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One Day in a Bottle – Cocchi Americano di Torino

Tuesday, Oct 4, 2011 at 4:51 pm by [Brian Melton](#)

[Liquor](#), [Wine](#)

I think it's fitting that my first installment of One Day In a Bottle comes one week before I retire from the world of bartending for a life as a Hospitality Consultant. A lot has happened over the past few months to expedite my decision to step away from the day-to-day life of a professional drink-slinger. These days, it seems like a lot can happen in a month to change the course of a life.

Shit, it's nothing compared to a year.

It comes to me on a Sunday. Not any old Sunday, but Father's Day, the last day of the Food & Wine Classic in Aspen. I had spent the weekend mixing drinks with Ty Ku, an Asian spirit and wine company based out of New York, who were gracious enough to pay me to sling their booze all over the mountain. Although a majority of the Aspen debauchery happens on that Sunday afternoon when most of the crowd has left, I decided to head back to Denver that morning where my girlfriend was waiting. I had more than drinking to attend to.

In March of this year Shannon's father passed away from ALS (otherwise known as Lou Gehrig's Disease), and this was going to be her first Father's Day without him. It was important for me to be there for her, although I knew there was jack-all I could do for her. As I sped home, thousands of thoughts raced through my head. Since meeting Shannon in October of last year, I had matured into a man. Here I was, forgoing a fun-filled Aspen day of free drinking and partying for a quiet night at home with the love of my life. I was thrilled. And then I was scared to death. My single life was coming to an end. After 32 years of boozing and sleeping around, I was settling down. I couldn't breathe. This was it, the period of my life I had been postponing for over a decade. And then the water works came, followed by sheer joy. I was driving as fast as the state of Colorado allowed to see the woman I loved. Everything was simple and pure. I put some Tom Petty on and took a deep breath. It was an emotional drive home and would be an intense night at the homestead. We probably needed some booze.



This is where Cocchi Vermouth di Torino (\$19, 750ml) comes into our story (and I thank everyone who has followed along to this point). On the way through the city I stopped at my favorite liquor store, Mondo Vino, to grab Shannon a bottle of wine and myself a little treat with the money I had made over the weekend. Now, I want you to know, that I've had Cocchi (pronounced co-key) Americano, the precursor to the Torino, before. Fell in love with Cocchi Americano before. Swooned over Cocchi Americano before and literally broken down when I was told Cocchi Americano was not in stock before. I love Cocchi Americano like I love Tex-Mex. There's something deep inside my soul that longs for it the moment after it's gone.

The first time I tasted Cocchi Americano was almost an afterthought. I had picked up this curious bottle with the Rooster on the label whimsically. "Look! It has a cock on the bottle!" For around \$18, I could easily afford something that was new on the market and that none of my liquor reps had provided for me. Plus, it had a cock on the bottle. I took it home and kept it in the fridge for a couple of weeks. Then, one Wednesday afternoon prior to leaving for work, I opened the bottle and took a swig. The bitterness from the quinine melded together with the sweet white wine that was accented with notes of orange and lemon peel. It left a coating on my tongue that was very pleasing. "Well that's delicious," I said to myself as I grabbed my keys and headed out the door.

But it's what happened an hour later that really caught me off-guard. There I was, mixing drinks and taking orders when I tasted a familiar flavor in my mouth. It was floral, and bitter and sweet, and it crept up out of nowhere, calling to me from some ethereal location that is normally reserved for first kisses and Christmas mornings. It was Cocchi Americano knocking, it's astoundingly long finish reminding me that the bottle was at home, barely cracked and calling my name.

So imagine my surprise when I walked into Mondo Vino and saw a bottle of Cocchi Vermouth di Torino on the shelf next to the Cocchi. How long do you think it took me to grab that bottle and purchase it? I believe the answer can be given in a fraction.

I'd imagine that many of you have never heard of Cocchi Americano. Where has it been all of your life and why haven't you tried it yet? Like all horror stories in the alcohol industry, we really have one thing to blame: Vodka.

Cocchi Americano has been around since 1891. That's when Giulio Cocchi, an Italian distiller and wine maker, first developed his formulas for both the Barolo Chinato and Aperitivo Americano. Although many records indicate that Cocchi was distributed throughout the world, it was primarily an Italian cult brand that made most of its money off of making boozy chocolates in Italy. Prior to 2010, only a handful of individuals in the United States even knew it existed.

But why do we blame vodka for Cocchi's irrelevance prior to the last two years? Well, in 1986, a product very similar to Cocchi Americano decided to change its recipe as a direct result of the age of the "Fear of Flavor" that vodka brought about in the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1986, Kina Lillet was a bitter version of the aperitif wine that we now call simply Lillet Blanc. When the Vesper and the Corpse Reviver #2 were originally created, bartenders had access to Kina Lillet. But during the 1980s, the vodka craze impacted every element of the booze industry. Who would want to drink a sweet, bitter-flavored aperitif when there was so much vodka to be had? Lillet changed its formula, dropped the alcohol content and rendered itself to becoming that obscure bottle at the back of a bar's reach-in. By 2000, no one in the industry knew what in the hell to do with the stuff.

Meanwhile, back in Italy, the House of Cocchi continued to make its chocolates, and its spirits.

In 2010, with the rise of the international bartending scene and the return of classic cocktails, Cocchi Americano was discovered as kin to the original Kina Lillet. Suddenly, bartenders could recreate the original Vesper that Ian Fleming wrote about in *Casino Royale*. Mixologists could now transport themselves back in time to the days of Henry Craddock and the 1930s at the Savoy Hotel in London. And nothing... I mean nothing makes a bar geek more geeky than making a proper Corpse Reviver #2 from the Savoy Cocktail Book.

And with this added interest comes increased production and import. And with this increased interest comes opportunity. In 2011, to celebrate the 120th Anniversary of the House of Cocchi, Cocchi resumed production of Cocchi Vermouth di Torino. It's a deliciously bitter, sweet vermouth that tastes of cocoa, cinnamon, tobacco and orange peel. And yes, it coats your tongue, reminding you of days you've never had in the Italian countryside. And yes, it makes you crave more, like a romantic afternoon on the streets of Florence.

And there I was at Mondo Vino, purchasing a bottle of Malbec for Shannon and a bottle of Cocchi Vermouth di Torino for me. And now, here I am on a Sunday night three months later, sipping it straight from the bottle. That Father's Day evening in June, I was less focused on the Cocchi than I was on the world around me. Shannon and I had just moved in together and we were adjusting to our new life. It was thrilling and frightening and overwhelming and real. Now, at fifteen after midnight on October 2, with the world around me asleep, I focus on the Cocchi and reflect on the life I'm leaving behind.

I'm nearly 33. That's not old, by any stretch of the imagination, but, as my Grandfather would say, I'm no spring chicken. I've lived many lives behind bars, slung thousands of drinks to thousands of faces. The nights I've seen compile a tomb of stories worthy of a hardback book... the days a blur worthy of a movie montage.

I've lived, I've loved, and I've lost and won from behind the bar. And now, with one week left of a career that has brought me more joy than sorrow, I sit back on my couch while Shannon sleeps upstairs and quietly take a pull from my bottle of Cocchi.

A Very Cocchi Manhattan

- 2 oz Bulleit Rye Whiskey
- 1 oz Cocchi Vermouth di Torino
- 1 Dash of Angostura Bitters
- 5 drops of Regan's Orange Bitters

Add all ingredients in a mixing glass with ice. Stir. Julep strain over a block ice cube and garnish with a flamed orange peel. Smile.



About Brian Melton

Brian Melton is the Brand Manager and Beverage Director for Leigh Sullivan Enterprises, a hospitality consulting firm in Denver, Colorado, where his duties include marketing, PR and beverage development for LSE's clients. With over 13 years in the restaurant industry, Melton has been lead bartender at several award-winning restaurants including Denver's TAG Restaurant and ChoLon Modern Asian Bistro and is the Secretary of the Colorado Bartenders Guild. Melton is also an avid writer whose work has appeared in 5280, Denver Magazine, Westword and Relix.

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1. [Kevin Burke](#) says:
[October 5, 2011 at 3:33 pm](#)

So well written, so excited to read these posts. Well done Brian and best of luck on your new endeavour

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