

Guardians of a legacy

BY BETHANY WHYMARK

Hayman's boasts one of the richest histories of any gin distillery operating today – we speak to the fifth generation of the Hayman family as their business marks its 160th anniversary



In popular culture, the portrayal of family business often goes hand in hand with family drama. Hit American series *Succession* shows the struggles – both corporate and emotional – of the Roy family over the future of their media empire in the face of patriarch Logan's ill health. *Arrested Development* stars Jason Bateman as the reluctant head of the Bluth family, attempting to keep the family business afloat (and his relatives at peace) after his father is sent to prison for fraud. In classic British sitcom *Only Fools and Horses*, brothers and business partners Derek and Rodney Trotter spend most of their working hours at loggerheads.

The Haymans aren't like that, and nor is their business. For 160 years, the London-based family has quietly been making gin with minimal fuss or fanfare. But, if the awards and global cult following its spirits have accrued are anything to go by, there probably should be at least a little bit of fanfare.

The story starts with a chemist called James Burrough (better known as the man who developed the recipe for Beefeater gin). In 1863, Burrough, who was also an accomplished inventor, bought a small distillery in Chelsea, west London, and started making gin.

"And thankfully for us, he stuck to gin," says fifth-generation family member Miranda Hayman, who now manages the day-to-day running of the business with her brother James.

When Burroughs opened his distillery, the sweeter and more flavourful Old Tom was the most prevalent gin style. But the chemist had other ideas. He developed a new unsweetened style – one that would later become known as London dry gin. However, he continued to produce an Old Tom-style gin to sate the demand from bartenders during the first cocktail age of the 1880s and 1890s.

The family business continued to grow, moving to bigger distilleries across the capital. Ye Olde Chelsea Gin and Tom

Cat Gin were its leading brands at the time. When the First World War broke out, records show that members of the family were not permitted to serve in the military as the distillery was supplying alcohol for medicinal purposes.

James and Miranda's grandfather Neville Hayman joined the business in the wake of the Second World War. An accountant by trade, he had married into the founding family, but restrictions on married women's employment at the time meant neither his wife (James and Miranda's grandmother) nor her two sisters took up a job at their family's distillery.

A cocktail renaissance in the 1950s – and one of its poster children, the Gin Martini – brought a boost for the company. "People's tastes were getting drier, and the Gin Martini really led the way for that," Miranda notes. "These drier tastes led to a reformulation of the Hayman's portfolio: it dropped its Old Tom gin, focusing solely on production of its London Dry.

It was Miranda and James' father, Christopher, now a *Gin Magazine* Hall of Fame inductee and chairman of the Gin Guild, who helped to build the modern-day Hayman's of London brand. After the family business was sold in the 1980s, Christopher bought back a chunk in 1987 and began re-developing it. Speaking about this period of

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time with *Gin Magazine* in 2021, Christopher said, "The whole gin category has changed since the late 1980s and 1990s, when gin was in the doldrums and certainly not enjoying the renaissance we are enjoying today."

James, who manages the brand's international sales, echoes his father's thoughts, noting that vodka was the "drink of choice" in the late '80s and '90s. "Where we started to see a revival was when people

started to drink the classic style of gin again," he says.

This revival brought another old character out of the history books. Hayman's Old Tom Gin was reintroduced to the portfolio in 2007 after a 50-year hiatus, primarily driven by interest from a new generation of bartenders. "[They] were interested in the way things used to be done," Miranda explains. "They were hungry for knowledge and wanted to know how to make the classic gin cocktails, and Old Tom was the way to do that authentically... And it is a versatile spirit, it is made for mixing."

While many other British gin makers have since added Old Tom gins to their rosters, Hayman's had an ace up its sleeve: Burrough's original Old Tom recipe from the 1860s. To the outside world, Hayman's Old Tom is an authentic and well-made product that has garnered much due praise. But to James and Miranda, it is a symbol of something much bigger. "From a gin point of view, we were the only people





These pages, clockwise from bottom left: A Hayman's Martini; Hayman's Sloe Royale; The Hayman's of London Distillery in Balham; Distiller Matt loads the still; The Hayman's line-up



with an unbroken lineage. If there is a gap, information gets lost in that process, but the reason we are able to do what we do is because that information was passed down and it was never lost," James explains.

"Dad often says that we are guardians of the family business. And that is quite important in the gin category. One thing we always say is that we are here for the marathon, not the sprint... In the UK, business success is seen as coming up with an idea, raising some finance, and then selling. People don't look at family business in the same way, but running a business for a long time is actually much harder."

That family-business mentality has chimed with the distillery's global partners, too. Hayman's started building its international presence around two decades ago; according

to James, this was in part to ensure security at a time when gin was on the way up in the UK but not yet "buoyant". He continues, "We have found that quite a lot of our importers think about opportunities in a very similar way to us. That family-business element plays a big part in that relationship, and at the time they didn't have a gin in their portfolio, so we have grown together."

The growth has been pronounced. Hayman's doesn't publicise precise sales figures, but its presence in 70 global markets in 2023 gives some indication of its success. As James puts it, they are an "established name" now. "We are not one of the larger gin brands, but we are not a new up-and-coming brand either. From an originality point of view, we are quite unique, and we are doing a lot of work to impress that and tell people who we are and what we represent."

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Flavoured gin has been the engine of the UK gin boom in the 2010s, but the Hayman family decided early on that this trend would not be a guiding one. "Gin by tradition is a spirit that is made by distilling with botanicals with an English wheat spirit, as is the case for us. Some methods of colouring and flavouring [are] a way to make gin more accessible to more people, but it is not what Hayman's does," James says. There is no pretension in this approach; it's simply a choice the family made about the way they wanted to build their gin range.

Their one recent foray into flavoured gin, Hayman's Exotic Citrus, has been a hit, and was named World's Best Signature Botanical Gin in the World Gin Awards 2021. James explains that the expression remains true: to the traditionally citrus-forward profile of Hayman's London Dry. "Our DNA is a citrus-forward gin. So, it was a case of what other citrus fruits were available to add that extra citrus but keep it still 'gin'. We had various different citrus notes to look at. It is a very hard, painstaking process to go through to get that balance of flavours right."

Producing Exotic Citrus in the London dry style added another layer of complexity. Miranda explains, "You are relying on natural ingredients and oils. That balance of flavours is so evident in all of our gins."

There is another idea in the pipeline, which James and Miranda say they have ready to go as and when the time is right - as previously mentioned, it's all about the long game. "There are an awful lot of new gins that have come on the market in recent years," says James, "but... there may be a time when gin needs a bit of an injection of life back into it."

He continues: "Some people talk about the gin boom being two bubbles, classic and flavoured. The classic category will be maintained but [in] the flavoured category, those consumers may not be there in five years' time... A real focus for the next few years is to maintain our gin. It has had an



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incredible renaissance in the past 15 years. Now it is about protecting the standards of gin, the category of gin.”

Both siblings are firm believers in the appeal and growth potential of the ‘no and low’ market. Hayman’s Small Gin, launched in 2019, was a first of its kind as a spirit-strength but very intensely flavoured botanical spirit of which only a tiny measure (5ml) was needed to make a recognisable G and Tonic, and a new lower-alcohol product the 12.5% ABV Hayman’s London Light, launched in early 2023.

These recent groundbreaking releases have been produced at the new Hayman’s distillery in Balham, south-west London. After a number of years distilling at premises in neighbouring Essex, the company returned to the capital in 2017, moving into a refurbished brick warehouse just a few miles from where Burrough distilled the first Hayman’s gins 150 years earlier. The new site has enabled Hayman’s to expand its distilling horizons: Re:Spirited Vodka, repurposing leftover spirit from its gin production, was released in 2022. And, in April 2023, it launched a hospitality training academy, giving back to a community that has played crucial part in the brand’s success. 🍸

Old Tom Time

Hayman’s of London has turned a strong spotlight on its Old Tom Gin this year, celebrating its barnstorming success in the decade and a half since its reintroduction. Earlier this year the distillery hosted a competition in partnership with online spirits and liqueurs publication *Difford’s Guide* asking bartenders to create a new cocktail based around its Old Tom Gin. The top prize was an expenses-paid trip to the Hayman’s Distillery in Balham and a three-night stay in a boutique hotel, plus a £1,000 cash prize. The Hayman’s team felt that, with the hospitality industry now back on its feet and the world more open after the pandemic, now was the ideal time to host such a competition and to reinvigorate its relationship with the global bartending community.

James (who loves a Martinez cocktail, perfectly suited to Old Tom’s) says, “Old Tom is consistent for us, but having a competition and looking at new sophisticated ways to drink Old Tom is something we wanted to try this year.”

