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Drink Like an Italian with These 11 Spirits

By [Tara Cox](#) | October 14, 2021

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Already read up on the fabulous foods, fashion, and wines of Italy? Take a deeper dive into the *essenza* of the culture by exploring these 11 exciting Italian spirits. Click the image for link.

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Rosolio Liqueur


The *rosolio*, a low ABV aperitivo infused with herbacious essences such as bergamot (and not necessarily rose petals as many assume; the word 'rosolio' actually translates to 'dew of the sun') is an ancient spirit category. It was originally the favored spirit of Milan until the 1700s, when a king banned it in favor of the newer, trendier vermouth. Italicus is a modern take, with a subtlety-sweet orange floral flavor and a gorgeous clean-line bottle. It tastes wonderful in spritz variation, or added to a white Negroni.



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Amaro

An after dinner digestif, "amaro" literally means "bitter." Once sold as an herbal tonic, this spirit can now range from bitter to sweet, but always with a base of herbs and botanicals. Less severe in flavor than the red aperitivos (see next), it actually contains more alcohol. Amaro can be mixed into a cocktail but is more often served alone over ice. Made in Sicily, Amaro Averna has been producing the liquor with the same recipe (including notes of orange, licorice, myrtle, juniper berries, rosemary, and sage) for 150 years.



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Aperitivo Liqueur (aka "The Red Bitter Liqueurs")

Though technically Amari (plural of Amaro), the Aperitivo Liqueurs form a sub category of their own. Known for their vibrant red color (like an Italian sunset!), bitter taste, and as an ingredient in the famed Italian before-dinner cocktails (aperitivo) the Spritz and Negroni. With humble beginnings as a medicinal tonic, they were adopted into cocktails in the 20th century. Created in 1920, Select Aperitivo, became an instant Italian classic with its complex bitter and mouth-watering flavor. It's the official ingredient of the Original Venetian Spritz (3 parts prosecco, 2 parts select aperitivo, 1 splash of soda and a green olive garnish).



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Sambuca

Sambuca is a traditional Roman anise-based liqueur with a distinct licorice flavor. Often served neat with three espresso beans (to represent the three blessings of health, happiness, and prosperity), it's also served as an after dinner drink neat or poured into espresso as a *caffè corretto* or "corrected coffee." Made with fennel seeds, sambuco flower and star anise, the liquid turns white when served over ice due to a reaction with the essential oils from the star anise. Rossi d'Asiago Antica Sambuca Classic, produced in Venice, is considered one of the premier Sambucas on the market.



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Grappa

Grappa is Italy's national spirit, similar to Scotland's whisky, Mexico's tequila or America's bourbon. Created to help herdsmen survive the extreme cold of the Alps, grappa mostly falls in the *eau de vie* category (a clear fruit brandy not aged in barrels) distilled from the grape seeds, stalks, and stems remaining from wine production. Usually enjoyed as a digestif after dinner, or in a *caffè corretto* (see Sambuca) Italians will also use it as a *resentin*, or "little rinses" after espresso by pouring a few drops into the empty cup, swirling it around and drinking up the goodness. Sibona Antica Distilleria a historical distillery from the Piedmonte region that boasts distillation license number one. Their La Grappa di Barolo is made from the Nebbiolo grapes used in Barolo wine.



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Nocino

Hailing from the Emilia-Romagna region, Nocino is made from green, unripe walnuts, resulting in another warming bittersweet aromatic with a nutty flavor. Traditionally served as a digestif, it's great in cocktails, or over ice cream. Il Mallo Nocino liqueur, produced in Modena contains an infusion of walnut husks, water, sugar, alcohol and spices (cinnamon, cloves and coriander seeds) in a recipe that has remained unchanged for many years.




Limoncello

Mostly produced in Southern Italy, Limoncello is made from the zest of lemons and served as a bright, sweet, and refreshing digestif, though it's often used in cooking and baking as well. Pallini's Limoncello has been produced since 1875 using lemons from the Amalfi Coast, and is one of the easiest brands to find in the USA.



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Gin

Though gin was born in Holland and popularized in England, Italians have recently thrown their juniper berries into the game. Since it holds equal weight to the other ingredients in Italy's classic Negroni, why not use a local gin as well? Gin Marconi is a small batch gin with a dominant juniper berry flavor supported by other botanicals like rosemary, mint, basil and thyme.



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Vermouth

A fortified wine (meaning a spirit has been added) and flavored with botanicals, Vermouth can be red or white with various degrees of dryness and sweetness. Usually only thought of as an ingredient in mixed drinks like Martinis, Negroni and Manhattans, a good Vermouth is a pleasure to drink solo over ice – and Vandalò's Vermouth Rosso is one of those; bitter, rich and rustic (with a super cool label).





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Bitter Wine

Bitter Wine is basically a new category created by Sicilian producer Whitehouse. Using Marsala wine (a wine fortified with brandy) as a base, this blend is infused with some of the same bitter herbs used in Amaro. Its grape base separates it from the spirit, sending the flavor profile in a different direction. Whitehouse's Bitter Wine works as an aperitivo or digestif with its complex bitter, yet flowery and slightly salty, taste.



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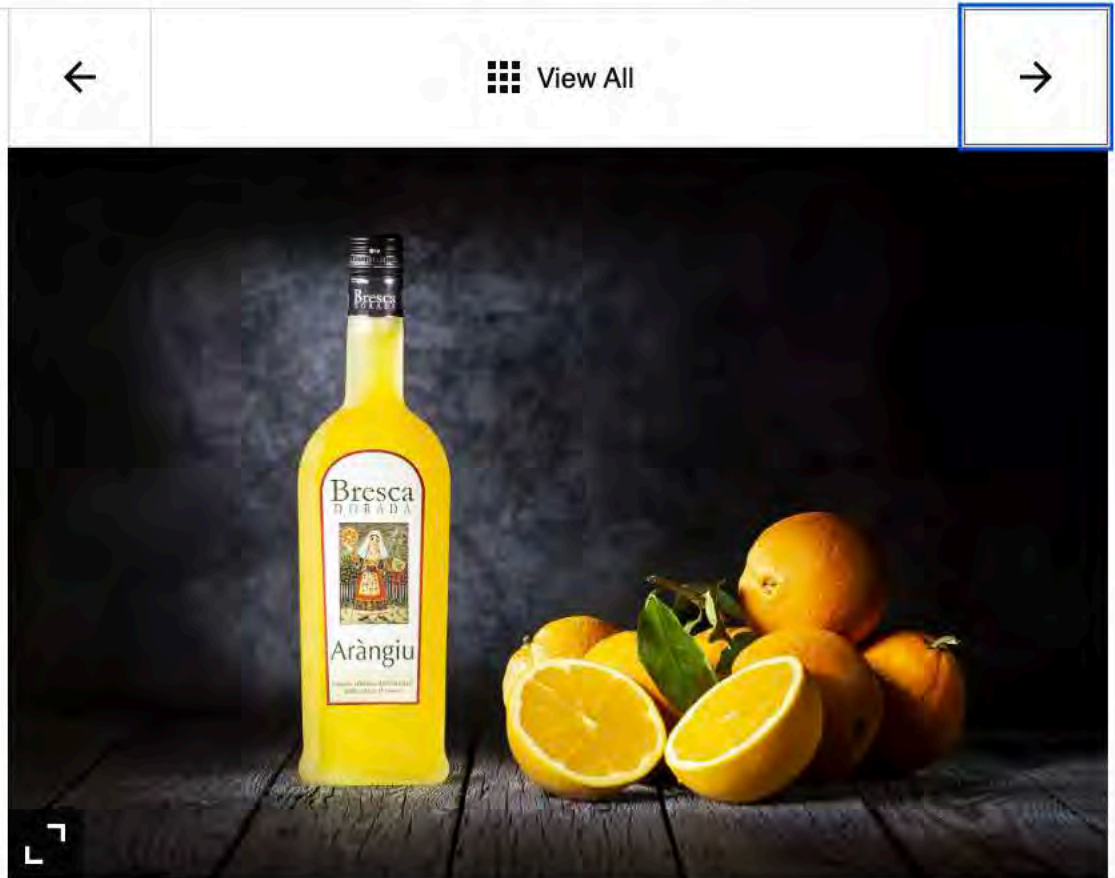
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Arangiu

Arangiu is similar to Limoncello, but made with oranges instead of lemons. Another drink best served cold, it also works as a lovely palate cleanser. Bresca Dorada makes their arangiu on a small Sardinian farm alongside jams, honey and flavored salt.



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