

Meet the Maker: De Vry Distillery



By [Samantha Snedorf](#)

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I've been exploring Johannesburg-based distilleries for some time now and it was by chance that I came across De Vry Distillery. After chatting to Gerrit, he recommended that I come through for a tasting, but there was just one catch, they were situated all the way out in Oranjeville on a farm. The location technically makes it Free State-based, but we will forgive the lengthy journey because tasting their gins made it all worth it.



About the distillery

The De Vry distillery is owned by three brothers who have, within their brand, two gins, a rum and a vodka. They began experimenting with distillation in 2015/16, but officially only opened their doors to the public last year because of how difficult it was to get papers and licenses in the Free State.

Gerrit, the eldest brother who works as the front man of the distillery, guided me through the location as well as their journey.

Cherry gin

Let's start off with their cherry gin. De Vry was the first distillery in the country to craft this type of gin, which to this day is their best seller. Uniquely red, the taste is not sweet on the palate as one would expect. Instead, it has more of a liqueur taste comparable to kirsch, which comes from the way in which the cherry gin is macerated.

The process begins with the procuring of the cherries which come from a farm out in Ceres. This farm is part of the De Vry family through marriage which is both convenient and cost-effective due to the scarcity of good quality cherries at an affordable price. Having such an invaluable commodity got the brothers thinking and eventually experimenting, which

essentially led to the creation of cherry gin.



Once the cherries are brought back to the distillery, they are crushed (including the pits which add an almond flavour), and a pure alcohol is added to create a cherry syrup. After enough time, the cherries release their flavour and colour making these additions 100% natural. The gin is then distilled and this special syrup is added, giving it less of the juniper gin flavour and slightly more of a liqueur taste. I'm not surprised that this gin flies off of the shelves.

Their second gin, which is a favourite amongst the De Vry family, is the dry gin. These botanicals are sourced right off of their farm in Oranjeville, giving the gin its distinct flavour.

The first botanical worth mentioning is *khakibos* (khaki bush) which is considered by most to be a weed. The strong smelling plant gives an almost medicinal flavour that is only used in minute quantities (in both gins) as it can come out tasting bitter if overdone. Strangely enough, it adds a warm citrus flavour and works very well with the juniper.

The second naturally occurring botanical from the dry gin is cosmos - those little pink and white flowers that usually grow on the side of the road. You know, the ones that your mom forbade you from picking because if you did, someone was going to die? No? Just my mom? Well, these flowers run the length of the road leading up to the distillery, meaning that in season, excess amounts can be picked to dry and use in the winter months when the cosmos is out of season.



The last locally sourced botanical is the pink peppercorns which once more, come from their farm. This botanical does not have much flavour beyond the earthy and almost potpourri notes that it gives off.

The nose of the dry is very floral. The lingering taste/mouthfeel comes from the *khakibos*.



Not many distilleries have their botanicals occurring naturally around them which does set De Vry apart from many of the Johannesburg-based distilleries.

Gin values

I was interested to discover that Gerrit personally believes that gin should not need any additional garnish. He believes the drink should be easy to replicate at home, meaning that the perfect pour of De Vry gin is a simple but good quality tonic.

The cherry gin can take a maraschino dropped in the glass for aesthetics. I was surprised to find this out that his vehement belief that everything should already be in the gin was unshakable. The De Vry distillers believe in high quality and the integrity of their gin that needs to be able to stand on its own with only tonic added.



Rum and vodka

On to their rum which is gorgeous. The reason the quality is so exceptional, is that the brothers learnt exactly how to make a Jamaican style rum. The rum is barreled and aged at the distillery, in American oak which imbues a sweet honey like taste and amber colour which again is all natural with zero additives.

The vodka is strong but pure and made from grain. It contains sorghum which gives it a biscuit/cookie flavour, as well as a nutty/maltabella flavour, which comes from the grain sourced from the area.

The designs

The bottles are something special to look at. Each is marked with a specially designed crest which gives it a classy look and feel. The crest was the brainchild of the brothers and a designer who helped bring to life the lovely symbolism.

On either side of the shield are the South African flag and Old Free State flag representing their heritage. The mielie on the crest represents the grains that are used to distil their alcohol. The ploughed land represents their farming background.



The XOXO is a quirky representation of the Afrikaans slang *vry* which means to kiss. So the little hugs and kisses and the ply on *vry* for kisses. The clouds and birds represent freedom which is something that they believe in and from the "Free" State as well. Finally, topping it all are the three crowns represent the three brothers.

What they stand for

The De Vry brothers believe wholly in freedom; the freedom in craft distilling to play around with flavours and the freedom to create. There can be no boundaries in the creation process, as long as what they create is of a superior quality. They are passionate, salt of the earth people who love to have

like-minded gin lovers come visit. So if you are in the area do contact them for a tasting that will blow your mind.

Keep an eye on their website as well for their newest secret product that I was lucky enough to taste. Although I can't yet mention what it is, what I can say is that I will be buying about 40 bottles for myself.

De Vry gins are stocked to a number of stores including certain Norman Goodfellows, Tops and LocoLiq – check out their [website](#) for the exact locations or to order from them directly.

Read the [original Meet the Maker](#) on SamSamButDifferent.

ABOUT SAMANTHA SNEDORF

Snedorf is a qualified journalist and full-time blogger. She is obsessed with gin and is trying to bring light to the enormous number of gins and talented crafters that we have in South Africa. She films weekly videos where she samples different gins and focuses on their different botanicals. In the near future, she would love to host gin tastings and sell the handcrafted botanical bags she creates. She adores travel and wants to explore the world whilst drinking gin and taking beautiful photos.

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