

Meet the maker: Still 33

By [Samantha Snedorf](#)

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Still 33 is a craft distillery owned by Curtis and Brownyn Van Biljon who are honestly two of the nicest people I have met in a long time. A family-owned business based in Kyalami; I got to meet every single member of their clan as I sipped on a gin at 11am on a Sunday morning while discovering their story.



Still 33's creation

Two years ago, this lovely couple set their minds to creating their own gin, which has only recently been approved for sales. That's right folks, they submitted and applied for all of the necessary permits, patiently battled through the red tape and bureaucracy for two entire years without being able to sell their product or make any profits. It was also at this time that they had issues with their location and contractors, making this a tough journey indeed. So I was not surprised to find out that Curtis is still working a day job and distilling at night and on weekends.

For most, this would have meant the end but the Van Biljons took the waiting period as an opportunity to develop their brand.

"We got a lot of feedback from gin lovers by giving it to people as tasters and getting pointers to help tweak the gin," smiled Bronwyn.

This input was invaluable, allowing them to enter the Flivver gin into the Michelangelo Awards last year, where it was awarded a silver medal without even being on the shelves. The bottles are already marked with this accolade, ready for retailers, so you can be sure that you are buying a quality product.

So where does the name Still 33 come from?

It begins with the year 1933 which marked the abolition of prohibition. Curtis also races a vintage car with the number 33 and finally, it is an acknowledgement of the 33 Ford which they are lovingly restoring the brand and drive around as a promo distillery car, making the symbolism threefold.



The Flivver gin

The first product from Still 33 is a gin named Flivver which is an old-time slang term for the original model T Ford. The connections are endless it seems.



The Van Biljon's have not strayed from their South African roots though, as all of their products contain Rooibos in some way or the other.

For anyone who did not know (I was surprised to discover): "Rooibos has a geographic patent like champagne. You can't call it Rooibos if it isn't from South Africa," explained Bronwyn.

This means that as an export product it is ideal because it can only come from South Africa. So next time you are in a pinch, look out for this local gin to bring to your overseas friends!

Not only do they use Rooibos, Bronwyn stated: "We source all of our botanicals locally. All of our citrus - the grapefruit peel

and lemon peel comes from the Lowveld, and our Rooibos comes from the Cederburg. It is just the juniper berries that we have to import."

Curtis added: "We stick to the whole sustainability idea and we even offer a deposit on the bottle with a discount on the next gin!"

Family values

"We are definitely a family distillery. We do everything. We are very hands-on with everything we do," said Bronwyn.

Although the bottles are imported, the love and work that goes into making them look the way they do, all takes place here and mostly by hand. The painting is done locally by a company in Joburg and the corks are hand stamped and each bottle signed, attesting to the craft within this distillery.



Flivver gin

Now onto the Flivver gin which has a gorgeous amber hue. I was surprised to find out that the Rooibos botanicals don't immediately give this colour to the gin. In fact, it is the flavour that comes first through distillation, giving off a clear but Rooibos flavoured gin.

"We do the first distillation with all the botanicals and the flavour comes in that distillation. Then it comes out clear like most gins. But then we add the colour afterwards," explained Curtis.

Bronwyn said that they wanted it to look like a cup of tea, which it definitely does and is the reason I did a high tea inspired [Sipping with Sam video](#) with it.

Onto the botanicals

Considering the coriander, grapefruit and lemon botanicals in addition to the Rooibos, I asked each of them how they prefer to drink their Flivver gin.

Curtis has his with soda because of his affinity for the citrus flavours. When he does top it off with tonic, it is the softer brands such as Fitch and Leedes that he prefers so that they do not drown out or overpower the delicate gin. "It's a beautiful gin during the day," he said, which I can wholeheartedly agree with.

Bronwyn prefers hers with peach and thyme which has more of an iced tea feel. I tried it her way and it was delicious and her tonic of choice is FeverTree in spite of the cost. You can check out my [second video](#) on her take (and I do have to say it was delicious).

Creative roots

Curtis has been distilling for five years. They initially began with Rooibos brandy but it did not make economic sense as it needs to be aged for three years.

Their creativity has not been curbed, however, and they have a few more drinks up their distilling sleeves.

"Later in the year, we will introduce our dry gin and then after a year in the barrel, we will start introducing our rum," said Curtis.

I have to be upfront and confess that along with the gorgeous gin, I was also gifted delicious gin and tonic fruit pastilles, a thyme syrup that Bronwyn made and some dried grapefruit which was done in the oven, all of which made me feel

positively spoiled.



The taste of Flivver gin

It is a delicious gin which even on its own is reminiscent of iced tea. Rooibos and citrus on the nose in a beautiful married combination which I personally can't tear apart. On the palette, it is so soft, with nearly no burn on the throat. It is almost as though the juniper is bowing down to allow the other taste profiles to be sampled. The grapefruit and lemon together make a good combination and are not too overpowering.

They are coming into stores slowly so keep an eye out their [website](#) where you can buy them for a little cheaper than their estimated retail price of R400.

It is obvious they are making a product that they love and in being a craft distillery, they have room for creativity and many more interesting endeavours to come, so keep an eye out for the top notch products from Still 33.

Read the [original Meet the Maker](#) on SamSamButDifferent.

ABOUT SAMANTHA SNEDORF

Snedorf is a qualified journalist and full-time blogger. She is obsessed with gin and is trying to bring light to the enormous number of gins and talented crafters that we have in South Africa. She films weekly videos where she samples different gins and focuses on their different botanicals. In the near future, she would love to host gin tastings and sell the handcrafted botanical bags she creates. She adores travel and wants to explore the world whilst drinking gin and taking beautiful photos.

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