

Inaugural awards crown South Africa's best craft gins

By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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South Africa's vibrant craft gin industry was on show at the first South African Craft Gin Awards, held at the Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel on Wednesday evening. With product quality that rivals the world's biggest liquor brands and packaging design to match, the inaugural event acknowledged and celebrated the finest craft gins the country has to offer.



Alan Winde, Premier Western Cape, with double gold winners at the SA Craft Gin Awards 2019. Credit: Tasmin Weir

The competition, presented by Checkers LiquorShop, is the largest gin competition in the country and the only dedicated competition for craft gin distillers in South Africa. Last night's awards ceremony drew a gathering of distillers, gin connoisseurs, media, retail buyers and representatives from the hospitality industry.

As we circled the tasting room at the event, the various producers spoke of their unique journeys to gin, from backgrounds in winemaking to architecture, law and copywriting. For them, gin distilling presented an opportunity to create something they love and build a business from it. Take A Mari Gin, for example, inspired by the owners' love of the ocean and distilled using ocean water and coastal botanicals.

Distilleries that were represented are scattered across the country, from the Cradle of Humankind, to Mossel Bay, Hartbeespoort and the Cape Town CBD. Ingredients used in the production process are equally diverse.



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Indlovu Gin is created with botanicals that are selectively foraged by elephants, then extracted and cleansed from their dung for infusion - an idea that sprang to mind while on a family safari. Monk's Mary Jane, meanwhile, is the first South African gin to be infused with hemp, while the company's original product, Mysterium, is infused with Africa's 'miracle herb' buchu and Sceletium, a natural mood enhancer sometimes referred to as the 'pathway to the gods'.

Celebrity gin brands Jin Gin, owned by J'Something, and The Finery Gin, owned by Jeannie D, were also showcased and both scooped awards on the evening.



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From the 110 gins entered into the competition from over 50 distilleries, 26 locally distilled craft gins were awarded the highest accolade of Double Gold.

Double Gold award winners

- A Mari Atlantic Ocean and A Mari Indian Ocean gins
- Copper Republic African Dry and Copper Republic Rooibos & Grapefruit gins
- Die Dröe Rooinek Dry Gin
- Flowstone Bushwillow Gin
- Geometric Classic Cape Dry Gin
- Ginologist Spice Gin
- Harmony Aloe Ferox Gin
- Indlovu Gin - Elephant Dung Gin
- Jin Gin Olive & Honey and Jin Gin Tomato & Sweet Piquante Pepper gins
- Knut Hansen Dry Gin - a South African version of the German original
- Lieben Sailor Lemon & Lime Gin
- Magalies Lavender Gin
- Monks Medella Blueberry Infused and Monks Mary Jane Hemp Infused gins
- Nuy Legacy and Nuy Mastery gins
- Old N1 African Dry and Old N1 Fijnbos Fields gins
- Old Packhouse Moringa Gin
- Pienaar & Son Empire and Pienaar & Son Orient gins
- Smiths Elderflower Dry and Smiths Spiced Dry gins
- Wild Rose Fynbos Gin

The gins were blind-tasted by an expert panel of judges, including Roger Jorgensen, the father of South African gin; Dr Anna Trapido, wine and spirits judge and food anthropologist; Thierry Lubala, mixologist at South Africa's largest gin bar at Asara Estate; Jean Buckham, owner of The Gin Box, a craft gin club showcasing different SA craft gins; Hanneli van der Merwe, oenologist and co-owner of Barker & Quin Mixers; and Tammy Frazer, perfumer and owner of Frazer Parfum.

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Commenting on the awards, Jorgensen said: “South African gin distillers are superb when they ace it as they develop their own style and techniques. Given the plethora of wonderful botanicals here it is no wonder that the Cape is the new Gin Capital of the world.”

“The future is bright and SA can be a global player, it has only just begun. Gin has been around for a long time and due to its versatile nature will not disappear overnight,” he added.

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