

SIMON BULEY

ONE MAN AND HIS GIN

by Mike Gerrard

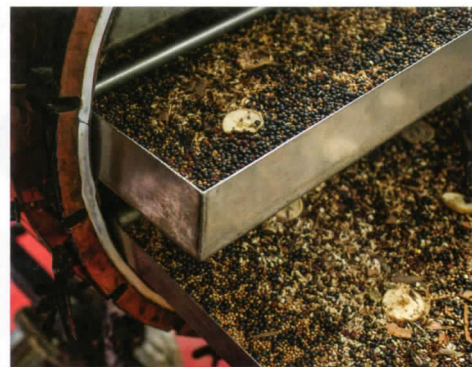
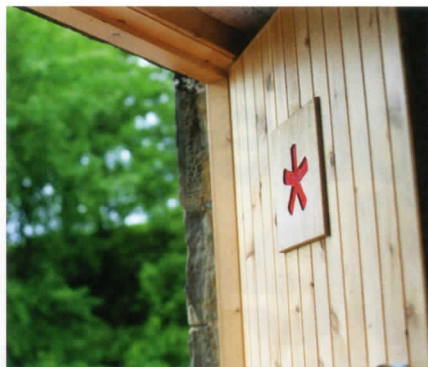


CAORUNN
{ka-roon}

70cl e

SMALL BATCH SCOTTISH GIN
Balmenach Distillery Stèidbichte 1824

41.8% vol.



Gin is booming, and in particular, Scottish gin is booming. The last few years have seen numerous gin distilleries opening in the home of whisky, from the highlands to the islands, and in Glasgow and Edinburgh too. Major whisky distilleries like Bruichladdich have started making impressive gins, and so have small new operations like Pickering's Gin in the Scottish capital, Edinburgh.

Probably no Scottish gin has had more impact than Caorunn, though, which is made in a historic whisky distillery on Speyside and is now available in 35 countries. A large part of the success of Caorunn (pronounced ka-roon) is down to one man, Caorunn's Gin Master Distiller Simon Buley, who's been involved in the distilling business for almost 20 years.

"I became involved in distilling in March 1998 at Balmenach Distillery," Buley says, "when it was reopened after being mothballed for five years."

Balmenach had been founded in 1824 less than a mile from the River Spey by James MacGregor, whose family background was farming and illicit distilling, not an unusual combination for that part of the Scottish Highlands.

"I worked my way up from shift operator to assistant manager, a position I still hold today," says Buley. "However, I've always enjoyed a gin tipple and I played with the idea of making a truly Scottish gin at our working malt whisky distillery. In 2008 we noticed the resurgence in the gin category and started exploring the possibility. I wanted especially

to use the ancient skills and recipes of spirit making, the uniquely pure Scottish water, and the local botanicals that grow on the surrounding hills. We set up a gin plant with our unique still, the world's only working Copper Berry Chamber, that was made in the 1920s."

This type of still was common in gin-making back then, but fell out of favor. It contains four trays on which the botanicals are placed, and with a long, slow distillation process, making Caorunn in 1,000-litre batches, the still ensures maximum flavor is coaxed from the botanicals.

Five of Caorunn's 11 botanicals come from the distillery's immediate surrounds, and Buley goes foraging for them before a distilling session to ensure peak freshness. The botanicals are also seasonal, so he has to stockpile enough of each to see them through the winter. Caorunn is the Gaelic word for "rowan," and alongside rowan berries, the gin's other local botanicals are heather, bog myrtle, the humble dandelion, and the Coul Blush apple. The Coul Blush is an apple that grows in the Scottish Highlands, and is Buley's favorite garnish for a Caorunn and tonic.

"I love Caorunn on a nice, hot summer day in the garden, with a premium tonic, plenty of ice, and a few wedges of red apple," he says. "In the Scottish Highlands we live in harmony with nature, and Caorunn is a truly Scottish Gin. It draws on the heritage, craft, and expertise of local people to harness Scotland's unique natural resources and age-old botanicals."

