

# Lessons in gin

*Devon is getting it's very own gin school as  
LIZ MILLER discovered on a trip to Salcombe*

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Create your own gin in  
Salcombe

SHARP-EYED and discerning drinkers may well have spotted bottles of Salcombe Gin, a new small-batch premium spirit brand on the shelves this winter. Now the team behind the new launch has opened the stylish Distillery Bar in Salcombe and is planning to start a gin school in March.

It's situated in two bespoke buildings in Island Street. First is the gin school, sitting above the aptly named Tonic art gallery, while behind lies The Boathouse housing a mighty 450 litre copper gin still and sleek first floor bar overlooking the estuary.

It's a fitting location for Angus Lugsdin and Howard Davies the founders of the brand, who met in Salcombe as teenagers while teaching sailing at the Island Cruising Club. Life has come full circle for the pair as the Salcombe Gin building lies on the site of the old ICC workshop making it one of the only distilleries in the UK accessible by boat.

This story started as a casual chat over a drink (G&T obviously) with the ambitious idea of creating a premium gin using the Salcombe brand name. Soon consultant distiller Jamie Baxter and drinks marketing guru Nick Marshall were onboard with a small team of investors and, after much experimentation, (all in the name of research) the product was launched in summer.

## ***'Salcombe and gin is a match made in heaven'***

"Salcombe and gin is a match made in heaven," says Angus. "Salcombe has a brand DNA already, with successful clothing companies, ice cream and the crab industry. We want to add to that with a premium product that is uncompromising on quality."

Following the launch of the first gin blend, Start Point, Angus and Howard had a "fantastic summer, working at an unrelenting pace" as they attended local food and drink festivals. Aside from local bars and wine merchants, Salcombe Gin is in 11 Majestic Wine stores, including the Chiswick branch in West London, as well

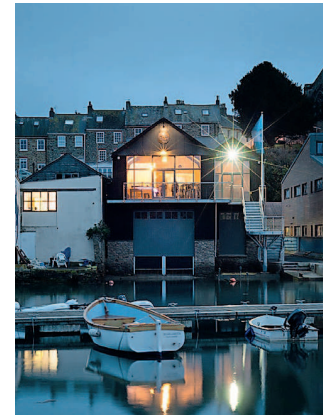




The sleek first floor bar looks out over the estuary



The Salcombe Tonic.



The site at night.

**THE PERFECT SALCOMBE TONIC**

One large measure of Salcombe Gin

Plenty of ice

Fever Tree tonic added in a three-to-one ratio

Finish with a slice of ruby grapefruit

**FRUITY SALCOMBE**

Before it became a playground for yachties and wealthy holidaymakers, Salcombe played a pivotal role in the fruit trade from the Azores, the Bahamas and West Indies. Citrus fruits were shipped on fast wooden boats with copper bottoms called Salcombe Fruiters, built in local workshops.

“Salcombe Gin is made using hand-peeled grapefruit, lemon and lime befitting the town’s trading legacy,” says co-founder Angus Lugsdin.

The blend is named after nearby landmark, Start Point, and the bottle’s label also celebrates its nautical heritage with a map of the area.

as the St Austell pub chain. Restaurateur Mark Hix has also snapped up a supply for his eateries in London and Lyme Regis.

“We’ve had great feedback from the industry and customers and exceeded all our expectations so far. Since the bar opened we’ve had busy nights serving Salcombe and Tonics and the next stage is to open up the gin school and give people a chance to learn about distillation,” says Angus.

The gin school is essentially a chemistry lesson for grown-ups, but instead of Bunsen burners and conical flasks, ten copper stills line a work bench around a bar area. Pupils will be tutored by distilling experts

as they start with a neutral high-proof spirit and add their own botanicals from the range on offer (or from their own gardens) to create a unique bottle of gin.

At the end of the three hour session customers get their handmade bottle, plus enough spirit left over for a celebratory G&T. The company is selling vouchers for the experience as gifts on its website, and Angus and Howard anticipate that, as one of the few gin schools in the country, it should prove popular for tourists, locals and businesses.

Until recently, the gin has been distilled on an industrial unit outside Salcombe where two 60 litre flame-fired stills, named Hoshi and Provident, after ICC boats, run in tandem producing 500 bottles a week.

“The output of six still runs are blended together to ensure consistency and Dartmoor water is used which is soft and good for distilling. The final spirit is 44% and then the bottling and labelling is done by hand,” explains Angus.

With the magnificent new copper 450 litre German-made Arnold Holstein still installed on the premises the entire process has been stepped up and one 12 hour run can produce 600 bottles.

If demand continues at the current pace, the still will be running at capacity as the brand met its first year’s sales target in three months. “There’s a lot of gin out there,” says Angus, “but we think we’ve created something truly special here in Salcombe.” ♦



Founders Angus Lugsdin and Howard Davies