

AROMATIZED WINES

DEFINITION

Wines that are flavoured and fortified are called Aromatized wines. Sweetening agent may or may not be added. Examples are Vermouth, Commandaria, Dubonnet, Pineau de Charente etc.

VARIOUS AROMATIZED WINE

Different aromatized wines are as follows:

(i) VERMOUTH: Initially, the local wines that were flavoured with wormwood, were called as Vermouth in Germany. These were used medicinally as it was believed that it had therapeutic and digestive properties. Later, the Italians and French commercialised the alcoholic drink. Benedetto Carpano of Turin was the first to offer vermouth for sale as a social drink in Turin, Italy. The French made a much drier product and opened production houses in Marseilles and Chambéry. At that time there was a definite demarcation of styles: Italian vermouth was sweet and red and the French version was dry and white. Today, both styles are made in both countries.

INGREDIENTS

There are up to 50 ingredients used in its making. It consists of flavouring agents, wine, sweetener and spirit.

Flavouring agents: The main flavour comes from the flowers of the wormwood shrub. Other flavours include spices, hyssop, coriander, cloves, camomile, quinine and juniper.

Wine: A placid, two – three year old, high-strength wine is used as a base wine. For Italian Vermouth, the wine can come from any part of the country, but the French use the wines of the Midi.

Sweetener: This is either sugar syrup or *mistelle* (grape juice muted with brandy).

Spirit: The spirit is usually neutral brandy.

MAKING VERMOUTH

The flavouring agents are steeped or infused in the spirit. The flavoured spirit is then added to the sweetened wine. The liquid is fined to free it from haze-forming substances. It is also refrigerated to crystallize the remaining tartrates, which then drop to the bottom of the vat. Finally, it is pasteurised to stabilize and sterilise and to keep the wine healthy and bright. Vermouth gets a short resting period. It has a short shelf-life and the wine is meant to be drunk young.

STYLES OF VERMOUTH

(a) Dry vermouth: It is also called French Vermouth or simply French. It has a base of dry white wine and is light yellow with green tinge. It is served with ice and lemon and sometimes with a splash of soda. It is also a prime ingredient for the Dry Martini cocktail. It is often used in the kitchen to flavour fish dishes.

(b) Sweet vermouth or bianco: This is made from a dry white wine, which is flavoured, fortified and sweetened with mistelle.

(c) Rose vermouth: It has a white wine base with a little sweetening added and it is flavoured, fortified and coloured pink with the addition of caramel.

(d) Red vermouth: It is also called Italian Vermouth, Italian or simply It (as in Gin and It). It is made from a white wine base, which is well sweetened, flavoured and fortified. The reddish brown colour comes from a generous addition of caramel.

(e) Chambery: A light and very delicate vermouth made in the vicinity of the Savoie mountains. This is flavoured with Alpine herbs and is the only vermouth produced in France with an AOC status.

(f) Chamberyzette: It is vermouth flavoured with wild Alpine strawberries.

(g) Punt e Mes: It is made by Carpano in Turin. The drink is an acquired taste. It is heavily flavoured with quinine and has very pronounced contrasts of bitterness and sweetness. It has the colour of iodine. It is said that a broker came to Carpano's shop-cum-wine-bar and asked for his vermouth to have a point and a half of bitterness added. Apparently, some precious stocks had fallen by a point and a half on that particular day. The name stuck.

POPULAR BRANDS OF VERMOUTH

Dry: Chambery, Cinzano, Martini, Noilly Prat, Torella

Bitter-Sweet: Punt e Mes

Sweet: Cinzano Bianco, Cinzano Red, Martini Bianco, Martini Rose, Martini Rosso and Noilly Prat Red.

(ii) DUBONNET: It is made at Thuir in south-west France. Dubonnet made by Joseph Dubonnet was used as a tonic. Modern versions have a wine base, flavoured with quinine and bitter herbs with additions of *mistelle* and spirit. It is blonde (white) or rouge (red) and is consumed as an aperitif.

(iii) ST RAPHAEL: This bitter-sweet drink from France is flavoured with herbs and quinine. It may be red and sweet or white and less sweet, or there is also an extra dry style. St Raphael is a type of Ratafia, the 'good will' drink formerly offered when a legal document or contract was agreed, signed and ratified.

(iv) LILLET: Lillet is made from white Bordeaux wine, herbs and fruit peel and fortified with Armagnac brandy. It is a favourite in France.

(v) SUZE: Suze is a bright yellow French aperitif flavoured with gentian and herbs. It is bitter in flavour with supposedly digestive properties.

(vi) PINEAU DES CHARENTES: This is a popular sweet aperitif from the Cognac area. Pineau is a heady mixture of Cognac and grape juice. It may be white, rose or red in colour. It can be drunk neat or with ice and is also adaptable for mixing with orange juice, white wine or tonic water. It can be drunk during, before or after a meal. Its alcoholic strength is between 16 and 22% and the residual sugar content is 125 – 40 g per litre.