



# Russia Spirits: The Sanctions Gin Boom

Russia · Spirits

---

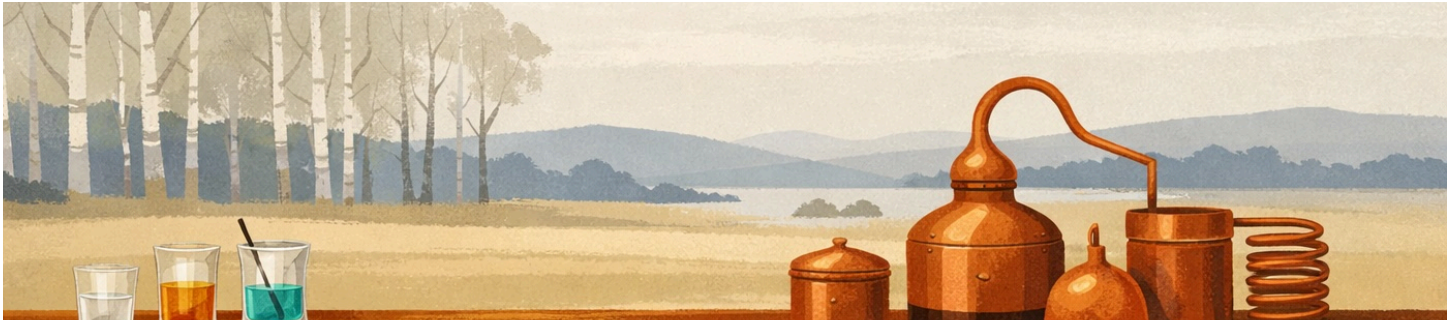
SECTOR SPOTLIGHT

First Edition | March 2026

English Edition (also available in Russian and Chinese)



**Brandmine**



## SECTOR SPOTLIGHT

# Russia Spirits: The Sanctions Gin Boom

*The world's sixth-largest gin brand does not appear in any international spirits database. It is produced in St. Petersburg by a former Soviet space engineer, sold in more than fifty countries, and has grown faster than any gin brand on earth for two consecutive years. No analyst covers the 426 brands behind it.*

## QUICK FACTS

<b>Market Size</b>	A \$300M+ domestic category that grew twelvefold in seven years — from niche curiosity to mainstream
<b>Unique Advantage</b>	No craft distillery license exists — bartenders develop recipes, century-old vodka factories produce them. The most unlikely craft spirits model
<b>Biggest Challenge</b>	EU and US sanctions block access to the world's two largest premium gin markets, forcing exports through China, India, and CIS channels
<b>Timing Factor</b>	A license moratorium freezes new entrants until April 2027 — the competitive landscape is locked for twenty-one months

*“Russian gin didn't displace foreign brands but created a new market. Our gin began to be consumed by different buyers.”*

**Vadim Drobiz**, Director, TsIFRRA

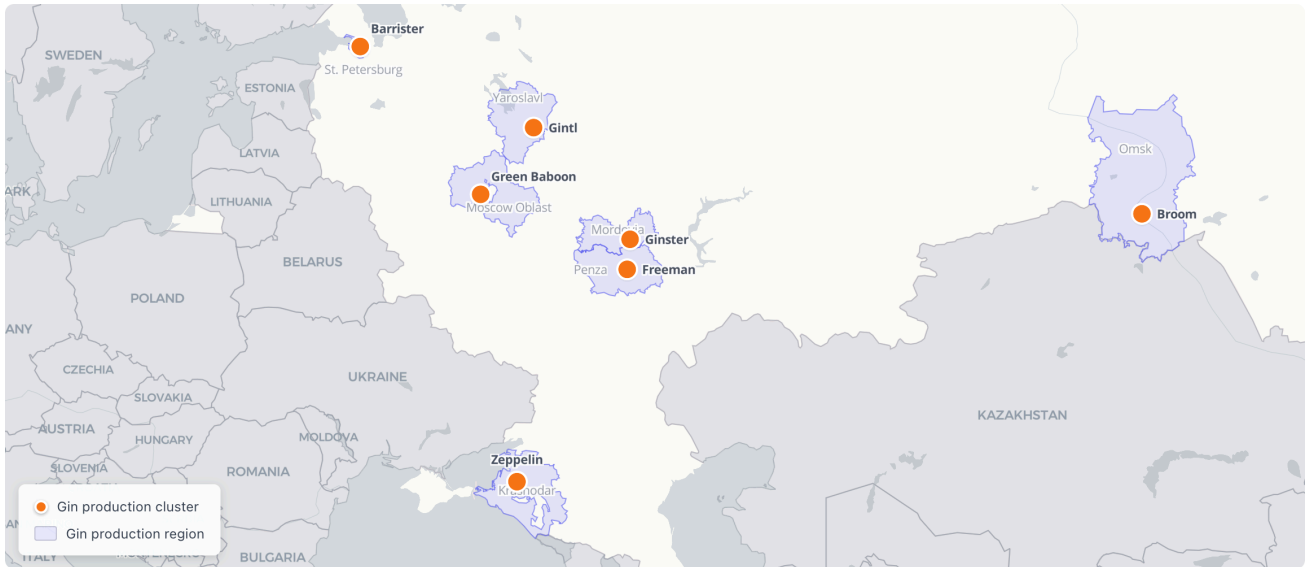
*Kommersant, 2022*

**MARKETS:** Russia

**SECTORS:** Spirits

GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

# Russia's Gin Producers: Six Production Clusters



© OpenStreetMap contributors · © CARTO

426 brands, six clusters — Russia's gin boom follows the vodka infrastructure map.

**St. Petersburg** — The sector's centre of gravity. First-mover scale and Baltic port access created the conditions for the brand that now commands nearly half the national market. Bartender-founded spirits carry credibility that no industrial producer can replicate.

**Moscow Oblast** — The innovation corridor. A German copper alembic line, premium positioning, and proximity to Russia's largest consumer market make it the natural testing ground for the category's most ambitious expressions.

**Yaroslavl** — The bartender-entrepreneur hub. A century-old factory as production partner for Moscow-based recipe developers — the arrangement that produced Russia's first vacuum-distilled gin, Forbes-listed among the world's top fifty.

**Mordovia & Penza (Volga)** — Reinvention through scale. A 125-year-old Mordovian factory pivoted from vodka and won national awards within a year. Penza became one of the country's largest gin producers by volume, proving existing infrastructure enables the category.

**Krasnodar Krai** — Ecological positioning from Russia's Black Sea fringe. Southern botanical access, one of the sector's rare female master distillers, and a publicly traded wine producer that diversified into gin after 2022.

**Omsk** — The Siberian anchor. Taiga herbs and wild berries give a flavour vocabulary unavailable in European Russia. The same infrastructure supporting Russia's bestselling vodka now exports gin to 30+ countries.

\* \* \*

**SECTOR NARRATIVE**

*The world's sixth-largest gin brand appears in no international spirits database. It is made in St. Petersburg by a former Soviet space engineer who pivoted from military optics to alcohol during the 1990s privatisation chaos; it sells in fifty-plus countries, has grown faster than any gin on earth for two straight years, commands nearly half the Russian market — and its international Instagram account has three hundred followers. Russian gin consumption went from 1.6 million litres in 2017 to over twenty million by 2024, and when Diageo, Pernod Ricard, and Bacardi withdrew in 2022 they left not a vacuum but a catalyst: 426 brands at last count across fifty-plus factories, invisible to every major trade publication. The revolution happened in Russian, and nobody translated it.*

## From vodka's shadow to bartenders' stage

Russia's first modern gin appeared in 1998, when a Novgorod (Новгород) distillery produced a tentative domestic expression. It was received with indifference and attracted no followers. For nearly two decades, gin occupied the margins of Russian spirits culture — a foreign curiosity in a country where vodka accounted for more than seventy percent of consumption. The few domestic brands that existed competed not with each other but with the assumption that gin was inherently British.

The first crack in that assumption came not from a distillery but from a bar. In 2015, three bartenders from provincial cities — none of whom had planned careers in hospitality — pooled resources and opened a hidden speakeasy in a St. Petersburg basement. Within a year it ranked among the World's 50 Best Bars. By 2021 it would reach number eight globally, and one of its founders would be named among the most influential people in the global bar industry by Drinks International. The model — obsessive cocktail craft in a small space, built on expertise rather than capital — demonstrated that Russia possessed world-class spirits knowledge. What it lacked was a domestic product worthy of that knowledge. The bartenders were serving imported gin to prove Russian creativity. The irony was lost on nobody.

A year later, one of Russia's largest spirits producers launched a gin into a market of just 3.5 million litres. The timing was contrarian. By 2018, that brand had overtaken Beefeater, Gordon's, and Bombay Sapphire as Russia's bestselling gin — proving demand existed before the supply existed to meet it.

The same period saw a former Chinese tea ceremony master — a man who had once been afraid of cocktail bars — buy a copper still and begin what would become a four-year experiment with vacuum distillation. Moscow's first gin-focused bar opened. Russia's first craft tonic launched. In Nizhny Novgorod (Нижний Новгород), a bartender was building a private collection of more than two hundred gins, studying the category with collector's obsession before attempting his own. The infrastructure for a gin movement was assembling itself, piece by piece, in basements and bars across half a dozen cities. The founders were in place. The crises had not yet arrived.

Then the pandemic came. Then the sanctions. Then the moratorium. Each crisis accelerated what the previous one had started. And each one deepened the resilience of the founders who survived it.

### Six cities, six characters

Russian gin production clusters around existing vodka infrastructure, and the geography tells the sector's story.

St. Petersburg is the sector's centre of gravity. The city's alcohol production heritage, Baltic port access, and first-mover advantage created the conditions for the brand that now commands nearly half the national market.

A bartender-founded spirits brand adds a craft credibility layer that no industrial producer can match — spirits created by people who ranked among the world’s best bartenders.

Moscow Oblast is the innovation corridor. Proximity to Russia’s largest consumer market makes it the natural testing ground for premium positioning. The first Russian premium gin launched from a German copper alembic line here. The bar scene that sets trends is a short drive from the production facilities that serve it.

The Volga region tells the story of reinvention. A Mordovian factory celebrating its 125th anniversary pivoted from vodka to gin and won national awards within a year. A Penza (Пенза) vodka plant became one of the country’s largest gin producers by volume. These century-old facilities demonstrate how existing infrastructure enabled a category that would have been prohibitively expensive to build from scratch.

Krasnodar (Краснодар) Krai brings ecological positioning and botanical access. Southern Russia’s Black Sea climate supports a style closer to European craft distilling than anything produced elsewhere in the country. One of the sector’s rare female production leads works from this region, and a publicly traded wine producer diversified into gin after the 2022 upheaval.

Yaroslavl (Ярославль), three hours north of Moscow, has emerged as the bartender-entrepreneur hub. A century-old factory serves as the production partner for Moscow-based recipe developers who install their own equipment in dedicated rooms. The first Russian vacuum-distilled gin was born in this arrangement — a four-year collaboration between a bartender’s palate and a factory’s licence.

Omsk (Омск), in western Siberia, anchors the sector’s eastern edge. One of Russia’s three largest spirits producers creates gin here that leans into Siberian botanical identity — taiga herbs and wild berries providing a flavour vocabulary unavailable anywhere in European Russia. The same infrastructure that supports Russia’s bestselling vodka brand now produces gin for export to more than thirty countries.

## What the databases miss

Three barriers conspire to keep Russia’s gin sector invisible to international capital.

The first is linguistic. More than eighty-five percent of the source material documenting this sector exists only in Russian — in *Kommersant* (Коммерсантъ) business reporting, RBC (РБК) *Vino* market analyses, *Sobaka.ru* (Собака.ру) founder profiles, and NielsenIQ data published through Russian trade press. No English-language spirits publication has covered the structural transformation. *Drinks International* surveys the world’s best bars but does not map the brands those bartenders create. The *Spirits Business* has named one Russian brand a Brand Champion twice — and published nothing about the 425 brands behind it.

The second is regulatory opacity. Russia has no craft distillery licence. The entry barrier is not a modest artisan permit but ₺19.5 million in combined charter capital and licensing fees — roughly \$215,000 before a single bottle is produced. This regulatory architecture forces craft founders into a contract distilling model that has no equivalent in any major spirits market. Understanding which factory produces which brand, which bartender developed which recipe, and which founder controls which intellectual property requires navigating a web of relationships that no database captures.

The third is geopolitical. EU sanctions impose a total ban on Russian spirits imports. US executive orders prohibit importation of Russian alcoholic beverages. The world’s two largest premium gin markets are sealed. This does not mean the brands are unimportant — it means they are building distribution through China, India, the Middle East, and Central Asia while invisible to Western analysts. The intelligence gap is structural, not temporary.

The result is a domestic spirits category worth more than \$300 million whose founders, crisis narratives, growth trajectories, and competitive dynamics have never been documented in any language except Russian. No international spirits consultancy has published a market map. No investment bank has written a sector overview. The brands are hiding in plain sight — if you read Russian, attend *Prodexpo* (Продэкспо), and follow the bartender community. For everyone else, the sector does not exist.

## Those who stayed when the shelves went bare

In March 2022, the shelves changed overnight. Diageo withdrew Tanqueray and Gordon's. Pernod Ricard pulled Beefeater. Bacardi suspended Bombay Sapphire. Gin imports collapsed thirty-nine percent in nine months. What followed was not a scramble to fill gaps. It was an eruption.

Veniamin Grabar (Вениамин Грабар) had spent six years preparing for a moment nobody predicted. A former Soviet space engineer who had pivoted to alcohol distribution during the 1990s privatisation chaos, Grabar launched his gin in 2016 when the entire Russian market consumed just 3.5 million litres annually. The bet was contrarian and early. When Western brands departed, his brand was already the domestic leader. He did not hesitate — production expanded fifty-seven percent in a single year. By 2023, the brand had crossed one million cases, entering the Drinks International Millionaires' Club as the world's fastest-growing gin. By 2024, it ranked sixth globally, exporting to more than fifty countries including China, where shipments tripled. The space engineer had become the architect of a category.

Three bartenders from the provinces made their decision in a pandemic basement. Igor Zernov (Игорь Зернов) from Voronezh (Воронеж), Artem Peruk (Артём Перук) from Pskov (Псков), and Nikolay Kiselev (Николай Киселёв) from Tver (Тверь) Oblast had built their speakeasy into the world's eighth-best bar. When COVID shuttered it, their income collapsed. The pivot was into Russia's most regulated consumer category. They chose a name that referenced the historical Russian tavern keepers who kissed the cross to pledge honest service — the *tselovalniki* (целовальники), Russia's original bartenders. They launched with organic vodka, which even they later admitted was foolish — the most saturated segment in Russian spirits. But their gin, infused with nettle, reindeer moss, and sagan-dailya, carried a credibility that no corporate competitor could manufacture: the endorsement of the world's best bartenders.

The path to gin for Vladimir Kolganov (Владимир Колганов) began in a tea ceremony. A Chinese tea master who was once intimidated by cocktail bars, he overcame that fear, rose through Moscow's elite bar circuit, and became the Russian ambassador for Monkey 47. A visit to the Black Forest distillery planted the question: why not make gin in Russia? He bought a still. His first experiment was, by his own admission, shockingly good. Four years of iteration followed, culminating in the installation of vacuum distillation equipment at a century-old Yaroslavl factory — a technique that preserves botanical aromas and had never been applied to Russian gin. When the sanctions hit, his brand launched with twelve botanicals including sagan-dailya, a Buryat medicinal herb from the Altai (Алтай) highlands used in Siberian shamanic traditions. Forbes listed it among the world's top fifty gins out of 550 evaluated.

Ivan Mamutov (Иван Мамутов) represents the counter-argument within the revolution. A master distiller at a Nizhny Novgorod cocktail bar that had amassed more than two hundred gins, he was challenged by an industry veteran: why do you only collect gin and not make your own? His response — a gin built from viburnum and jasmine sourced within his own region — insists that craft means local, not just domestic. His public stance is uncompromising: "The boom of cheap mediocre gin does reputational damage to this interesting and cool drink." In a sector defined by speed and scale, Mamutov is the voice demanding that quality survive the revolution.

Beyond these four, eighty-plus brands have launched since 2022. A 125-year-old Mordovian factory reinvented itself and won Prodexpo's Star Award within a year. One of Russia's few female master distillers leads production in Krasnodar, winning "Best Gin" at the Eurasia Spirits Drinks competition two years running. A bartender in Izhevsk (Ижевск) won a nationwide competition run by one of the country's largest producers — his winning recipe, named after Chanel №5, bridges corporate infrastructure with artisan creativity. A state-backed Tatarstan producer entered the category to fill the Western vacuum. Russia's most celebrated sparkling wine brand diversified into colour-changing gin. The breadth of the movement — from Soviet-era factories pivoting overnight to bartenders installing vacuum stills in century-old plants — is as striking as the crisis that accelerated it.

## Beyond the bottle

Russia's gin boom is not merely commercial. It represents a generational shift in how urban Russians relate to spirits.

For decades, vodka defined Russian drinking culture — not just the drink but the ritual around it: the toast, the *zakuski*, the communal shot. Gin's rise signals something deeper: a generation choosing complexity over neutrality, botanicals over purity, individual expression over collective tradition. The cocktail bar has replaced the *ryumochnaya* (рюмочная) — the standing shot bar — as the aspirational drinking venue for urban millennials. Gin is its primary currency.

The emphasis on specifically Russian botanicals marks this as an identity project, not merely a commercial one. Sagan-dailya from Buryat shamanic traditions. Karelian (Карельский) angelica. Nizhny Novgorod viburnum. Altai cranberry. These are not marketing decorations — they represent a fusion of global gin technique with Russian terroir, the same identity impulse that drives Georgian natural wine and Japanese whisky. Even the dominant brand has launched a “Taste of Russia” project creating regional expressions tied to specific geographies, transforming gin from an import category into a vehicle for exploring the country's botanical diversity.

What makes this culturally distinctive is the structural model behind it. Six of the eight founders documented in this sector's research are active or former bartenders. In no other global spirits market does the bartender class dominate brand creation to this degree. Russia's regulatory constraint — no craft distillery licence, ₺19.5 million in combined entry costs — forced creativity into an unlikely channel: bartenders who develop recipes and century-old vodka factories that produce them. It is the world's most improbable craft spirits model. The bartender brings the palate, the botanical knowledge, and the credibility earned behind a world-class bar. The factory brings the licence, the capacity, and the regulatory compliance. The constraint became the advantage.

## Twenty-one months and closing

On 31 July 2025, Federal Law №274-FZ froze all new ethanol production licences until April 2027. The moratorium blocks new entrants who need to produce their own base spirit. Applications submitted during the freeze are returned without consideration. Combined with the pre-existing ₺19.5 million entry barrier, the regulatory moat around incumbent producers has never been deeper.

The timing creates a twenty-one-month window with three consequences.

First, the competitive landscape is locked. The founders who entered before the freeze — and particularly those who entered during the 2022 surge — hold positions that cannot be challenged by newcomers until the moratorium lifts. Every month it remains in force compounds first-mover advantage.

Second, export channels are maturing in real time. China shipments tripled in 2023. India market presentations at ProWine Mumbai have opened South Asian distribution. CIS states — Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan — provide near-market expansion. Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian channels are building simultaneously. The brands establishing international relationships during the moratorium will have two years of distribution infrastructure, retail partnerships, and regulatory approvals in place before any new competitor can begin production. In emerging market spirits, distribution relationships are the moat — not the liquid.

Third, the succession question approaches. The sector's dominant founder launched his company three decades ago. IPO preparations have been reported. The generation that built Russia's gin industry is approaching decisions about scale, liquidity, and ownership transition that will reshape the sector's structure within the decade.

For those watching from outside Russia — investors, distributors, strategic partners scanning emerging market spirits for the next category to break internationally — the moratorium creates a paradox. The sector has never been more legible: the founders are identifiable, the competitive positions are clear, the crisis narratives are

documented. And the moratorium is not permanent. When it lifts, a second wave of entrants will dilute the positioning that current incumbents enjoy. The window to understand who built this sector, how they survived what they survived, and what their competitive positions actually look like is measured in months, not years.

## What the bartenders built

The Russian gin sector presents three propositions to three audiences.

For investors, it offers a market that grew twelvefold in seven years, led by founders with documented crisis resilience and competitive moats reinforced by regulatory barriers. The intelligence to evaluate these brands exists — scattered across Russian-language business press, trade publications, and competition records. It has not been assembled.

For buyers and distributors, it offers brands with proven domestic scale actively seeking international channels in precisely the markets where Western premium brands have the weakest historical presence — China, India, the Gulf, Central Asia. The export infrastructure is building now, and first-mover distribution advantages are compounding.

For strategic partners, it offers a sector where the bartender-to-brand pipeline has produced the world's most credible craft spirits model — born not from choice but from regulatory constraint. The founders who survived COVID bar closures, navigated sanctions upheaval, and built brands through century-old vodka factories have resilience that corporate brand-building cannot replicate.

Four hundred and twenty-six brands. More than fifty factories. A market that did not exist at this scale five years ago. The intelligence to understand it lives in Kommersant business pages, Prodexpo exhibition records, and bartender community forums — in Russian, behind sanctions, invisible to every international spirits database. Hiding in plain sight.

### KEY TAKEAWAY

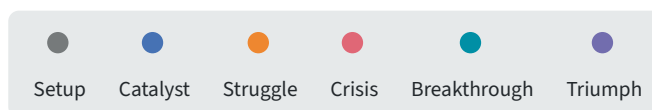
**The founders who filled the vacuum are consolidating before the moratorium lifts. The window to map them is closing.**

\* \* \*

### SECTOR TIMELINE

## 426 brands, one quiet boom

The decisive moments that shaped Russia's gin sector — from a single tentative experiment to 426 brands hiding in plain sight.



**SETUP** 1998**First modern Russian gin produced**

Novgorod's Alkon distillery produces Russia's first modern gin — a tentative domestic expression in a market where gin means British. The experiment attracts no followers. For nearly two decades, Russian gin will remain a curiosity.

**SETUP** 2015**El Copitas speakeasy opens**

Three bartenders from provincial cities — Voronezh, Pskov, Tver — open a hidden cocktail bar in St. Petersburg. Within a year it enters the World's 50 Best Bars. By 2021 it will reach number eight globally, proving Russia possesses world-class spirits expertise.

**CATALYST** 2016**Barrister gin launched**

Ladoga Group introduces Barrister gin into a market of just 3.5 million litres. The bet is contrarian — gin is a negligible category in a country that drinks vodka. The brand is positioned with London Dry credentials and registered under a UK entity.

**SETUP** 2016**Moscow's first ginoteria opens**

A former tea ceremony master opens Dictatura Aestetica, Moscow's first gin-focused bar. The same year he creates Rocket Tonic — Russia's first craft tonic. The infrastructure for a gin culture assembles itself in basements and bars across two cities.

**BREAKTHROUGH** 2018**Barrister overtakes all imported gin**

Barrister becomes Russia's bestselling gin, surpassing Beefeater, Gordon's, and Bombay Sapphire. A domestic brand has overtaken the world's most established gin houses in their own category — and the international industry does not notice.

**STRUGGLE** 2019**Gin remains niche despite pioneers**

Despite Barrister's domestic dominance and a growing Moscow bar scene, Russian gin consumption remains under eight million litres. Craft founders face a regulatory wall: no artisan distillery license, prohibitive capital requirements, and no institutional support for category development.

**CRISIS** 2020**COVID lockdowns catalyze brand creation**

Bar closures push Russia's most talented bartenders into product development. The El Copitas team develops Tselovalnik. A Moscow bartender accelerates his four-year gin recipe. The pandemic does not destroy the bartender class — it pushes them upstream into production.

**CRISIS** 2022**Western brands exit Russia**

Diageo withdraws Tanqueray and Gordon's. Pernod Ricard pulls Beefeater. Bacardi suspends Bombay Sapphire. Gin imports collapse thirty-nine percent in nine months. Eighty-plus new domestic brands launch within the year.

**TRIUMPH** 2023**Barrister crosses one million cases**

Fifty-seven percent growth in a single year. Barrister enters the Drinks International Millionaires' Club as the world's fastest-growing gin brand. The space engineer's contrarian bet has produced a global-scale spirits brand.

**BREAKTHROUGH** 2023**Craft gin wins international recognition**

A vacuum-distilled Russian gin with Siberian botanicals wins Master medals at the Global Gin Masters and places in Forbes' top fifty world gins. Snob magazine nominates it for 'Made in Russia.' The craft layer is earning credibility beyond the domestic market.

**TRIUMPH** 2024**Russian gin reaches 20M+ litres**

The market has grown 5.5 times in five years. Domestic brands hold more than ninety percent market share. Four hundred and twenty-six brands operate across more than fifty factories. One brand alone produces more gin than the entire market consumed five years earlier.

**BREAKTHROUGH** 2024**Export channels reach fifty-plus countries**

China exports triple. India market entry begins with ProWine Mumbai presentations. CIS, Middle Eastern, and Asian distribution builds. The brands are finding markets where Western premium brands have the weakest presence.

**CRISIS** 2025**License moratorium signed into law**

Federal Law №274-FZ freezes new ethanol production licenses until April 2027. New entrants who need to produce their own base spirit are blocked. The regulatory moat around existing producers deepens.

**TRIUMPH** 2025**Domestic brands reach 90.5% market share**

Russian brands control the economy and mid-range segments almost entirely. Premium domestic share surges thirteen percentage points in a single year. The import substitution is not just complete — it has created a market several times larger than what imports ever served.



# About this research

This report draws on 20 verified sources across 2 languages — primary documents, founder interviews, and trade press. Every figure and claim is cross-validated against independent references.

Full methodology at [brandmine.ai](https://brandmine.ai).

## ABOUT BRANDMINE

Exceptional founder-owned brands. Proven resilient. Ready now.

Brandmine delivers structured discovery intelligence on founder-owned consumer brands in emerging markets — researched in local languages, structured for investment decisions, delivered as focused reports.

Contact: [hello@brandmine.ai](mailto:hello@brandmine.ai) Intelligence reports: [brandmine.ai/intelligence/](https://brandmine.ai/intelligence/)

## ALSO AVAILABLE FROM BRANDMINE

### BRAND RESILIENCE PROFILE

Complete transformation arc, location intelligence, and business snapshot for a single brand. 15 pages of verified research.

### FOUNDER RESILIENCE PROFILE

The founder's personal arc from origin to breakthrough. Verified through native-language research and primary source analysis.

### MARKET MAP

Profiles all verified brands in a sector at snapshot depth — geographic distribution, market timeline, and founder spotlights. 25–40 pages.

### SECTOR INTELLIGENCE REPORT

Comprehensive sector intelligence. All brands profiled at snapshot depth, plus full transformation arcs for six brands — each representing a distinct crisis archetype. 90–120 pages.

*Set in Source Serif 4 and Source Sans 3. Composed in Typst. CMYK color throughout.  
Maps rendered with MapLibre GL · CARTO Positron basemap · © OpenStreetMap contributors  
Published simultaneously in English, Russian, and Chinese.  
Researched in English, Russian sources.  
First Edition · March 2026*

Exceptional founder-owned  
brands. Proven resilient. Ready  
now.

**Exceptional founder-owned brands.  
250+ verified across emerging markets.**

Brand Resilience Profiles · Founder Resilience Profiles  
Market Maps · Sector Intelligence Reports

Structured research on founder-owned consumer brands in  
emerging markets.  
English, Russian, and Chinese editions.

**[brandmine.ai/intelligence/](https://brandmine.ai/intelligence/)**

✉ [hello@brandmine.ai](mailto:hello@brandmine.ai)

🌐 [www.brandmine.ai](https://www.brandmine.ai)

© 2026 Brandmine. All rights reserved.

v1.4.2