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In the Spirit



How do two new Midwest spirits compare with fashionable gins and vodkas in the same \$25-to-\$30 range? Chicago's chief dining critic pitted Distiller's Gin No. 6 and DiVine vodka against premium brands. Two clear winners emerged.

by Dennis Ray Wheaton



Gin: Clear grain spirit flavored with a variety of botanicals, always including juniper

Distiller's Gin No. 6 - WINNER
(Illinois, 90 proof)

In 2004, Derek and Sonja Kassebaum founded North Shore Distillery, the first licensed and bonded craft distillery in Illinois. Made in a custom-built German copper still in Lake Bluff, their gin is infused with ten botanicals, including cardamom, lavender, and cinnamon. **Verdict:** Wonderful complexity with pronounced floral aromas and flavors; easy to sip neat even at room temperature. I'm not just jingoistic; it really is the best of the bunch.

Bombay Sapphire
(England, 94 proof)

Ten botanicals, including grains of paradise, almonds, and licorice, infused into the spirit while it's in vapor form in London Carterhead stills. **Verdict:** Complex from all the botanicals yet subdued and smooth. A little wimpish compared with the others, which explains its appeal to non-gin lovers.

Hendrick's Gin
(Scotland, 88 proof)

The back of the squat black jug says, "It Is Not for Everyone." Botanicals unique to this brand include Holland cucumbers as well as Bulgarian rose petals. **Verdict:** Reduced taste of juniper compared with others and more assertively floral. The cucumber adds complexity and brightness; often served as a martini garnished with cucumber to add to the effect.

Tanqueray No. Ten
(England, 94.6 proof)

Made with ten fresh botanicals—not dried, as many competitors use—including grapefruit, orange, lime, and a hint of chamomile. **Verdict:** Lively and fresh, with restrained juniper and sprightly citrus notes and an earthy hint of cardamom that make it stand out from most gins. My favorite since it was introduced in 2000—until North Shore came along.