

EXPERIENCE HOBART



Storytelling with spirit

You don't need to be a demographic to enjoy a trendy tippie, writes *Mark Dapin*.

AT MACQ 01 in Hobart - whose name sounds more like a rego than a pub - I discover that I'm a demographic.

The MACQ 01 styles itself as a "storytelling hotel". I like to hear stories, and ideally enjoy a drink at the same time, so MACQ 01's Gin Tales experience held out a certain promise.

Each of the 114 rooms at the waterfront hotel is named after a Tasmanian identity, from Abel Tasman, who "discovered" Australia for Europeans, to Alison Reid, who used to walk a leopard around Hobart Botanical Gardens.

According to the hotel's slightly odd reasoning, each of these people exhibits certain of the "five traits of the Tasmanian character", ranging from "curious and creative" through "hearty and resilient" to "fighting believer" (which isn't technically a character trait, but never mind).

The hotel has divided its 114 characters into these five temperaments and, in partnership with McHenry Distillery in Port Arthur, developed a gin for each one. Which is how I also find out that I'm a personality type.

The hotel's storytelling and the gin come together in the MACQ

01's Story Bar, which is decorated with historic front pages of Tasmanian newspapers. Our flight of five gins is already lined up on a table, but first we have to take a personality test. I'm usually wary of personality tests in case I fail (*"I'm sorry, sir, you have no personality"*), but I turn out to be "curious and creative".

I should say here that I don't know anything about gin. More than that, I didn't know that there was anything to know about gin. I'd just assumed it all tasted the same.

Apparently, however, a distiller can add any kind of botanical to the juniper base, and McHenry and MACQ laboured long and hard to establish which Tasmanian ingredients might best link to the characters. "We tried everything," says the hotel's Danika Porter. "We even made one gin that had squid ink in it; it didn't work."

Before we sniff and sample our McHenry's Fighting Believer gin, we are told the story of "fighting believer" Matthew Brady.

Known as the "Gentleman Bushranger", Brady was a transported thief who escaped from Macquarie Harbour in 1824 and spent the next two years terrorising the Tasmanian gentry with feigned good manners, relatively subdued violence and a lively sense of humour. He was hanged in 1826.

The Fighting Believer gin is a revelation to me.

It's an aperitif, only 23 percent alcohol and carries flavour of cardamon, mountain pepper, ginger, citrus and wild damson plum.

It's very nice indeed. Should I ever have occasion to drink gin in the future (which I never have in the past), I would ideally be served with a Fighting Believer.

The Colourful & Quirky gin (named for the personality type of everybody at the table but me) has gold leaf in the bottle, which looks like a sort of precious snow dome. The colourful and quirky character is Salamanca brothel madam and publican Ma Dwyer, who kept a chair leg known as "the peacemaker" behind her bar.

Colourful & Quirky is apparently best taken with McHenry tonic which, unlike

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most tonics, doesn't taste like weedkiller.

My favourite character is the "hearty and resilient" Jorgen Jorgenson, a Danish adventurer who sailed to Australia in 1800 and was one of the first colonists of Tasmania in 1803.

Jorgenson returned to Europe and later proclaimed himself regent of Iceland. His reign lasted only nine weeks, and he soon found himself imprisoned in England, where he fell into a life of crime - only to be transported back to Van Diemen's Land in 1826. His gin could never really live up to his story, although it's pretty good.

The more that I drink, the more absorbing - and funnier - the stories of the characters seem to become. After my third gin, I resolve to write a book about Tasmania (although apparently there have been a couple written already).



Next up is Curious & Creative (that's me!). My type of Tasmanian is personified by Lady Jane Franklin, the wife of Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Franklin, a man who continually tried and failed to traverse the Northwest Passage.

Lady Jane, however, established Tasmanian institutions such as the museum, the university and the botanic gardens and was the first woman to climb Mount Wellington.

When Sir John vanished on his final attempt on the Northwest Passage, Lady Jane sponsored seven unsuccessful attempts to find him.

It's difficult to see what Lady Jane and I might have in common, but our gin combines lemon verbena, strawberry gum, fennel seed, mountain pepper and aniseed myrtle - only some of which I have ever heard of.

The final gin is the barrel-aged Grounded, Yet Exceptional. It's the best gin since Fighting Believer, but that might just be because it's the last one.

Our "grounded, yet exceptional" woman is Lucy Beeton, "the Queen of the Isles", the daughter of a convict father and an Aboriginal mother, who did her best to improve the conditions of dispossessed Indigenous women and children in Tasmania.

The storytelling is inspired, largely accurate, funny and socially aware. Washed down with gin, it seems aimed with uncanny accuracy at a rather specific demographic: me.

The writer was a guest of MACQ 01

SNAPSHOT

What: Gin Tales takes place in the Story Bar at MACQ 01, 5pm-6.30pm, Monday to Saturday, with a maximum of eight guests.

How much: \$35 per person

Explore more: macq01.com.au

From top: Master storyteller Aaron Cuneo at the Story Bar, MACQ01 hotel, each of the hotel's rooms is named after a Tasmanian identity.

