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By the pricking of my thumbs, something bitter this way comes ...

June 15, 2011 Chuck [Aperol](#), [aromatic bitters](#), [aromatized wines](#), [bitter](#), [cacao/mole bitters](#), [CioCiaro](#), [Cocchi Vermouth di Torino](#), [cocktails](#), [Fernet Branca](#), [rye](#), [whisk\(e\)y](#) 3 Comments

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It's fun coming up with cocktail names. Then comes the hard part ... coming up with the cocktail.

Most of the time the process is reversed, at least with most bartenders I know. The spirits and flavors form the initial idea, and the name comes afterward. Sometimes, though, you just come up with such a great drink name that you use that as your creative inspiration.

There was one such night several months back, drinking at The Varnish in Downtown L.A. My friend [Aaron](#) was with us and was on a roll, tossing out great drink names one after the other. Most of them I don't remember, given that my memory tends to be a bit hazy with trivial details during periods of cocktail quaffing. I do, however, remember one very clearly.

My friend Zane Harris from Seattle was guest bartending that evening (that was the night he made me the [Yellow With Envy](#) cocktail), and one of the concoctions he served up was based on Averna amaro, with a touch of Fernet. It was fabulous, and I loved the idea of using two amari in the same cocktail. Hell, why not try a drink combining bitter elements the way tiki drinks combine rums? Certainly this has been done before, but I hadn't done it before. Aaron immediately tossed off a perfect drink name — "Something Bitter This Way Comes." Had he been reading my mind, coming across my lifelong love of the writing of Ray Bradbury, and the fact that *Something Wicked This Way Comes* has been one of my favorite novels since I was 13? Whether he was mindmelding or not, he nailed this one, and kindly gave me the name to use as I saw fit. (Fortunately I forgot all the other ones, at least one of which I challenged him to actually create.)

I wanted a rye base for this for spice and backbone, and definitely Fernet although not so much that it would dominate. For the primary amaro I chose Amaro CioCiaro — bracingly bitter and herbal but bright and citrusy enough to be refreshing, and sweeter than you might imagine once you've had a few sips. What would I use to bind these together, though?

I tried almost everything, or so it seemed; I went through many many incarnations of this one before I was satisfied. Previous versions included maraschino (too sweet) and Aperol (getting there, but no). Cocchi Aperitivo Americano seemed just the thing to ameliorate the sweetness inherent in the amari while adding a bitter element of its own. I tried overproof ryes to attempt to stand up to the amaro combinations but it wasn't necessary — a 90ish proof rye (Bulleit or Redemption or Sazerac 6) seems to work the best.

And then ... I put it aside for a while. Procrastinated. Time passed. Wesly made the amazing [Golden Dahlia](#). The following weekend I thought it might finally be time to run this post, so I'd make the drink again and take some pics ... and then I had another thought.

We had just gotten our first bottle of another Cocchi product, the Vermouth di Torino, a fantastic red vermouth from Turin, Italy that's brand-new to the States. I love it. I decided to give the drink one more incarnation, to let the cocoa and bitter notes of this vermouth work with the other *amari* and see what happens.

What happened was that the bell rang. This one was it.

That cocoa aspect of the Cocchi di Torino hooked in perfectly with the orangey notes of the CioCiaro, while contributing a bit of citrus of its own along with a great breadth of complexity (in fact, you should be drinking Cocchi Vermouth di Torino by itself as much as possible, and don't ever let it go bad in your fridge).

The final touch (learned from friends and mentors Kirk Estopinal and Maks Pazuniak after several rounds of drinking at [Cure](#) in New Orleans) was a tiny pinch of kosher salt. This helped rein in the bitterness to make it more pleasant and less of an attack on the palate, and helped cut down a bit on the sweetness too. Remember, amari are liqueurs and contain a fair amount of sugar.

Funny thing is ... it's actually not all that bitter, and comes in squarely in the Manhattan variation category. That may not have been what I was initially going for, but it's what evolved. Who am I to question it? Also, I'm tired of working on it. It's a mighty tasty drink, but does it live up to the name? That may well be up to you.



SOMETHING BITTER THIS WAY COMES

- 1-1/2 ounces rye whiskey.
- 1 ounce Amaro CioCiaro.
- 1/2 ounce Cocchi Vermouth di Torino.
- 1/4 ounce Fernet-Branca.
- 2 dashes Bittermens Xocolatl Mole Bitters.
- Tiny pinch of kosher salt.

Combine ingredients with cracked ice in a mixing glass. Stir for at least 30 seconds until thoroughly chilled. Strain into a chilled cocktail glass. Garnish with an orange peel after expressing the orange oil onto the drink.

If you can't find the Vermouth di Torino near you, Cocchi Aperitivo Americano still works well. Barring either of those, I'd say go for Punt E Mes.

Gaah, I might work on it again. Campari or Luxardo Bitter instead of Cocchi Vermouth? **tear hair out**

looka, <lu'-ka> dialect, v.

1. The imperative form of the verb "look," in the spoken vernacular of New Orleans. It is usually employed when the speaker wishes to call one's attention to something, or to what one is about to say.

2. --n. Chuck Taggart's weblog, est. 1999, with contributions by Wesly Moore, updated (almost) daily (except when it's not), focusing on cocktails and spirits, food and other drink, music, New Orleans and Louisiana culture ... and occasionally movies, books, sf, public radio, media and culture, travel, Macs, humor and amusements, reviews, news of the reality-based community, wry observations, complaints, the authors' lives and opinions, witty and/or smart-arsed comments and whatever else tickles the authors' fancy.

This weblog is part of The Gumbo Pages, by the way. It's big and unwieldy and full of all kinds of fun food, drink and New Orleans stuff. Check it out.



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