



How Gin Became a Tourist Must-Do

Ever since Juno Gin first started in 2016, there have been stories to tell.

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Originally, it was a story of two founders, Dave and Jo James, quitting their jobs and returning home to Taranaki after more than 30 years overseas to start a bold new venture with next to no experience whatsoever.

Then, there was a steadfast commitment to doing it ethically and

sustainably, from employing local contractors to minimising waste and sourcing the very best ingredients - including leading efforts to establish local growing industries where there previously were none.

Along the way, Dave and Jo have become passionate advocates for the

New Zealand spirits industry, paving the way for other distillers to grow their own operations and be recognised.

The story is filled with quirks, challenges, nifty problem solving and the integrity to stick to what they believe in.

And the newest chapter is a place where that story can be told.

THE JUNO CELLAR DOOR

To use a bartending metaphor, the Juno Cellar Door is one part bar, one part experience. It opened last month alongside Juno's distillery on Sunley Street in Westown, and includes a charming bar, a tour and function centre and an outdoor courtyard.

It can fit up to 90 people, and makes for a modern, intimate space where people can enjoy some of the best gin Taranaki - and even New Zealand - has to offer. It's not just gin though; they have a range of Shining Peak and Three Sisters beer, wine, as well as mocktails and light meals.

Juno does their own range of limoncello and pre-mixed cocktails. Their coffee vodka is particularly popular and makes espresso martinis to die for.

Which leads us to the experience aspect. The Cellar Door offers much more than you'd usually get at a bar. It feels more personal. It's certainly a unique place to host events.

"This is a place where people can come to engage your brain and learn about gin and other spirits, how they're made, what plants are in them and, in gin's case, how up to 15 ingredients come together in such a complicated spirit to make up its flavour profile," Jo says.

"It can act as a bar, but that's only a small part of what really happens here."

While you're more than welcome to have a drink in peace, there's also the chance to engage with Cellar Door staff about the Juno story. And the things you find out are fascinating.

Like how people aren't allowed to have things like curry for lunch in the distillery on certain days. Gin is incredibly sensitive and its flavour can be impacted by strong smells and flavours nearby.

Or how Dave sets alarms to check the gin production himself every 15 minutes throughout the day.

"You can't just do it by time and temperature - all sorts of things like atmospheric pressure make a difference," he says. "The only way to manage the flavour and understand what's happening through the process and adjust the still to match is to taste it. Thankfully, it's only a teaspoon at a time!"

These little gold nuggets are everywhere, which makes it a fascinating place to enjoy a drink and some company.

And they're all bound together by the Juno core values: Make it Fun, Make it Together, Make it Right.

MAKE IT FUN

At its heart, the hospitality industry is about being social and having a good time, and Juno goes above and beyond to create a fun experience, whether in the Cellar Door or elsewhere.

Staff at Juno choose their own job titles, and they have fun with it. They have Cellar Dwellers and Distillery Elves. Their custom-made gin still - courtesy of local fabricators Rivet - is lovingly known as Lila.

Not content with producing one of New Zealand's best gins, Dave and Jo push the boat out looking for new and novel seasonal gin flavours every year. They've made 28 different small batch gins in the last 6 years, influenced by flavours of the time.

This year's summer gin is themed Free Your Spirit, a nod to our Australian neighbours with lemon myrtle and finger lime.

Their lively personalities touch on all elements of The Cellar Door. They do things their own way, which makes it an uplifting, interesting place to be.

Fun is a lens that's cast over everything Juno does - if it's not fun, they won't do it.



MAKE IT TOGETHER

There's no hierarchy at Juno Gin - decisions tend to be made by consensus. Often, it happens over a shared lunch, which is prepared on site every day by whoever has the time.

But the together aspect of Juno is far more than just their own team.

From day one, they partnered with Taranaki tradies, engineers, marketers and service providers at every turn.

Early on, Dave and Jo established Distilled Spirits Aotearoa, an advocacy group for all independent spirit-makers across the country. The group helps to nurture pre-competitive distilleries with all aspects of growing their businesses.

One of Dave and Jo's goals with the DSA is to grow the global reputation of New Zealand spirits to be on par with our wine. It's a big, hairy, audacious goal, but they're ambitious people.

Jo says her other big goal for the industry is to have Air New Zealand carry New Zealand-made spirits on their planes.

"It would be great if it was Juno, but if it was another kiwi spirit I'd still be happy," she says.

Juno has also been influential in creating a botanicals growing industry in New Zealand, where previously

there was none. They've encouraged growers to start growing traditional gin botanicals like orris root, liquorice and angelica root, securing unique, quality ingredients for themselves and others, and helping local growers to find diverse international income streams.

They launched the Great New Zealand Juniper Hunt in collaboration with Massey University to track down juniper trees they knew must be around New Zealand.

To date, they've found 40 trees all over the country. But that's just the beginning - to bear fruit, female juniper trees need to be pollinated by male trees. They've only discovered one place where this has occurred naturally (in Christchurch), so they're helping to create partnerships by growing cuttings from various trees.

The challenge with that is you need diverse genetic backgrounds in order to be resistant to diseases, so it's not as simple as taking one cutting and growing it next to another. If that wasn't hard enough, it takes roughly 30 years until juniper trees reach maturity.

"I probably won't be around to see it happen," Dave deadpans.

But they're doing it anyway and bringing growers along for the ride.





clever, custom-made reticulation system at Juno means it takes less than five litres. Waste products are collected and given to other local producers - leftover still water goes to Three Sisters, where it's used to make their Wit Bier, while the remaining woody cone of the juniper goes to Giles Chocolatier to be used in truffles.

Through Venture Taranaki's Resource Wise Business Programme, Juno is independently audited for how much waste they produce. Two weeks worth of waste is laid out on a big tarpaulin and the ultimate disposal is reviewed.

"Nothing like a two-week-old smoked salmon packet to make you rethink your life choices!" laughs Jo.

At last count, a remarkable 93% of everything the business uses is recycled or reused. The other 7% is incredibly difficult to recycle (due to things like sanitation issues), but they're still looking for ways to be better.

Juno is a zero-waste facility - the first distillery in the world to achieve such recognition.

"We're sustainability geeks," Jo says. "We only have one planet, and we have no right to destroy this place. That is the most important thing we can do."

The proverbial trophy cabinet at Juno Gin is proof that you can make premium quality spirits while also looking after the environment.

Juno Extra Fine Gin has won Taster's Pick for Classic Gins in the New Zealand Gin Guide multiple times in the last few years. Various seasonal gins have also collected medals. It's beyond doubt now that Juno Gin is right up there with the very best.

The famous Elephant Room in Singapore, which is considered one of Asia's very best bars, even has a Juno cocktail on the menu - the only non-Indian spirit they serve.

"Being New Zealand's best gin is a big deal to me," Jo says simply.

All this only scratches the surface of the Juno story. Fortunately, that story is now there for anyone to hear and experience at the Juno Cellar Door.

"We now have a space that other people can come and enjoy with us," Dave says. "They know it's good gin, an ethical business, that we work locally and live and breathe our values.

"Now it's time to come here and have fun."

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MAKE IT RIGHT

The idea of making something the "right" way may sound subjective, but at Juno, it's more about being responsible than having a correct gin-making process.

Ethical production is non-negotiable. For instance, where it typically takes 25 litres of water to make a litre of gin, the

