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DG insider



Aperitivo Oscuro - Cocchi Americano



Any recipe involving a white wine aperitif has bartenders reaching for a bottle of Lillet Blanc. It's become the industry standard, not unlike Baileys is synonymous with Irish Cream or Kahlua for coffee liqueur.



Which is most likely the reason why we had never heard of Cocchi Americano, a white wine aperitivo from Italy that we stumbled upon courtesy of Ken Benner of Leschi Market. A fellow liquor enthusiast (who we cannot thank by name because we do not know it) was inquiring about it as a special order, and Ken found an importer for them. Just a day or two

later we had a bottle too (he had thoughtfully ordered us an extra). As luck would have it, it has been available in the U.S. since March of 2010, and there were more than a few very happy liquor hunters when it finally arrived on shelves.

What's all the fuss about a white wine aperitif? The brief history lesson goes like this: **Kina Lillet** was frequently used in cocktails and was a different animal than the Lillet Blanc that we have today. Kina Lillet was more alcoholic and more, well, like an aperitif... namely more bitter. The recipe was changed in 1986, most likely to garner more universal appeal (the 80's were the beginning of the drinking dark ages, after all). With the recent interest in craft cocktails on the rise, bartenders have discovered that indeed some liquors and aperitifs have fundamentally changed, changing the taste and balance of the cocktails as a result.

This had prompted a renewed interest in what Kina Lillet was. Once the recipe had changed, the "Kina" was dropped from the name (Kina is a shortened version of *quinquina*, which is the French name for the bark that quinine is made from), and it was known as Lillet Blanc after that. As we mentioned earlier, Lillet Blanc is more tepid than the original, so the search has become for one that was most like the original.

Cocchi Aperitivo Americano has been made in the town of Asti, Italy since 1891. It's made from moscato d'asti, which wine lovers know is a sweet fortified wine. It is then aromatized with herbs and spices, and then aged for a year before being sold to the public. And, as rumor has it, it is as close as one can get to the original Kina Lillet. Now that it's available nationwide, it's starting to crop up here and there in cocktail bars, and (as we mentioned earlier) people are asking for it by name in retail stores as well.

Our taste test revealed that it did indeed taste more bitter and stronger than Lillet Blanc, as promised. As far as whether or not it tastes like Kina Lillet? We have no idea. Of course, if one of you out there has a bottle of Kina lying around, please feel free to pop by with a bottle and we will set the record straight!

We did test it out in a couple cocktails, just to see how much of a difference you could taste. It did take a bit of the sweetness out of the Vesper and added complexity to the Corpse Reviver #2 (which we incidentally found a recipe for on the back of the bottle). We can see how the original recipes would have had a little extra something where the Blanc just falls flat. The most surprising revelation, however, was the other recipe that we found on the back of the bottle. Called the Classico, we've listed the recipe below. This is how the Italians drink it, and it is as tasty as it is simple!

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Classico

2 oz Cocchi Aperitivo Americano
2 oz Soda water
3 ice cubes

Garnish with a large, wise slice of orange peel

Salud!

posted 1/11/2011 12:36 am

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