

Meet the Maker: Jacqueline Grobler

 By [Samantha Snedorf](#)

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Meet Jacqueline Grobler, owner of Angel Heart Liqueur, Ginifer gin, Westcliff gin, Luvoa Vodka and Venom Moonshine as well as a set of all natural bitters; quite the repertoire for just one lady. I got to sit down and experience a day in the life of a master distiller and it was fascinating to say the least.



Jacqueline Grobler

"I built the distillery from scratch," says Grobler proudly. "I designed the distillery and lab for myself. This is not a place where we make booze. This is a real distillery."

Where it all began

2010 saw the humble beginnings of Angel Heart Liqueur established in Grobler's personal kitchen. At the time, she recognised that a greater food technology knowledge was imperative in order to pursue distilling and hired a food consultant to come in and teach her lab work, as well as many other skills that she now uses on a daily basis.



Fast forward to the distillery as it stands today – walking in, you get a feeling that you are home somehow, as overly romantic as that may sound. The warm copper bric-a-brac delicately complimenting the richly coloured bar entice and draw you in. Behind the bar is the starkly contrasting pure white laboratory which is somehow welcoming rather than clinical. Within the lab, is also Grobler's office where she can be as reclusive from or as open to the distillery as she wishes.

About the business

"We do a massive range of products, not just gin, and we are in the process

of expanding," explains Grobler. "That way no one gets bored."

It is a busy and never-ending job working in the distillery but the team are happy – all coming from various backgrounds, each individual fills a very particular role in the well-oiled machine that is Angel Heart.

The creation process

When it comes to creating products, Grobler prefers to be free and uninhibited.

It begins with a strong idea of where the product is heading, but the journey to the end vision is always organic and natural. Consistency in taste and flavour are very important in this industry, which is why Grobler does all of the development of recipes in the laboratory herself. "I like doing things the hard way," smiles Grobler.

The entire process is done in-house, beginning with the alcohol creation in small batches initially. These are then upped to about one or two litres and then to the larger three-kilogram kettle in order to test how the ingredients react; and finally, it will then be produced on a large scale in the 250kg still.





The progression of the product range began with Angel Heart, Ginifer and then Westcliff. Out of six products, five were awarded medals at the Michaelangelo awards, with Westcliff leading the pack. They also do vodka as well as their own range of bitters which requires up to three months per batch for development – the final flavour will be coming out soon to complete the range of eight. Even the gins are left to rest for two months so that they can develop their flavours.

Sourcing botanicals

The majority of botanicals and ingredients used in the distillation process are sourced locally. Some come from Grobler's mother's farm out in Limpopo, as well as from surrounding farms; and a little closer to home from the Johannesburg Muthi Market.

"I've got quite a strong belief that if you want to make a gin local, you have to be brave. We don't have fynbos here. We have grass and trees but in the middle of the CBD is the Muthi market. There is plant material sourced from all over, plant material that Sangomas buy for traditional medicine. That means that every gin we make contains muthi!" states Grobler.

She has also begun to grow some of her own botanicals, both in her personal garden and in front of the distillery itself. This way, she can ensure that the soil is at its best quality, organic and in perfect quality for her spirits – there are no synthetic ingredients in the gins; everything is natural but nothing is left to chance as Grobler combines both traditional and modern techniques to craft her spirits.

Distilling the gin

A large wooden mortar and pestle is used to mash the botanicals for every batch of gin and on days when the gin is being distilled, you can hear the rhythmic blows of the enormous tool as the staff crush them by hand. The thumping is the heartbeat of the distillery, and the lifeblood is in the incredible smell of the gins being created, filling the entire place with magic.



"With the amount of love, passion for what we are doing, in a way we are calling on the ancestors a little. If you crush a botanical, you release the plant's spirit," Grobler whispers coyly.

The truth behind the names

Finally, I requested some insight into the names of the gins, which I have always found unique. Both gins are named as a personification of the city of Johannesburg.

Ginifer is the gin with a personality representative of the energy of Johannesburg. The design on the bottle stands for the multiple cultures in the city that are all mixed into one. The gin itself is bold, fiery and won't get lost to a tonic because it is peppery and fierce.

Westcliff is dedicated to the area. Historically, gin arrived in Johannesburg because of the gold rush and the Westcliff, was one of the areas that developed because of it. The flavours of this gin are based on the man-made forest located in the area. It is a soft gin with green herbal undertones and is very easy to drink.

Finally, **Tincture gin** is the alchemical gin. With strong flavours such as lavender and bitter orange which is sourced from Grobler's mom's farm. This gin combines botanicals that are notoriously difficult to work with including sceletium and other interesting ingredients that simply cannot be produced on a massive scale. Grobler calls this her heart's gin.

Keep an eye out for Tincture, their new gin, which will be coming out in small batches of only 200 bottles. The only way to avoid disappointment is by pre-booking. There will also be special edition sloe gins which make use of local botanicals as well, so do stay tuned.

For more info on their range of alcohol, check out their [website](#) and also contact them if you would like to arrange a private paid tasting.

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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