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UNDERSTANDING THE MAIN TYPES OF GIN

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At its simplest definition, gin is a spirit flavored with juniper berries and other botanicals. In the U.S. and many other countries known for the spirit's production, a bottle can't be labeled "gin" unless it includes juniper.

But beyond this requirement, producers have a wealth of options when creating gin. Like vodka, it can be made from any base material, though often uses a fermented grain like wheat or barley. Botanicals used in gin can also vary widely, and depending on the style, the spirit might be bottled at extra-high proof, sweetened or flavored after distillation, or even rested in oak.

Among the more common botanicals found in gin are coriander, orris root, angelica, citrus peel, star anise, and licorice. Some gins contain just a few botanicals, while others include dozens,

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resulting in aroma and flavor profiles that can range from pine-y to citrusy, floral, earthy, or any combination of elements. However, certain gin profiles are collected under larger categories, like London Dry, Old Tom, Plymouth, and more.

These are some of the most popular styles of gin, along with bottles that embody each category and what you can expect from each.

Contemporary/ New Western/New American

This category of gin goes by many names—New American, American Dry, New Western, etc.—but it's not strictly U.S. producers in the game. While these bottlings all contain juniper, many defy convention and often utilize unusual botanicals (think seaweed, olives, or lemongrass) that create unique flavor profiles.

"New American was a connotation given to gins that arose during Prohibition, as bootleggers and speakeasies would flavor neutral grain spirit with things like juniper oil and tree resins and then sell it as 'new American' or 'bathtub' gin," says Marsh Mokhtari, who owns Los Angeles-based Gray Whale Gin along with his cofounder and wife, Jan Mokhtari. "Today, these terms are purely marketing terms for gins that are attempting to differentiate themselves from traditional London Dry brands."

There's no legal definition for any of these terms and as such, brands calling themselves Contemporary/New American can use a range of distilling styles, proofs, flavorings, and additives to achieve their desired flavor.

Bottles to try: St. George Terroir Gin, Gray Whale Gin, Hendrick's, **Uncle Val's Botanical Gin**

UNCLE VAL'S / BOTANICAL GIN