type seen outside Europe, and constitutes the bulk of sales to Argentina. Old genever makes a great Improved Holland Gin Cocktail or, indeed, a Collins.

### **Young Genever (Jonge Bols brand)**

This must contain a *maximum* of 15% malt wine, be at least 35% ABV and contain no more than 10 grams of sugar per liter for sweetening. If the label mentions "graanjenever" or "grain genever", then the neutral spirits is 100% grain-based, such as the Bols and Bokma brands. Bols Young Genever contains 3% malt wine, plus extracts of apricot, clove, ginger and liquorice, as well as "key concentrate", a distillate of aniseed, coriander, angelica, caraway, liquorice and malt wine. Young genever is a superb mixer for longdrinks, but excellent in gin-based cocktails as an alternative: the malt wine aroma and mouthfeel is still present, but the botanicals are more apparent than in more maltwine-heavy genevers.

### **Fruit genevers**

Like Sloe gin, these gained tremendous popularity in the post-WWII era and are best-sellers to this day: the Coebergh brand, with red fruits, is a staple drink in bars and discos in Holland. These tend towards emphasizing the fruit flavours and have far less apparent malt wine or botanical character. Fruit genevers are hugely popular and widely drunk with ice, juice or sodas.