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Time For A Drink: The Vesper



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Introduced to the world in 1953 in *Casino Royale*—the first book in what became **Ian Fleming's sprawling James Bond franchise**—the Vesper has had more popularity in print and

in film than it's ever had inside a glass. Which is too bad, actually, considering it's actually a pretty decent drink.

In the book, Bond spells out the recipe very clearly to a barman, and the drink he describes is a sort of **hybrid between the classic gin martini and the then-upstart vodka martini**, with a notable twist: for a flavor modifier, instead of the martini's signature dry vermouth, Bond specifies Kina Lillet.

As I wrote on Wednesday, Kina Lillet disappeared from the bar in the mid-1980s, when Lillet reformulated its product and removed "Kina" from the name. Some have claimed that pre-reformulation Lillet had a sharper bitter bite, with a flavor similar to that of [Cocchi Aperitivo Americano](http://www.seriousseats.com/2011/02/what-is-cocchi-aperitivo-americano-aperitif-cocktails-drinks.html) [<http://www.seriousseats.com/2011/02/what-is-cocchi-aperitivo-americano-aperitif-cocktails-drinks.html>], an Italian aperitif wine currently enjoying its moment in the craft-cocktail sun.

After I wrote my post for Wednesday, I received further information about Lillet's reformulation that suggests the previous version may not have been as bitter as Cocchi Americano, and that there's not a great deal of difference between the Kina Lillet that Fleming included in the recipe and the Lillet currently available in stores.

But that's a topic for further research; for now, the Vesper offers its own opportunities for exploration. **Start with the basics:** the vodka part is easy, just go with one you like; for the gin, aim for an old-school London dry, such as Tanqueray or Beefeater. Then, if you're in the mood for an experiment and you have some friends to play along (not to mention the ingredients), try mixing two versions of the drink, the first with Lillet and the second with Cocchi Americano. (Oh, and a word on the quantities: as detailed in the book, the recipe makes a massive, very potent drink -- pretty much what you'd expect for James Bond. Take it easy, though; unless you've either got a license or an evening to kill, I'd suggest you cut the recipe in half or share this with a friend.)

Both versions are quite nice, but where the Lillet version will be smooth and floral with a touch of citrus, **the Cocchi version will have a crisp, bitter finish**. Which Vesper is better? You be the judge.

Special equipment: mixing glass, strainer (or to be more Bond-ian, a cocktail shaker)

Ingredients

yield: 1 (or more prudently, 2), active time 1 minute, total time 1 minute

3 ounces London dry gin
1 ounce vodka
1/2 ounce Lillet or Cocchi Aperitivo Americano
wide strip of lemon zest, for garnish

Procedures

- 1 Combine ingredients in a mixing glass and fill with ice. Stir well until chilled, about 20 seconds, and strain into chilled cocktail glass. (Or if you want to go the full Bond route, use a cocktail shaker, shaking with ice for about 10 seconds -- it'll make a more bubbly, cloudy drink, but that's up to you). Squeeze a wide strip of lemon zest over the drink and use as garnish.