

Something unique is happening at the southern tip of Africa where indigenous flora, which has been linked to the evolution of mankind, is being given a modern, trendy twist.

FYNBOS FLAVOURS

THE SPIRIT OF THE SOUTHERN CAPE



In spite of the bad press medical science and over-indulgence have given the gentle pleasure of drinking, most of the alcoholic tipples we enjoy today started out life as medicines.

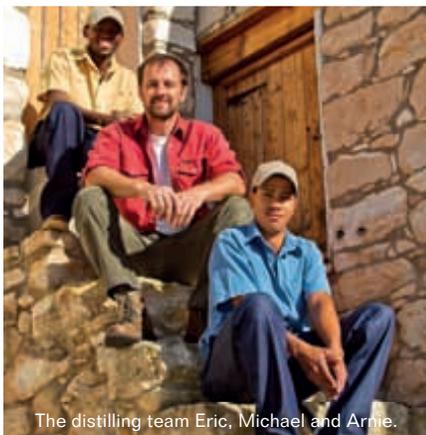
Whisky, brandy and rum not only lifted the spirits when life was, in the enduring description by English philosopher Thomas Hobbes “nasty, brutish and short”, they were believed to keep unspeakable lurgies at bay. Beer was quaffed through the ages because public water sources were too

foul to drink and gin was prescribed for everything from gout to a sore throat.

In the 13th century Italian monks were fermenting and distilling grapes and grains into spirits and adding plants with healing properties, like juniper berries, believing they could cure dread diseases of the day like ague, palsy, smallpox and colic. No one would claim much medical benefit in gin and tonic or scotch and soda today, but some blue-sky thinking and a treasure unique to South Africa have given birth to a

distillery in the Southern Cape producing a range of hand-crafted potstill spirits, borrowing from the skills of those early apothecaries but as revolutionary as when Scottish distiller William Grant launched Hendrick’s, a gin flavoured with cucumber and rose petals, about a decade ago.

The secret of Inverroche gins, rums and liqueurs, made in the small coastal town of Stilbaai, is the infusion of varieties of our own fynbos, the generic term for the nearly 9 000 species of ■■■



The distilling team Eric, Michael and Arnie.

IT'S ALL GREEN

Passionate about sustainability, the Scotts designed the distillery to be largely independent of scarce resources. Water is pumped by windmill from the aquifers under the Goukou River, rain is harvested and stored, the potstill is wood-fired with invasive alien vegetation, botanical material is composted and returned to the soil and limestone on the property was used for construction,

INVERROCHE

Inverroche means confluence of the waters (*Inver* in Michael's native Gaelic) and rock (*roche* in French) for Lorna's Huguenot roots.

plants that grow along a narrow coastal strip roughly from Namaqualand to Port Elizabeth, known as the Cape Floral Kingdom.

From the regal mountain protea to the low-growing scrub and herb-like vegetation of the plains, the flora that occur here are found naturally nowhere else on the planet.

Fynbos has slowly been introduced to the world over the years. People on several continents are familiar with rooibos tea, every garden has at least one geranium – evolved from the wild pelargonium of the Cape – and buchu, cancer bush, suurvygie, and aloe, among many others, are used in natural remedies. In spite of being confined to such a small area, it is believed also that fynbos played a pivotal role in the evolution of man.

Scientists excavating caves near Stilbaai and Mossel Bay have found proof that humans behaving much like we do lived there 100 000 years ago, predating by millennia the earliest evidence of modern man in the rest of the world. These early men and women cooked their food, painted artworks on their walls, wore shell "jewellery" and even had a rudimentary way of writing by scratching symbols on pieces of stone. They cured their ills with medicines made from fynbos, whose carbohydrate-rich bulbs, corms and rhizomes also provided food.

These early people are believed to have survived the last ice age and it is possible the heritage of all humankind lies on this wild and arid coast.

From paleontology to distilling may be something of a quantum leap but not for Lorna Scott, her Scottish husband Michael and their children, Rohan and Lauren, who established Inverroche and developed the range of premium spirits. Their vision was to turn an amazing natural asset into a world-class brand – and to celebrate the resilience of our ancestors.

Inverroche gins are made to traditional recipes but the additional infusion of aromatic and piquant fynbos botanicals adds to their complexity and unique taste. The classic flavours of citrus, spices and juniper berry are present but top notes and undertones of fynbos add to and complement the character of the spirit.

As one guest to the distillery wrote in the visitors' book, tasting the gins was "like a walk in the veld after the rain".

The recipes took three years to perfect – in a miniature two-litre copper still in Lorna's kitchen – and the gins were launched late last year. Packed in elegant French glass, they are double or triple distilled in a 1 000 litre custom-made copper potstill in small vintage batches of 250 bottles.

There are three in the range, available at selected Woolworths stores, boutique liquor outlets, the duty free shop at OR Tambo Airport and online.

Gin Classic is rich and crisp, best enjoyed with ice, tonic and a twist of orange zest.

Gin Verdant is full flavoured with the added infusion of late summer blooms that turn the spirit a delicate green. Drink it with ice, a dash of soda or tonic and a twist of lime or lemon zest.

Gin Amber is luscious and complex with tannin-rich fynbos botanicals that turn the gin soft amber. It is best neat on ice with a twist of orange zest.

The liqueurs, Essence of Fynos and Marmalade Liqueur will be available soon and the rum, at present maturing in oak barrels, will be launched next year. 🍷

