



1 LITTLE LON DISTILLING CO, MELBOURNE

In a tiny, heritage-listed c.1877 brick cottage, hemmed in by skyscrapers, Little Lon may be petite but it packs a punch. In a pocket of Melbourne's CBD, once the city's red-light district, Little Lon is a distillery, cellar door, cocktail bar and heritage gem all in one. A masterclass here is "gin with a side of history", an account of the practicalities of distilling and the characters behind Little Lon's gins. "We embrace the questionable histories of Little Lon and enjoy keeping the stories alive," says proprietor Lynden Barnes. Constable Proudfoot, a classic London Dry-style gin with its "arresting" flavours of rosemary, juniper and a touch of pepper, acknowledges the real-life police officer and the constabulary's role in this Melbourne district's colourful heyday. Little Miss Yoko, a gin offering a taste of the Orient with seasonal lychees and vanilla, honours a successful madam and property owner who lived in the cottage around 1900. Open Thursday-Sunday.

littlondistillingco.com

Clockwise from above: Little Lon Distilling Co; Bellarine Distillery; Naught Distilling; Four Pillars; Bass & Flinders



2 BASS & FLINDERS, MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Sign up for a two-hour masterclass at this distillery to discover the nuances of modern craft gin distilling and create your own bespoke gin recipe. For something less intense, perhaps try a Gin High Tea of sweet and savoury morsels and a tasting paddle of gins. Or maybe a classic G&T in the Cocktail Bar or garden. Bass & Flinders distils its own spirit on site using shiraz grapes from a Peninsula winery, then botanical and aromatic flavours are vapour-infused. The Maritime Gin weaves foraged saltbush, kelp, wattle seed and currant. The Barbie-pink Cerise Gin is infused with locally grown Amarillo cherries, while the Angry Ant, "a truly unique taste of the outback" according to head distiller Holly Klintworth, uses botanicals such as mulla mulla and native sandalwood nuts from the remote Woolleen Station in Western Australia, and even pheromones from native gravel ants. Bass & Flinders also distils brandy and liqueurs. Open Friday-Sunday.

bassandflindersdistillery.com

THAT'S THE SPIRIT

Victoria's distilleries are taking gin making and tastings to a whole new level

MARGARET BARCA



TRAVEL + LUXURY



3 BELLARINE DISTILLERY - THE WHISKERY

This Bellarine Peninsula establishment has a rustic charm with its generous windows and an open wood fire for chilly days or, when the sun shines, a veranda, garden, umbrellas and table seating. Serious tasters can opt for a paddle of four gins, tonic and tasting notes. The original Teddy & the Fox gin combines lemon myrtle, orange, coriander seeds and star anise. Rosey & the Rabbits, infused with black limes and Turkish apricots, is aged in pinot noir barrels. The Old Dodger is a heady 57 per cent navy strength gin with saltbush and walnut. Trooper & the Roo features roasted wattle seed and organic cacao. There are stories behind the quirky names and clever illustrations by artist Stuart McLachlan. Platters focus on local produce, and pizzas are available. And yes, whisky is distilled here, too. Open Thursday-Monday.

bellarinedistillery.com.au/gin



4 NAUGHT DISTILLING, MELBOURNE

The entrance and the location in an unlikely pocket of outer Melbourne's Eltham seem a little basic, but once inside Naught Distilling's Cocktail Bar it's another story. This is the place for very elegant gin drinking. Think: chic polished timbers, jewel-coloured velvet seating, leather booths, botanicals draped from the rafters and the theoretically lit 800-litre copper still gleaming. Owner Chris Cameron, a former professional basketball player, hasn't been distilling for long, but has won a swag of awards.

Naught's range includes an Australian dry gin with wattle seed and star anise characteristics, a classic dry gin "for purists", and sangiovese gin using grapes from the Yarra Valley. Order a flight of Naught's three top gin cocktails or sign up for a masterclass to learn how to create the perfect Gimlet, Gin Fizz or other stylish tipples. Open Thursday-Sunday.

naughtgin.com.au

5 FOUR PILLARS, HEALESVILLE

It's not too much of a stretch to say the modern Australian gin movement started at Four Pillars in Healesville. The company is known for its innovative use of Australian and Asian botanicals, such as lemon myrtle, pepperberry, yuzu and star anise. There are multiple experiences in the sleek contemporary warehouse and gin garden. Order a mini tasting paddle, or book for a G&T tasting. Getting more serious? There's a masterclass, including a history of gin, tastings, a discussion of the botanicals, and a bottle to take home. For the seriously curious, join a 2.5-hour Maker Session, including joining in a distillation. Participants receive a bottle of the gin they've distilled plus other mementos. "Made from gin" snacks are also on the menu. The Bandwagon range offers non-alcoholic gins. And ask what "Four Pillars" means. Open daily.

fourpillarsgin.com