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The Bitterest Taboo

Cocchi stands in for out-of-reach booze

Quinquinas--bitter aperitivo-style wines made with quinine--might be the masked crusaders of the cocktail world: They function well on their own when placed in the spotlight, but they also enhance drinks on the sly by coaxing out the nuances of the spirits they accompany.

As such, these obscure sidemen have become the workhorses for bartenders across the country. The recent buzz within the category is for Suze, an aperitif wine that's not quite legal. But until it can take a lawful place on the liquor shelves, bartenders are relying on its Italian cousin, the just-arrived Cocchi Aperitivo Americano.

This bitter, citrusy infusion--a blend of Moscato d'Asti, the roots of gentian flowers (also present in Suze), cinchona bark and a secret blend of botanicals--happens to be a ringer for Kina Lillet, the now-extinct original expression of Lillet used in classic recipes like the Corpse Reviver #2 (modern-day Lillet uses a new formula that lacks its forbearer's bitter tinge).

Cocchi is great for mixing, and bartenders such as Joseph Schwartz of New York's Little Branch are giving it due diligence in drinks like the Mercy, Mercy ([click here to download](#)), a biting gin-based affair.

Or try it the Piemontese way: On the rocks, with a splash of soda and an orange twist.

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