



Gin Xoriguer

The secret of **Xoriguer** lies in its unusual Mediterranean origins, the Pons family distillery and the island of Menorca.

History & Origins

Menorca, the most easterly of the Balearic Islands, belonged to the British Crown for most of the 18th century. First occupied in 1708 during the War of Spanish Succession, it was formally ceded to Great Britain in 1713 at the Treaty of Utrecht. The island's strategic significance lay in its port at Mahón, one of the best natural harbours in the Mediterranean, which became a major British naval base.

Sailors and soldiers stationed on the island frequented local taverns but were unable to find gin, the most popular drink of the day. Before long, a group of Mahón craftsmen found a solution to the problem. They imported juniper berries, which were not native to the island, and distilled gin using wine alcohol from Mediterranean vineyards. During the 18th and 19th centuries Menorcan gin became a fashionable drink at cultural events and parties (fiestas) on the island.

Almost 100 years ago, Senor Miguel Pons Justo, head of one of the first Menorcan families to produce the local gin, christened their creation Xoriguer (pronounced sho-ri-gair). Wishing to reflect the family's long established reputation as millers, he named the gin after the emblem of his family's centuries old milling business: Xoriguer, the old windmill, built in 1784, in which many generations of the Pons family had converted bushels of wheat to flour.

Over time, Xoriguer gin became more than merely a local curiosity and gained ever widening recognition for its unique flavour and distinctive bottle.

These attributes, and its characteristic Mediterranean flavour, eventually resulted in Xoriguer being one of the few gins to be recognised throughout the EU as a local speciality with a geographic designation of origin, ETG Mahon-Menorca.

Xoriguer is still a family business, and the Pons family aims to introduce the distinctive appeal of its gin to a wider circle of gin connoisseurs.

The Ritual Of Distillation

Xoriguer is today - as always - the result of meticulous manual distillation in wood-fuelled copper stills, using the best wine alcohol (rather than the more commonly used grain alcohol) and fresh juniper berries.

A number of other aromatics are added to create the gin's bouquet, but these remain a closely guarded secret. Only the heirs of Miguel Pons Justo know the identity of the ingredients and their proportions. To protect the unique character of Xoriguer, those secret ingredients are always added to the still just before distillation begins, behind closed doors and without witnesses.

A blend of wine, alcohol and water is boiled in the copper still, to produce a vapour. The wine alcohol used has no taste of grapes or wine. It therefore absorbs the scent of wild juniper and other aromatics in a completely different way to grain-based gins, which is one of the keys to Xoriguer's unique flavour and aroma. The vapour passes through a copper basket in the neck of the still, which contains the botanicals; each time it passes through it becomes a little more infused with their distinctive scents and flavours.

The vapour is carefully heated and cooled repeatedly, allowing it to pass through the berries and herbs several times. Only when it has become saturated with their flavour, is it allowed to condense within the coil, where it forms a clear liquid and drips into jars. The distillation is tasted by experts to ensure that its flavour is complete and to determine where to make "the cut". It is then stored in large oak barrels, where its colour, flavour and aroma remain unchanged until it is bottled.

Unlike most gins, which are distilled in a concentrated form and then diluted with water for bottling, Xoriguer is distilled with such meticulous care that it emerges from the still ready to be tasted, at about its final strength of 38% alcohol. Whenever you drink Xoriguer, you know that every drop of it has gone through this rigorous distillation process, which creates a uniquely rounded taste.

The Island Of Menorca

Menorca remained almost unknown to the outside world until the 17th century when, thanks to its British connections and its naval significance in the Mediterranean, it emerged into the modern era. The Menorcan people enjoyed the fruits of their new prominence; in the 19th century building up footwear and silverware industries alongside their thriving distilling and wine producing traditions; then in the 20th century welcoming tourism and modern agriculture.

The island has achieved all this without jeopardizing its beautiful natural environment and unique personality. UNESCO has awarded the island the status of a Biosphere Reserve in recognition of its success in maintaining an economic and ecological balance.

Local traditions remain central to the lives of Menorcans of every age, and are an important part of what it means to live on the island. Nothing epitomizes this more than the fiestas, in which Xoriguer plays a central role. Typically, it is drunk with fresh lemon juice or with lemonade in a delicious mixture called pomada.

Fiestas

Menorcan fiestas take place almost every weekend throughout the summer. Each town, in turn, is transformed into a venue for a high spirited public celebration, at the centre of which is the jáleo. Horses and their elaborately dressed riders (caixers) enter the town's main square and, encouraged by the live band and an animated crowd, they dance to the music of the fiesta. Xoriguer in pomada is always at the heart of the party.

The most traditional of all fiestas is the Sant Joan of Ciudadella. On the Sunday preceding the fiesta (Día des be) a man, dressed in lambskin and carrying a sheep decorated in coloured ribbons and tiny mirrors, walks barefoot through the streets of Ciudadella and into the houses of the senior riders. This marks the start of two days of fun, music, parties and Xoriguer, interspersed with some extraordinary demonstrations of equestrian skill.

One of the most spectacular of these events is the Córreer abraçats in which two horses gallop together through a street in the centre of the town, their riders arm in arm.



Gin Xoriguer

The Pons family is proud of its long-standing participation in the well-balanced development of Menorca and of its role in sharing this philosophy with all those who are able to enjoy the island's natural and cultural attractions.

Even today, 60% of Xoriguer never leaves Menorca. Yet its owners are happy to share their gin with people in other parts of the world who are willing and able to appreciate it. They are now delighted to bring their exceptional gin to Britain – a nation whose people played such an instrumental part in its creation all those years ago.

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