

The Art of Aperitivo

*A guide for exploring the classic
aperitifs of Europe*

Presented by:



wines and spirits for the discerning drinker

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Forward from an Importer

Traveling the streets of Mediterranean Europe before mealtime can be quite a sight. People of all ages, shapes and sizes flood sunlit streets to partake in an exercise of opening one's pallet. I first experienced it while roaming Oporto on an enchanting visit to the famous port houses of the Douro Valley. We have since seen it from Jerez to Barcelona to Aix to Venezia; the same general human desire manifesting under the wide array of culinary cultures and traditions that populate Europe. A structure for everything, including drinking and eating, which is not dictated by hours and work schedules – in fact the other way around.

I quickly became fascinated with this fact of life, what we have come to call the 'Art of Aperitivo.' It seemed that everywhere I went in Europe light, stylish and delicious sips reflective of the local palate would appear all around me in an act of preparation for more drinking and eating. Thousands upon thousands of expressions of apéritif, each as good and as different as the next. And all passed over the counter alongside savory snacks with a strict expectation for light grazing while one drank.

When I returned to America on periodic pilgrimages from my then adopted home of London, I wondered why we had never developed our own apéritif tradition in the United States. Yes, we have 'happy hour,' a time when hordes of workers escape the grips of air conditioned offices to celebrate the end of a workday with a few discounted drinks. But the objective here is typically quick and inexpensive inebriation, often by the hand of sweet and boozy drinks paired with greasy and heavy snacks. No one seemed to be concerned with encouraging a structure to consumption that would enhance the basic, hedonistic pleasure of eating and drinking.

My best friend and now business partner decided we would change all that. Americans, with our adoration for stimulating eating and drinking adventures, deserve to experience the apéritif traditions of Europe. And we – Lars Fasel and Leith Shenstone – would help them do it by making available in the United States a range of authentic, high quality and iconic European apéritifs.

We spend over 200 days a year in amazing and creative bars and restaurants across America, and another few dozen scouring apéritif production regions for new imports. But most people don't have this luxury of pursuing the 'Art of Aperitivo' for sport. This booklet is our attempt to distill what we have learned and share it in a convenient and accessible format. As such, this guide is an important step towards our larger vision of an aperitivo rich America. Understanding the history, styles and applications of European apéritifs is a key first step to enjoying them. Hopefully this guide sets you off on the right foot and enriches your drinking and eating experiences. Salud!



The Sum of All Parts

Mixing drinks, making drinks, bartending, crafting, mixology cocktailing - whatever you call this act of combining ingredients to fashion a beverage - is the culmination of a series of decisions that start long before ice hits the base of a glass. Because a libation is only as good as the sum of all decisions preceding it, we decided to provide some step-by-step guidance to help you make good decisions all along your aperitivo journey.

Liquid Decisions: the decisions you make at the wine & liquor store will make or break a cocktail. Here are a few rules to help you try new and different things without ending up disappointed. 1) Good aromatized wines are rarely under \$15 because good base wine is expensive, so don't buy cheap; sub-par aperitifs will have a more pronounced negative effect in a cocktail than a sub-par spirit. 2) Explore different styles from different producers and different regions. Changing your aperitif product will drastically change the nature of your drink. 3) Do your homework on new brands / their importers. It becomes clear pretty quickly which products are worth exploring.

Organic Decisions: buy good produce, ideally from a local fresh market. The quality of fruit and herbs varies considerably from store to store. If it does not look good enough for a snack, don't buy it for your drink. We look for small-medium sized fruit with good density and consistently lush peels. Blemished or wrinkling suggest the fruit or vegetable might be aged, and this is not cheese people, so age is bad. If garnishing with herbs like mint or rosemary, be sure to use the fresher and younger leaves and give them a good smack in your palm first.

Frozen Decisions: ice is probably the most neglected ingredient in a cocktail, yet it is possibly the most important. First off, think carefully about the size of ice you want to use. Larger and denser cubes melt slowly, meaning less dilution. Crushed ice melts fast, meaning more dilution, but sometimes dilution is desirable. There really are no excuses since one can purchase nifty and colorful ice trays of many different shapes and sizes online or in any decent kitchen store / department. Make a conscious decision about the ice based on the style of drink, the season, your preferred taste and the concentration of ingredients. For example, viscous and sweet liqueurs like dilution while lighter vermouths may not. Finally, when making ice at home, try to use filtered water and try not to freeze it next to bananas, fish, coffee - anything in your freezer that might impart fragrance and flavor into your ice. It sounds crazy, but ice will take on flavors of things around it. No one likes a fish and green pea flavored Negroni.

Durable Decisions: glassware is the first impression of a cocktail experience. Before all your effort is judged on what is in the glass, it will be judged by the glass it is in. The glassware will also impact the tasting experience. First and foremost use the right glassware. You really only need four styles - tumbler, highball, coupe, wine glass. Be sure to invest in some nice glasses. Vintage shops are an excellent source of low-cost yet beautiful cocktail glassware. Alternatively, try a specialty home retailer like Williams Sonoma. Curvature on the rim and comfort in the hand combine with other perceptions like flavor, aroma and appearance for a single sensory experience. In terms of tools, you can have as many or as few as you want. We tend to mix aperitif cocktails right in the glass to simplify the process. So just be sure to have a decent bar spoon.

Decorative Decisions: garnishes are important, but keep it simple. A fresh peel, pinched or twisted to express the juice in the skin is sufficient in most cases. We love using our simple ten dollar tomato peeler for peeling fruit. It pulls the perfect peel every time, and the blades are replaceable. For thin peels, you can either buy a special peeler or just cut smaller strips from peels pulled with your nifty tomato peeler and manipulate them into twists. It just depends how many tools you really want.

Storage Decisions: if it has a wine base put it and keep it in the fridge after opening, if it is a liqueur or spirit, don't bother. This is a simple yet crucial rule. Following it will mean consistent results for your mixing. For anything wine-based, try to use it within 4 weeks. Higher quality products last longer (we figure you get about a day for every dollar you spend), so if it is old but you think it is still good just give it a whiff and a taste first to double check. Stickiness / lack of acidity signals deterioration.

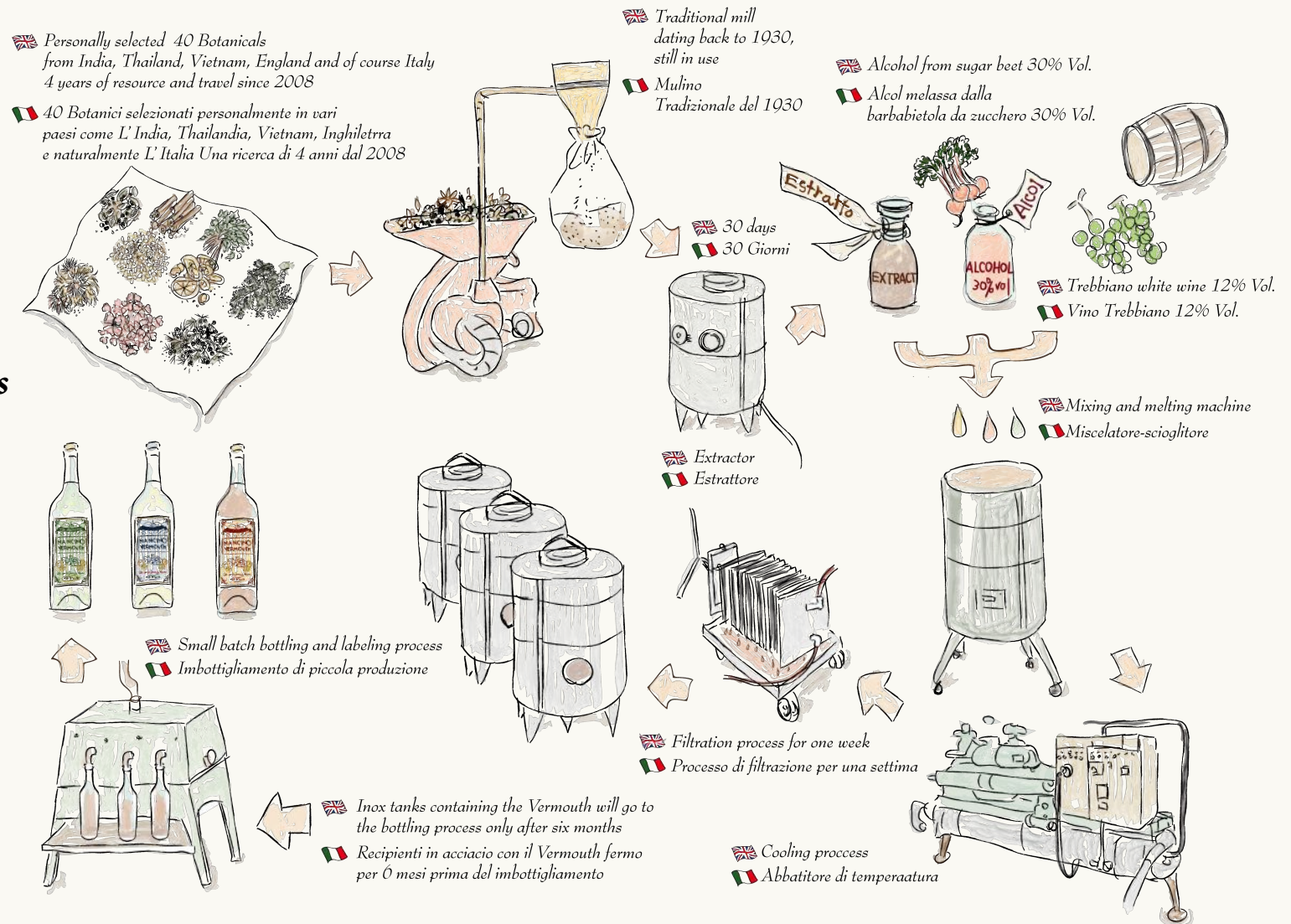


World of Aperitivo

The world of aperitivo can be divided into three major categories, each with a number of sub-categories, defined by certain production choices. Below is our mental map of the categories and an illustrated overview of how they are produced (using aromatized and fortified wines as the example).

i) Aromatized Liqueurs

- Amaro
- Aperitivo Liqueur
- Gentian Liqueur
- Other aromatized liqueurs



ii) Fortified + Aromatized Wines

- Gentian Wines / Americano
- Chinato
- Quinquina
- Vermouth

iii) Fortified Wines

- Marsala (not all)
- Mistelle
- Pineau des Charentes
- Sherry

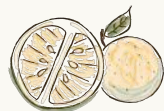


Botanical Garden

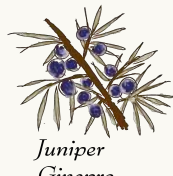
Playing in the world of aperitifs necessarily involves interaction with and understanding of a range of plants and herbs - botanicals. We thought it might be nice to have a visual point of reference for the botanicals referenced throughout this booklet. What do all these strange things look like?



Wormwood
Assenzio Gentile



Bitter Orange
Arancio Amaro



Juniper
Ginepro



Roman Absinthe
Assenzio Romano



Pontic Wormwood
Assenzio Pontico



Iris
Ireos



Chamomile
Camomilla



Marjoram
Maggiorana



Clary Sage
Selvia Sclarea



Coriander
Coriandolo



Oregano
Origano



Cinchona
China



Cinnamon
Cannella



Cloves
Chiodi di Garofano



Nutmeg
Noce moscata



Roman Chamomile
Camomilla Romana



Sweet Clover
Meliloto



Pimento



Calamus
Calamo



English Rhubarb
Rabarbaro



Myrrh
Mirra



Licorice
Liquirizia



Ginger
Zenzero



Chiretta



Satureja



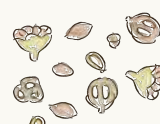
Sweet Orange
Arancio Dolce



Angelica



Cardamom
Cardamomo



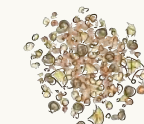
Cascarilla Bark
Cascarilla



Elderflower
Sambuco



Aloe



Colombo Spice
Colombo



Enula



Gentian
Genziana



Quassia
Quassio



Lemon Grass
Citronella



Mint
Menta



Nettle
Ortica



Dog Rose
Rose Canina

Vermouth



Vermouth is among the oldest wine-based aperitifs in existence. The word 'vermouth' derives from 'wormwood,' a bitter plant ingredient that provides a distinct tannic backbone. The category name is inherited from earlier Hungarian and German wormwood-infused wines of the same nature. Spain is the single largest consumer of vermouth per capita, while Italy is the largest producer. Styles from different European countries vary significantly, as do consumption habits. The quality of any vermouth is a function of the quality of base-wine and extract ingredients. Make sure to buy a good one, as it will make or break a cocktail, and be sure to try pairing different vermouths with a base spirit for new expressions.

The Vermouth Formula

White wine + botanical extract + sugar (if sweet) + caramel (if sweet red) + neutral alcohol (grape, grain or fruit based)

Typical herbs and spices for extract: wormwood, gentian root, angelica root, bitter orange peel, vanilla, cinchona bark

Base Wines: Moscatel, Macabeo / Trebbiano / Ugni Blanc

Types: dry, rosé (rare), sweet white, sweet red

Key Production Regions

France: southern Alps (Chambery); Cognac region

Germany: minimal production; Black Forest region

Italy: typically in the north (e.g. Milan, Turin, Asti)

Spain: most notably Catalonia, Madrid area and Rioja Alta

New World: USA (Oregon + California mostly), Australia, UK

The Art of Vermouth Apéritifs

Barca Connection

3oz Yzaguirre Vermouth Rojo

Tumbler

Medium ice cubes

Olives + Orange Wedge

Build in a glass on ice



Adam & Eve

2oz Lacuesta Vermut Rojo

3oz quality tonic

Highball stuffed with ice

Grapefruit wheel + rosemary

sprig

Build in a glass on ice



Better Spritz

2oz Mancino Vermouth Bianco

1/4oz Big Gin or similar

1/4oz Rinomato Aperitivo

2oz dry sparkling wine

1oz San pelegrino

Grapefruit wheel + lemon peel + raspberries

Build in a glass on ice. One quick stir



Chinato



Chinato (key' not toe) traces its roots to the late 19th century. As tradition has it, a pharmacist from Serralunga d'Alba named Giuseppe Cappellano blended numerous herbs and spices into a slightly sweetened aged Barolo wine. The earliest Chinati gained popularity due to the kingly status of Barolo wines in Italy. Today, Chinato is made on a number of different Piedmontese base wines and often involves fortification. A mysteriously sweet, dry and spicy elixir, Chinato straddles the line between digestivo and aperitivo. Its bitter root ingredients prepare the palate yet a good Chinato can also tie the entire evening together. Try it with tonic.

The Chinato Formula

Red wine + cinchona bark + other botanicals for infusion + sugar + neutral alcohol (grape or fruit)

Wine base: Piedmontese red varietals, including Barbera D'Asti and Nebbiolo (some producers use DOCG Barolo wines)

Typical herbs and spices: cinchona bark, cinnamon, vanilla, star anise, gentian, rhubarb root, fennel, juniper, citrus peel

Key Production Regions

- Chinato wines are produced exclusively in Piedmont, Italy. The most traditional region of production is Langhe, which sits due south of Alba and the River Tanaro in the province of Cuneo.
- Most classic producers use Nebbiolo grapes, although some more modern entrants into the category are experimenting with other Piedmontese grape varietals like Barbera d'Asti.

The Art of Chinato Apéritifs

RinoKina

1oz Mancino Vermouth Chinato

1oz Rinomato Aperitivo

1-2oz Tonic Water

Build in a high-ball glass over ice. Grapefruit peel



Vintage Negroni

1oz Mancino Vermouth Chinato

1oz Mancino Vermouth Rosso

1oz Rinomato Aperitivo or similar

1oz Low ABV gin

Stir in mixing glass and serve in a rocks glass. Lemon peel or wedge



Chinotto Aperitivo

2oz Mancino Vermouth Chinato

1oz Old Tom Gin

2/3oz Lemon Juice

1/3oz Honey Syrup (1:1)

Top up with Soda water

Shake all the ingredients with ice except the soda water, double strain into a high-ball. Long lemon zest twist



Art of Aperitivo - Chinato



Quinquina



Malaria proved a persistent problem for French soldiers and colonials in new African territories. While authorities knew that quinine, extracted from the bark of the cinchona tree, worked effectively to counteract the virus no one could stomach its extremely bitter nature. Apparently French authorities offered rewards to anyone who could create wine-based recipes that would help make the quinine more palatable. A new aperitif category was born. Quinquina is essentially the French alternative to tonic water. Oddly enough, these two make exceptionally good bedfellows in the glass.

The Quinquina Formula

Wine + mistelle (see below) + botanicals for infusion + sugar + neutral alcohol (grape or grain)

Mistelle: made by adding alcohol to wine in mid-fermentation. Fermentation halts, leaving more sugar and fruity flavors behind

Typical herbs and spices: cinchona bark, chicory bark, angostura bark, orange peel, vanilla, cocoa

Types: white, amber, rosé and red

Key Production Regions

Quinquina aperitif wines are produced exclusively in France. The notable producers still in business today are from the following regions:

St Raphael: Lyon, France | Established 1830

Byrrh: Thuir, France (near Cote Catalanes) | Established 1866

Lillet: Bordeaux, France | Established 1872

The Art of Quinquina Apéritifs

Spritz de Lyon

1oz St Raphael Gold or Rose

1oz Rinomato Aperitivo

2/3oz Mancino Vermouth Bianco

3-4oz Soda water

Build in a wine glass with ice.

White grapefruit wheel and edible flour (optional!)



Sbagliato Léger

1oz St Raphael Rouge

1oz Mancino Vermouth Rosso

2oz Cremant or Prosecco

Stir quinquina and vermouth on ice. Strain into highball. Top with sparkling wine. Orange twist



The Golden nEGGroni

1oz St Raphael Amber

1.5oz Mancino Vermouth Bianco

1oz London Dry Gin

Lowball

Stir in mixing glass. Serve over medium ice cubes. Lemon peel.



Gentian Liqueurs & Wines



Gentian liqueurs have a long history as a popular apéritif in France, specifically in the region of Auvergne where the drink was originally created in the 1880s. To create gentian liqueur, the root stalks of gentian plants, along with a few other key botanicals and flowers of the Massif Centrale region of France, are macerated in grain alcohol. Gentian wines (called Americano if Italian) are a similar concept only they feature more quinine and are typically less sweet. The wine base also makes them less viscous and higher in acidity. On that note, vermouths with high gentian content can act like gentian wines and are worth a try in their place.

The Formulas

Gentian Liqueur: alcohol + gentian root + other infused botanicals + sugar + water

Gentian Wines (incl. Americano): wine (sometimes mistelle) + gentian root + other infused botanicals + sugar + alcohol

Typical herbs and spices: gentian root, quinine, wild mountain flowers, citrus peel

Key Production Regions

France:

- ❖ Auvergne (Aveze, Suze - liqueur)
- ❖ Limousin (Salers - liqueur)
- ❖ Chambéry (Bonal - a wine made by Dolin)

Italy:

- ❖ Asti, Piedmont (Rinomato Americano)
- ❖ Turin (Cocchi Americano - wine)
- ❖ Trento (Cappelletti Aperitivo - wine)

The Art of Gentian Liqueur & Wine Apéritifs

Gentian Soda

2oz Rinomato Americano

2-3oz tonic or soda water

Glassware: High-Ball

Build in glass filled with ice.

Orange peel or twist.



Negroni Bianco

1.5oz Rinomato Americano

1oz Mancino Vermouth Bianco

1oz Big Gin or similar

Glassware: Rock Gobbler

Stir over ice in mixing glass.

Double strain. Lemon wedge



Vesper

1oz Rinomato Americano Bianco

1.5oz Vodka

1oz London Dry Gin Glassware:

Presidente / Coupe Method:

Shake with ice and double

strain. Lemont twist



Aperitivo Liqueur



The Aperitivo Liqueur category is driven by gentian root and bitter orange peel, which create an exceptionally bitter flavor when macerated in alcohol. As with most things Italian, Aperitivo Liqueurs vary widely in style as one traverses regional and cultural boundaries. What all of them do share in common is a balance between bitter and sweet, a notable presence of root plants, flowers, herbs and spices, and origination in the northern mountainous regions of Italy. The formulas out there today vary wildly from very sweet to very bitter, and production varies from downright industrial to charmingly artisanal. Get exploring.

The Formulas

Aperitivo Liqueur: alcohol (grain or fruit based) + botanical extract + sugar + color (artificial, carmyne or plant)-based + water

Bitter expressions (15-30% ABV): gentian is the primary focus, with a strong presence of other bitter herbs like angelica, cinchona bark, cascarilla, wormwood and rhubarb. High sugar to offset the bitterness.

Light expressions (10-15% ABV): bitter orange peel is front and center. Other common ingredients are vanilla, cinchona bark, chirata.

Key Production Regions

- ❖ Asti, Piedmont, Italy (Rinomato, Contratto)
- ❖ Milan, Italy (Campari, Aperol)
- ❖ Trieste Italy (Aperitivo Select)
- ❖ Trento / Venice, Italy (Luxardo)
- ❖ Turin, Italy (Gran Classico)
- ❖ USA (Leopold Bros in CO / St George's in CA)

The Art of Aperitivo Liqueur Apéritifs

Han Solo

3oz Rinomato Aperitivo

Glassware: Rock Gobbler

Stir Rinomato over ice and strain into glass. Fill with medium or large ice chunks.

Wedge of Lemon



Rossetto

2oz Rinomato Aperitivo

Top up with quality Ginger Ale

Glassware: High-Ball

Build over ice. Gentle single stir. Fat lemon peel



Agitato

2oz Rinomato Aperitivo

1/2oz Big Gin

Glassware: Presidente / Coupe

Method: Shake with ice and double strain. Orange zest, oil only





Mastering the art of aperitivo is not complicated.

Meaning 'to open' - referring to your palate - the concept of aperitivo encompasses a broad range of drink styles and flavor profiles. They are typically dry, bitter-sweet, sparkling, or a combination of these elements. They are designed to awaken your palate and induce appetite.

Be sure to use authentic, quality ingredients made for the discerning and educated drinker. Your cocktails are only as good as the ingredients you use.



If you would like to learn more about apéritifs, the Fasel Shenstone portfolio, or are interested in working together, please contact us.

Fasel Shenstone is a leading importer of quality apéritifs working across the United States.

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