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Thursday, July 21, 2011

[An Impromptu Amaro and Vermouth Tasting that Taught Me to Be Open](#)

Posted by ehalvey / [1 comment](#) » / [Drinks](#), [Food](#)



I have a bit of an OCD issue. We have a wine rack that holds up to 16 bottles, but we usually can only keep 3-4 in it at a time. So when we were down to one bottle, I had to stock up to get it back to my preferred amount. Plus I was out of gin, which is my liquor of choice in warm weather. So I headed to [Vinea](#), a local wine shop in 12 South to restock. For those who are not Tennesseans, you can't buy wine at the grocery store. You also can't buy beer or a corkscrew in the same shop as wine, liquor, and high gravity beer. Thus the abundance of wine shops with their own little niche.

Vinea has many unusual and affordable wines grouped by region and a staff picks section at the front. I gravitate towards reds, and I have found that Vinea is on point with their Spanish and Portuguese reds. Especially in the under \$15 category. I also like vinho verde for white wines in the summer, but they were out of the one I liked so I picked up another alternative white (my passionate hatred of chardonnay is on the level of Paul Giamatti's character's hatred of merlot in Sideways). Once I had my wines picked out, I continued perusing for gin. I wanted to get Corsair, which is local, but after talking to Bradley, he informed me that they were out and helped me find a similar style gin. After talking about my preference for a juicier gin versus a dry, English style gin, he asked if I've tried vermouth or amaro. I've had vermouth in a cocktail, but amaro? Never heard of it. So he went into a backroom and appeared with 3 bottles, a glass, and a bucket of ice.



Vermouth has a base of wine with additional alcohol and flavorings to create either a sweet or dry liqueur to drink as an aperitif. I started with a dry Dolin vermouth. It was pleasant, but the dryness wasn't quite my thing to drink straight. Onto the Cocchi Americano. This was very sweet. If you've had Lillet, it has a less syrupy quality as Lillet. I could drink a tiny glass of this with some salty tapas before a meal. The third was another Cocchi. This one was darker colored and had a tomato nose to it. More like a sweet ketchup kind of tomato nose or a tomato plant scent. That threw me off a bit since you don't expect tomato with booze unless it's a Bloody Mary. But it was my favorite of the three. It was a nice balance of sweet and dry, and it had a bit of cola taste to it which made it a familiar flavor.



Amaro is basically the bitters of Italy. Each family had their own recipe of herbs, roots, and fruits to make their own at home which explains the extremely wide variety of flavors that you can find. I tried the Averna which is the standard for amaro. It's made in Sicily, and the recipe dates back to 1868. The liqueur is like a perfume with a base note that you first notice, and then the other notes present themselves and recede into a finishing note. The first thing you taste is bitter orange which I LOVE now after that amazing cake in Barcelona. You also get touches of caramel and some herbal flavors that my palate couldn't quite identify. I could totally sip on this in place of a gin and tonic when the heat becomes oppressive.

I'm so glad I got to have this tasting thanks to Bradley. I was the only customer in the store at that point, mid-afternoon during the week, and I usually have an MO of peruse and buy without really talking to the salespeople. This experience showed me what can happen when I don't let my shyness take over which is an important lesson both home and abroad. You really can learn something new and experience something unexpected if you allow yourself to be open to it.

Posted by ehalvey on July 21, 2011

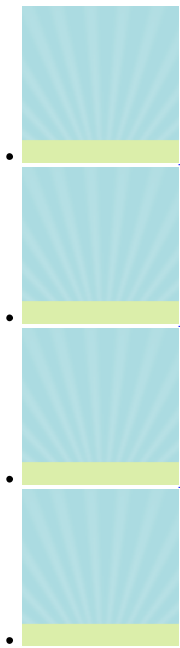
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1. 1



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