



What's the best Gin and Vermouth for a Negroni?

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There is a rule in my house: if I ever make a Negroni for myself, and Victoria is home (or about to come home), I have to make one for her too. Every time. This rule was put in place more than two years ago, and never once has it been broken, never turned down, never exceptioned.

There is only one other such mandate between us, in the case of bacon.

That's the Negroni. It's the bacon of cocktails. And yes, I take that comparison as seriously as it deserves, because like bacon, (1) it is always great, and (2) I'm never not in the mood for it.

The Negroni:



So first things first — what is a Negroni?

I'm not going to spend too much time on the history, but briefly: from the moment Campari was invented in 1860, it's had a heedless love for sweet vermouth.

Somewhere along the line, some genius (perhaps Gaspare Campari himself) united them with a little soda water and created the Americano, still the greatest pre-meal cocktail ever made. And the story goes that in 1919, Count Camillo Negroni walked into the Caffè Casoni in Florence and ordered an Americano with gin instead of soda water. He took one sip, lightning struck in the same spot three times, Jesus appeared on a biscotti, and the Negroni cocktail was born (unless it wasn't. See *Trivia*, at bottom).

Look anywhere for the recipe for a Negroni and you'll find the same thing, more or less everywhere, from more or less everyone:

The Negroni

1oz gin

1oz **Campari**

1oz Sweet Vermouth

Stir, and serve either on ice or up. Garnish with an orange slice or peel.

Almost no one specifies types of gin or vermouth, and in a way, it's not vital — one of the charms of the Negroni is its near invincibility. Use any gin or sweet vermouth you like, and it's going to taste great. Substitute Campari for any of its competitors, and it's going to taste great. Understir it, overstir it, add orange bitters, screw up the measurements, carbonate it, age it in barrels, do whatever you want to it, and it'll still be great. It's great for men or women, first dates or business meetings, after dinner, before dinner, before breakfast, on the train, in outer space, anywhere, always, forever. It's bitter, it's sweet, it's perfect. It is one of the handful of mixed drinks that enjoys universal respect in this industry.

But that's my problem. I get it, no one looks for the best Negroni because saying "best Negroni" is a little like saying "best orgasm" — yeah, there are shades of difference there, some better than others, but even a terrible one is still better than almost everything else in the world. *But*. If you could have the best one every time, wouldn't you?

And so, our question: what's best? What gin, what vermouth, what combination?

Rules:

These are my guiding principles:

(1) **Campari**. Bartenders are a tinkery bunch, which is mostly a good thing, but here, we're sticking with Campari. Yes, a Cynar/Aperol/Cappelletti/etc Negroni is a fine drink, but a true Negroni has to be made with Campari.

(2) **Sweet Vermouth**. Not dry vermouth, not bianco vermouth, not barolo chinato (which is like double-dutch heaven), but sweet vermouth. The red kind. Because that's what's in it.

(3) **Gin**. It's made with gin. For the love of god. Not mezcal, not aquavit, not genever, not barrel-aged gin. Gin.

(4) **Equal Parts**. A Negroni is equal parts Gin, Sweet Vermouth, and Campari. Yes, it comes with a bit of sweetness. Deal with it. The sweetness is part of the charm. There's no adding more gin. That's blasphemy, and it also doesn't taste as good.

Procedures:

Identical glasses, identical large (2" x 2") ice, stirred the same amount of times, tasted double blind by both Victoria and I according to the **sticker on the bottom of the glass** method. As double blind as possible, anyway. Punt e Mes is recognizably darker than the others, but it tastes so different it's not like we wouldn't have known anyway.

Competitors:

I chose gins and vermouths that are fairly standard. Yes, obviously I'm only tasting 5 each, and yes, I might be missing out on some other brand that makes the Negroni of my dreams. I'm sure you'll message me about it.

GIN: Beefeater, Tanqueray, Plymouth Navy Strength, Hendrick's, and Aviation.

VERMOUTH: Carpano Antica, Punt e Mes, Dolin Rouge, Cocchi Vermouth di Torino, and Martini and Rossi



Process:

First, we did 5 rounds of 5, keeping the gin constant and doing 5 different vermouths. Victoria and I silently rated them, then shared when we were done. Then, we did 5 more rounds, keeping the vermouth constant and doing 5 different gins. By the end, every one of the 25 possible combinations was tasted twice in two different heats. Points were given based on our respective ratings (we didn't always agree, of course), and the data looked like this:

	#1: Tanqueray		#2: Aviation		#3: Hendrick's		#4: Beefeater		#5: Plymouth Navy Strength	
	Jason	Vikki	Jason	Vikki	Jason	Vikki	Jason	Vikki	Jason	Vikki
Dolin	1	3	4	5	5	3	4	5	4	3
Cocchi	4	1	2	3	2	1	1	4	1	1
Martini	5	4	5	4	4	5	5	3	5	3
Carpano	3	2	3	1	3	4	2	1	3	5
Punt e Mes	2	5	1	2	1	2	3	2	2	3
	#6: Dolin Rouge		#7: Cocchi		#8: Martini		#9: Carpano		#10: Punt e Mes	
	Jason	Vikki	Jason	Vikki	Jason	Vikki	Jason	Vikki	Jason	Vikki
Tanqueray	4	1	1	1	2	4	3	3	5	1
Aviation	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	5
Hendricks	1	3	4	4	3	2	2	5	1	3
Beefeater	3	2	3	2	4	3	1	2	4	2
Plymouth N.S.	2	4	2	3	1	1	4	1	2	4

There are a couple different ways to look at this:

The way I like best is to count the amount of times each ingredient earned a 1st place ranking. You'll notice every ingredient had its own heat, so at one point or another, they all got at least 2 first place prizes, one from each of us. If I tally up Victoria's and my votes, the data looks like this:

Number of times each gin won it's heat:

- Tanqueray – 6
- Plymouth Navy Strength – 5
- Hendricks – 4
- Beefeater – 3
- Aviation – 2

Number of times each vermouth won it's heat:

- Cocchi Vermouth di Torino – 7
- Carpano Antica – 4
- Punt e Mes – 4
- Dolin – 3
- Martini and Rossi – 2



Another way to sort the data is individual Negroni scores. As we tasted every combination twice and both of us ranked them 1-5 each time, each Negroni has 4 ratings, so if it were #1 every single time, it would score a 4:

By points (lower is better):

- Beefeater & Carpano – 6
- Tanqueray & Cocchi – 7
- Hendricks & Punt e Mes – 7
- Aviation & Carpano – 7
- Plymouth Navy Strength & Cocchi – 7
- Tanqueray & Dolin – 9

This isn't perfect because they're rankings as opposed to evaluations, which means even if all 5 were bad (looking at you, Martini and Rossi) they still get ranked 1-5. However, this is how we did the Final Round, because it has the added benefit being fairly diverse, which is good because they've already competed against themselves in every possible way.

The final combined results, with my ranking and Victoria's ranking for reference

6th: Carpano and Aviation | #6 and #5
5th: Plymouth N.S. and Cocchi | #5 and #3
4th: Beefeater and Carpano | #4 and #4
3rd: Hendrick's and Punt e Mes | #2 and #6
2nd: Tanqueray and Dolin | #3 and #2
1st: Tanqueray and Cocchi | #1 and #1

Not even close. We both, independently, liked Tanqueray and Cocchi best by a significant margin. They were all great, but Tanqueray and Cocchi tasted the most like the ideal Negroni. No hair out of place. As close to perfect as I can imagine.

In fact, of the 6 times Tanqueray and Cocchi was rated, there is only once where it wasn't #1, a weird spike in the data on our very first test and one I'm tempted to explain away by error, but we'll never know. Nonetheless:

The Best Negroni*

1oz Tanqueray
1oz Cocchi Vermouth di Torino
1oz Campari.

Stir on ice. Garnish with an orange peel. Drink. Melt.



*That is, best of the 5 gins and 5 vermouths we tried, of course. And according to our specific palates. Out of only 1:1:1 Negronis. With strict rules. This is a very limited experiment featuring two people and 10 products. But, Tanqueray and Cocchi is now my champion, and what I'll make against any new combination I'm told about.

Ingredient Conclusions:

GINS



Tanqueray: The bars I've worked at have always carried Beefeater instead of Tanqueray so I've never been too familiar with its nuances. But I'm finding the more of these experiments I do, the more I find Tanqueray still standing at the end. I'm beginning to realize what an incredible gin this really is.

Beefeater: Great product, great for Negronis. Most cocktail bartenders I polled before starting this said Beefeater and Carpano are the best, and indeed, it's great. Carpano was too sweet, too much vanilla for most gins, but Beefeater handles it admirably.

Plymouth Navy Strength: I really thought the strength would counter the sweetness of the cocktail, but it just made most of them kinda flat, like a dampener.

Hendrick's: Performed better than I would've thought. I figured it didn't have the backbone for this and only included it as a reference point, but it did well. Its floral nature is absorbed by the cocktail and doesn't stick out. I'll drink Hendrick's & Punt e Mes Negronis all day.

Aviation: I love Aviation gin. It won my **Martini experiments**, after all, but the sarsaparilla note comes through as wintergreen, and has no place in a Negroni.

VERMOUTHS:



Cocchi Vermouth di Torino: Performed incredibly well. Mixes with Campari like a dream.

Carpano Antica: Great vermouth, but most of the Negronis, especially against peers, were too sweet with too much vanilla. It's like a Vanilla Negroni as opposed to just a Negroni.

Punt e Mes: I like Punt e Mes Negronis a lot, but Victoria doesn't much. It really shouldn't have been in this experiment because it's like a spin-off of a Negroni. It's too different. Sometimes I'm in the mood for a cherry/chocolate Negroni with Punt e Mes, but if I just want a normal one, Punt e Mes is not the answer.

Dolin Rouge: Too weak. All the Negronis with Dolin tasted flat & dull.

Martini and Rossi: Terrible. The worst performer of the whole experience. It tastes like an herb shop. The only time this was best was when it ran unopposed.

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Trivia: All of that history up there is true, unless of course Count Camillo Negroni never actually existed, but we're pretty sure he did. It's a minor rats nest and I don't feel like getting into it. If you're curious, there's an admirably complete discussion of the topic [here](#).