

A Global Bouquet

D. GEORGE BENHAM'S SONOMA DRY GIN

Made with a mix of 12 botanicals from across the globe, D. George Benham's Sonoma Dry Gin features both the usual suspects—star anise from China, cardamom from Guatemala, and coriander from Morocco—and more esoteric ingredients, among them sweet-and-spicy grains of paradise from West Africa, galangal from India, and zested Buddha's hand citrus from founder Dereck Benham's home state of California.

As its name suggests, Benham's is distilled in a small Sonoma County town called Graton. Soon after he perfected the gin for its 2016 debut, Benham—a veteran of the wine industry—promoted his assistant distiller Jeff Duckhorn to head distiller.

Duckhorn, who is a baker, brewer, fermenter of kombucha, and an avid gardener, can now add orchardist to his list of skills: "All of the Meyer lemons [used to produce Benham's] come from trees in my yard or from our local community," he says. And while the lion's share of the Buddha's hand citrus comes from the nearby Central Valley, Duckhorn has "a little baby Buddha [tree] that currently has about six Buddha's hands on it," he adds, noting that the majority of the fruit the brand uses will soon be grown locally.

Duckhorn and his team individually vapor distill each botanical before blending—which was especially helpful when they began experimenting with the recipe. For instance, while fresh fennel fell short of expectations, galangal worked exceptionally well. "[It's] almost like horseradish or wasabi coming off the still—super bright and earthy spice," Duckhorn says.

Using a micro-column still enables them to control the length of time each botanical sees in the gin basket as well as the temperature of the vapor that passes through it; peppermint, for example, doesn't need to spend nearly the same amount of time in the basket as cardamom. The subtly sweet Tuscan juniper berries they use, meanwhile, are "swapped out every 12 minutes." These precise methods ultimately yield a delicate spirit that's both worthy of gin enthusiasts' devotion and capable of converting the gin-averse.

Forgo the vermouth altogether and drink D. George Benham's Sonoma Dry Gin chilled on its own: Just stir and strain into coupe glass and garnish with a twist of Meyer lemon and three pods of cardamom. Or, with spring right around the corner, go the Gin and Tonic route—the fresh floral bouquet of the citrusy-clean libation will pair perfectly with a cool evening breeze.

—Eric Marsh



Benham's Gin, USA (\$35) This spirit is handmade, with each botanical individually vapor-distilled in column stills and then blended together; the citrus is locally sourced and hand-zested for a remarkable freshness. Aromas of salted lemon, lavender, and vanilla are delicate and inviting, while vibrant notes of lemon oil, chamomile, and honeysuckle are accented by coriander and rose petals. A wash of wintergreen mint and an echo of juniper melts into a dry, defined, and most stylish finish of blue flowers. **97** —*M.M.*

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