

Balancing act continues to bring reward

Hayman's Gin has been around since 1863 and its ability to maintain tradition while innovating has ensured it remains relevant in a crowded market. **Shay Waterworth** speaks to fifth-generation family member James Hayman

By modern standards a gin brand celebrating 10 years is considered a significant milestone amid such a competitive market. Yet Hayman's of London marked its 160th anniversary last year and the brand remains in the same family today.

The history of the company dates back to 1863, when James Burrough pioneered the London Dry gin style following the creation of the Coffey, or column, still. Four generations later and the Hayman family are still making this style of gin in London.

"As a brand we're not very good at making a fuss about ourselves. Perhaps we should, but it's not really in our nature," says James Hayman, a fifth-generation family member who joined the company 20 years ago.

"We're the last remaining family gin distiller from that time, which I think makes us unique in a lot of ways, yet today we're sold in around 70 markets worldwide."

Hayman works alongside his father Christopher, head distiller, and sister Miranda on a daily basis, and for him it was inevitable to work for the company.

"I've always been interested in the family business and I have memories from when I was a toddler being in the distillery," says Hayman. "I'd worked at some marketing agencies before joining the company in 2004 and, to be honest, it was always part of the plan to join the family business. My father wanted me to, but told me to go off and get some experience elsewhere first, because it would benefit both me and the company in the long run."

"Dad was always more of an operator while I did well on the marketing side of the business. That's not to say I haven't been called into action when required."

"Miranda and I always got on. We have different opinions in certain areas, but our fundamental beliefs for the company are very much aligned. Miranda is a lot better than me at the general day-to-day running of the business, whereas I tend to look further ahead and take a longer-term view of the brand's direction."

The explosion of the gin market, particularly in the UK, is almost perfectly aligned with Hayman's time in the industry and he's seen a lot of change in two decades. Yet retaining tradition has been a constant.

"Over the years we've always been loyal to what we think a gin should be. There have been multiple opportunities to turn around a quick sale, but we want Hayman's to represent what



JAMES HAYMAN

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British gin should be like. We do have a flavoured gin with our Exotic Citrus, which we developed during the pandemic, but the botanicals and citrus are steeped and then distilled."

NEW CONCEPTS

By sticking with tradition, it would be easy to stand still. However Hayman's has successfully balanced its principles with innovation over the past decade.

"In 2019 we launched our Small Gin concept, which is a solution to reducing alcohol intake. It's just a 20cl bottle but it's bursting with flavour, so just a small thimble of it inside a regular size Gin & Tonic makes it a low-abv serve. After that we developed Hayman's London Light, which at 12.5% abv is another low-abv alternative to the regular Gin & Tonic.

"We've obviously seen a huge amount of innovation in the gin sector over the past 10 years and I think it needs to take a

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breather. We always say 'gin will return to being gin', and by that I mean the category will return to its roots and the more traditional styles will always come back into fashion, which is why we're well placed for the future."

However, it isn't just gin which the Haymans have innovated in – there are other spirits categories the family have previously dabbled with.

"On a personal level I love drinking rum, but we have an extensive family history on this front too, which is why we developed Merseur in 2018. We actually have plans to open a new brand home for Merseur later this year and we have big ambitions for the brand going forward.

"As a company, we have a big focus on sustainability because, with our extensive history, it puts into perspective what we're looking after for future generations.

"During the pandemic we got a chance to review our processes and we launched a vodka called Respiration, which is made from the surplus grain spirit of our wider production, which we redistill to create a classic-style vodka."

Blending innovation with tradition is a difficult process, but one which the Haymans excel at. While other producers react to the latest trend or style, Hayman's of London do it on their own terms, to their own standards.

"There are so many different trends we get told about that it makes it tricky to predict what will happen next in the gin market," Hayman says.

"But from our perspective we want to support and focus on the traditions which have made the family such a long-term success. Maybe gin won't be so in fashion as it has been for the past decade, but we want it to be consistent and exciting for consumers even when it's not the trending category." 