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STILL LIFE

Just one year ago, Gary Jago and Catherine Crothers' 300-litre copper still, affectionately known as Beryl, produced its first commercial range of Big Tree gin. In the year since, Beryl's output has garnered Big Tree multiple gongs, including two gold and two silver medals at the Australian Distilled Spirits Awards (ADSA) and double gold at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition.

Jago and Crothers were also approached by the sommelier from Australia's most celebrated restaurant, Brae, to stock their Elegant Dry gin, one of five styles that Big Tree produces.

"It's a relief and nice to know we're on the right track," says Crothers of the gin's success. "A lot of distillers are going down the whisky path and their gin is a sideline, but we are just gin lovers."

Big Tree Distillery is on the couple's 32-hectare Jack's Springs farm in Victoria's Macedon Ranges, where they grow olive trees and prime-bred lamb to sell at farmers' markets and local restaurants. The gin is made from a mixture of farm-harvested rainwater and grain-based spirit. The botanicals are ground and added to the still pot in a one-charge distillation process.

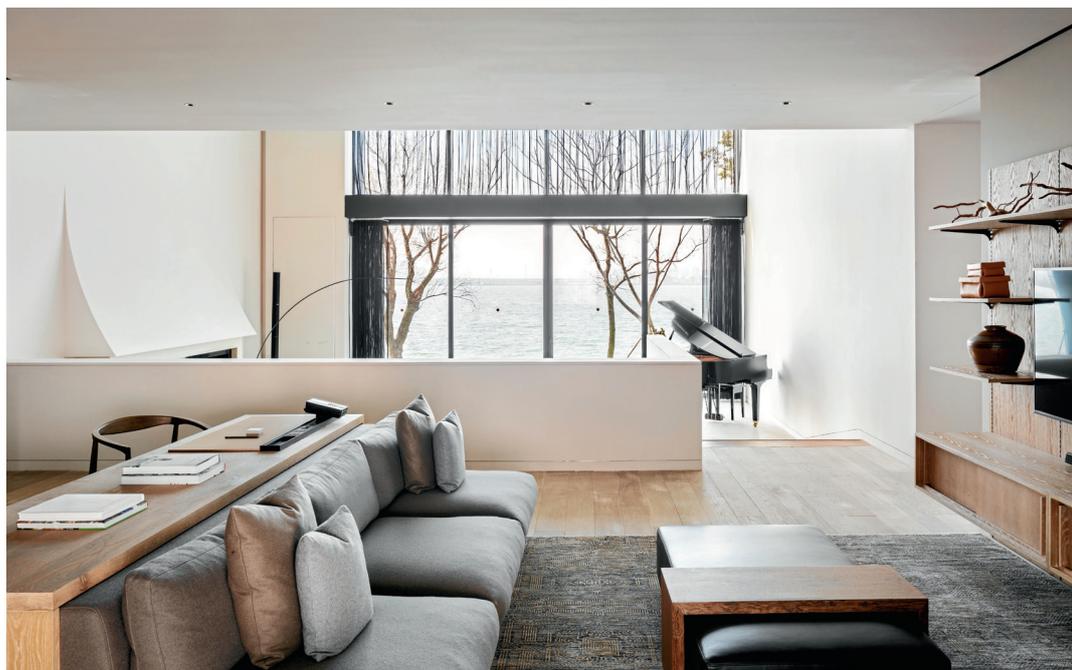
"Gary developed the recipe based on what we liked," says Crothers. "We also befriended a gin-loving botanist who would send us parcels of native botanicals he found in Victoria. That is how we came across the amazing botanical Southern Sassafras which is a key flavour for our Claude Navy Strength. It won the double gold in San Francisco."

Australia has at least 108 independent gin distillers, reflective of a global renaissance in the white spirit. Gin consumption has been growing above 16 per cent annually in Australia, and in March, brewing giant Lion bought a 50 per cent stake in Four Pillars Gin from Victoria's Yarra Valley, worth an estimated \$30 to \$50 million.

To add to Big Tree's appeal, Jago and Crothers chose bottles – made by Saverglass in France with wooden stoppers from Tapi in Italy – that can be re-purposed by peeling off the label. This leaves just the bottle artwork, by Kyneton artist Sarah Gabriel, which features gin botanicals and the birds that visit Jack's Springs.

Crothers also hopes to have her homemade Tully's Tonic commercially available by Christmas. "I make a lot of cordials for the farm and give them as gifts, so I've started experimenting to see what tonic would be like to make. We want to bring out the best in our gin." *Philippa Coates*

CURRENCY



RETREAT TO ADVANCE

WE ARE NOT HERE TO give the market what they want," says Fred Tsao, "but to help the market know what they need." In the case of his Sangha Retreat in China's ancient canal city of Suzhou, that means providing tender loving care to one's entire physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.

Built at a cost of \$US500 million, it's been quite an investment for Tsao, a fourth-generation shipping magnate whose family company has diverse interests in more than 17 countries. In turn, Tsao is heavily invested in the concept of building "sustainable businesses through harmonious relationships". A polymath who's prone to going off in tangents about the evolution of the human species, Tsao's latest book, *Quantum Leadership*, co-written with Chris Laszio, will be published in late July.

Sangha Retreat, which combines Western science with Eastern philosophy, opened to the Chinese in 2017 and is only now open to the rest

of us. "The international market is ready for it," says Tsao, who envisages his sessions offered in "quantum leadership" will be popular with Silicon Valley types or anyone looking for a sharper edge when they return to the office.

New York-based architects Tsao & McKown (Calvin Tsao is Fred's brother) designed the sustainable, low-rise masterplan on a 19-hectare peninsula of Yangcheng Lake, 30 minutes by high-speed train from Shanghai. They used designers including Neri & Hu, Atelier FCJZ and Baker Design Group.



Accommodation comprises two hotels, serviced apartments and houses. Children are encouraged because "you can't prosper without your closest unit supporting you."

Guest stays, recommended for a minimum five days, are all customised, beginning with a total body and mind assessment. The integrated medicine clinic has 10 doctors and programs for detoxing, cleansing, anti-ageing, breath and sleep therapy. The 6000-square metre subterranean spa is, according to Tsao, the biggest in Asia, "possibly the world".

"The programs we offer serve you. The experience is when you're in the space combined with the program. You've never seen anything like Sangha – plus we can teach you to understand China."

Just don't call Sangha a resort or an escape. "Escape is the manifestation of denial; it is running away," Tsao says. "This is about being present and taking what you learn here home with you." *Philippa Coates*



When does a pen become a writing instrument? Perhaps when it takes 50 steps just to create the nib.

"When a brand has this kind of know-how it would be a shame not to share it," says Montblanc South-East Asia president Matthieu Dupont. Dupont was in Sydney in May to celebrate the 113-year-old German brand's Black & White week, an exhibition of new novelties, including the Montblanc Patron

of Art Homage to Hadrian 888 fountain pen (left). Just 888 have been produced worldwide, at \$12,500 apiece.

Dupont says Montblanc's Australian market is growing. In June, the boutique in Sydney's Castlereagh Street will reopen after an extensive refurbishment. New features include an "ink bar" for testing different nibs and ink colours, plus an on-site technician and personalisation service. Write on. *Annie Brown*