



washingtonpost.com > Arts & Living > Food

FOLLOW FOOD AND DINING ON: RSS Facebook Twitter

THIS STORY: READ +

Advertisement

Aperitifs, once only found in Europe, make their way to U.S.

By Jason Wilson
Wednesday, April 21, 2010

Traveling "makes men wiser, but less happy," Thomas Jefferson once wrote to his nephew, advising him to stay home. "Their eyes are forever turned back to the object they have lost, and its recollection poisons the residue of their lives."



Sweet Basil (James M. Thresher for The Washington Post)

Enlarge Photo

THIS STORY
In search of the elusive aperitif
Recipe: Sweet Basil

Jefferson was, of course, holding forth -- a tad overwrought -- on the familiar, bittersweet refrain of travel: that so many of the experiences you fall in love with abroad are impossible to re-create once you return home.

Aperitifs are sort of like this for me. Drinking strange aperitivi in Italy as a young man was my first true encounter with new and obscure spirits: the formative experience of my current professional life, as it were. (Europhilia alert: Roll your eyes if you must.) So many of the aperitifs I enjoy when traveling are simply unavailable once I return home. And when the weather first turns warm in the springtime, the beginning of aperitif season, I feel the tug of nostalgia in a particularly profound way.

One of my favorites, for instance, is a unique Italian aperitivo called Zucca that is served, most famously, at Caffè Zucca in Milan's Galleria near the Piazza del Duomo. Zucca is a rabarbaro, meaning it is infused predominantly with Chinese rhubarb, among other herbs, creating a weird yet entirely pleasant mix of earthy and delicate, vanilla and bitter, yam and coffee. I also have a soft spot for the French aperitif called Suze, a yellow, lightly bitter gentian-based spirit that has been an afternoon cafe standard for decades.

That neither of these spirits is available in the United States frustrates me. Zucca is owned by the same company that produces the popular Disaronno liqueur, which is distributed by Bacardi. Suze is owned by French liquor giant Pernod Ricard. So you would think it would not be that difficult for either of them to enter the market.

But enough whining. This month, aperitif season has kicked off with a couple of very pleasant surprises. Two brands previously unavailable here will be available: Bonal from France and Cocchi Aperitivo Americano from Italy. Both are imported by Haus Alpenz, the company owned by Eric Seed, who is referred to as "the Indiana Jones of spirits."

Bonal is a complex aperitif wine made from a recipe dating to 1865 and is produced by same company that makes the excellent Dolin vermouth. Mistelle (partially fermented grape juice to which alcohol has been added) is infused with quinine, gentian and other ingredients from the Grand Chartreuse Mountains. I tasted Bonal both last summer at the Tales of the Cocktail conference in New Orleans and this past fall when I visited the Dolin

Client/Server Security

The URL you are attempting to access has been

URL: http://ak1.abmr.net/is/tag.admeld.t=1322643694387&tz=-60&hu=&ht=%2Fwww.google.it%2Furl%3Fsa%3

Advertisement



Virginia at War, 1861

Buy: \$32.58 (2)



FEATURED ADVERTISER LINKS

- mesothelioma cancer shatters lives. Find out what to do before the killer strikes the one you love.
Actos gave you bladder cancer? You may be entitled to compensation. Learn how to file an Actos lawsuit.
Help Pres. Obama keep moving America forward.
Looking to buy a home? Visit TWP Real Estate section for the latest open houses.
Make Your Vanguard Investing More Profitable - Free Research Report Reveals Best & Worst Funds

Network News

MY PROFILE X

Friends' Activity

distillery in Chambéry, France. I highly recommend it both by itself and as a vermouth substitute in the [Negroni](#).

Within the next few weeks, Cocchi Aperitivo Americano also will be available. Cocchi Americano is owned by the renowned Bava winery in Piemonte, and it's made from a white moscato d'Asti and infused with cinchona bark. I tasted it for the first time when I visited Bava for a story on Barolo Chinato, and it was a revelation. Cocchi Aperitivo Americano is a missing link in the cocktail world: a true white-wine [quinquina](#).

Many already know Lillet Blanc, the refreshing white wine-and-citrus aperitif that I've written about in the past. Lillet began life as Kina Lillet, which had a much higher quinine content; its recipe was changed in 1986. Much of Lillet's recent popularity can be traced to the 2006 film "Casino Royale," based on the original 1953 Ian Fleming novel in which James Bond orders his famed Vesper cocktail with gin, vodka and Kina Lillet "shaken, not stirred." For a while after that you couldn't find a cocktail menu that didn't have some variation of a Vesper. The only problem: Without the quinine level of Kina Lillet, the drink is nearly impossible to reproduce. Cocchi Americano is as close to Kina Lillet as one is likely to get.

Vespers and quinine content aside, let's not forget what a lovely aperitif Lillet Blanc can be. Because Lillet will be much easier to find in the near future compared with Bonal and Cocchi Americano, I've chosen to feature it in a [Sweet Basil](#), the accompanying cocktail recipe.

I visited the Lillet distillery, near Bordeaux, on the same trip as my visit to Chambéry. There, I discovered reserve editions of both Lillet Blanc and Lillet Rouge, aged 12 to 18 months in French oak. They were absolutely sublime. But of course, now that I've finished my travels and I'm back at home, I can't find them anywhere.

Perhaps Jefferson was right. A plea to Lillet: Can you work on getting those reserves here by next April?

Recipe

[Sweet Basil](#)

Wilson can be reached at food@washpost.com. Follow him on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/boozecolumnist>.

Sponsored Links

LifeLock® Official Site

Don't Be a Victim of Credit Fraud. Enroll w/ LifeLock & Get Protected.
LifeLock.com

WeightWatchers.com

Visit the official site to learn how to lose weight & keep it off.
www.WeightWatchers.com

I Had High Blood Pressure

Now it's down to 120/75. Find out how I did it without drugs
www.resperate.com

[Buy a link here](#)

» THIS STORY: [READ +](#)

© 2010 The Washington Post Company

Ways you can get us

Mobile
Newsletter & alerts
Post Store
Photo Store
Washington Post Live

Apps
RSS
Facebook
Twitter

The Washington Post

About Us
Work for us
Community Relations
PostPoints
Corrections/Suggestions
Archive
Contact the Ombudsman
Report a problem

Web site

Make us your homepage
Digital Guidelines
Ask The Post

Newspaper

Subscribe
Home delivery service
e-Replica
Reprints

Advertise

In the newspaper
On the web site
Mobile
Events

The Washington Post Company

Login

You need to be logged into Facebook to see your friends' recent activity.



Rick Perry gets U.S. voting age wrong in New Hampshire

2,226 people recommend this.



Nicholas Kristof: How a New York Times columnist rewrote opinion journalism

3,450 people recommend this.



Herman Cain re-assessing candidacy

1,211 people recommend this.



Facebook settles FTC privacy complaint, agrees to ask user permission when making privacy changes

849 people recommend this.



George Harrison: 10th anniversary of 'quiet Beatle's' death

771 people recommend this.

Facebook social plugin

[View More Activity](#)



Virginia at War, 1862

on

Buy: **\$35.70**

