BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

2008

Herbed Aperitifs

Presented by Kate Neudorf (Mainland Chapter)

" An aperitif is best able to start the saliva flowing if it has an assertive flavour." - Ted Underhill
" Anything that improves appetite increases the excitement at table." - Max Lake

AFTER COMPLETING THIS SESSION YOU WILL KNOW:

1. The description and technical characteristics of this class.
2. The famous areas of the world which produce herbed aperitifs.
3. How herbed aperitifs differ from region to region.
4. The history and origin of herbed aperitifs.
5. Some tips about judging this class.
6. The name of two salivary glands and where they are situated.
7. How to serve an herbed aperitif.

TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS - Class B Aperitif

Herbed or otherwise flavoured wine for use as an aperitif. Wines that exhibit the strong aperitif characteristic of the ingredient such as citrus, muscat, or other strongly-flavoured fruits belong in this class. The class includes vermouth type wines as well as those similar to the patent aperitifs. Most tend to the sweet rather than the dry end of the sugar spectrum.

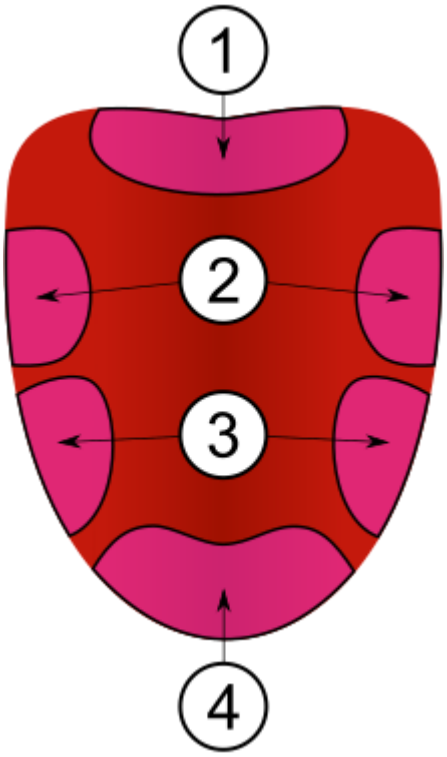
Ingredients:	No restrictions.
Alcohol:	16% - 18%
Colour:	No restrictions.
Sugar:	Medium to very sweet.
Specific Gravity:	1.000 - 1.040
Acid:	4.0 g/L - 5.0 g/L
Tannin:	May be somewhat astringent.
Bitterness:	A bitter characteristic is permissible.

OVERVIEW

Aperitifs are robust and assertive in flavour, with bitterness to whet the appetite as a desired quality.

We discover bitterness in food early on in life, in dandelions and orange peel. Then in tea and coffee and later in beer. Generally we don't like dark chocolate as children because it is bitter. Olive oil has a subtle bitterness as do olives.

There are four qualities which the tongue is able to taste. They are sweetness, saltiness, acidity and bitterness. Bitterness is detected at the back of the tongue and at the back of the roof of the mouth. This is something to keep in mind while tasting the flight – not to be too quick to swallow, and no to be too quick to close the throat when spitting.



1 Bitterness
2 Sour (Acid)
3 Salt
4 Sweet

One of the numerous medicinal values of bitterness is that it is cleansing of the blood, which becomes useful when we are recovering from an illness. It helps the body eliminate toxins. Add to this that wine is easily digested and the sweetness helps disguise the bitterness, and it makes for a beneficial medicinal combination. The aperitif is meant to open the palate and facilitate saliva production prior to a meal. The parotid gland is the largest of our salivary glands. It follows the jawline. The sublingual gland, under the tongue is the smallest of salivary glands and it empties saliva into the mouth towards our lower teeth. While you taste, pay attention to how your mouth waters – which of the wines makes you drool? Herbed aperitifs come in a wide variety of flavours which appeal to a wide range of tastes. They also come in a wide range of alcoholic strengths. Many are commonly served with ice, or mixed with other drinks such as soda water, fruit juice or fruit liqueurs.

JUDGING

Judging this category can have its difficulties. Herbed apéritifs are usually fortified. The herbs and spices can vary from a rather delicate flavour in some whites to a very robust flavour in a dark vermouth. Therefore it may be a dvantageous to separate the entries into light and dark classes and taste the light before the dark. We should also be aware that most herbed apéritifs are to be served chilled, over ice, or mixed with soda water or even fruit syrup. Therefore, what may be overpowering in flavour when tasted from a warm bottle may be and excellent apéritif when served over ice or mixed with soda water. Just as one looks for the balance of sugar and acid in a wine there should be a balance of flavours in this class.

ORIGIN

What we now call a herbed Apéritif did not originate as a before dinner appetizer. Centuries ago, medicinal herbs were often added to or infused into wine which made them more palatable and at the same time acted as a better solvent than water. The tonic and restorative properties of some herbed wines (not to mention liqueurs) are still touted today. Strongly flavoured herbs have also been often used through the ages to mask the flavour of bad or spoiled wine. Further, in some cases, aromatic flavours were imparted to the wine from the containers in which it was stored or shipped. The taste of the Greek wine Retsina presumably originated with the pitch used by the ancient Greeks to seal their wine jars.

VERMOUTH

Vermouth had its origins in the 16th century Germany: in fact, its name comes from the German word for wormwood, a shrub whose flowers were used to infuse Rhine wines with erratic results. The Italians had a little more success around 1775, producing a bittersweet flavoured wine from Muscat grapes. A few years later, around 1800, a drier vermouth was made in the South of France using Midi wines aged in oak. These were fortified with brandy and aged further. Italian vermouth was originally sweet, and French originally dry; now it should be noted that both countries produce both types, and, in fact, vermouth is made in most wine-producing regions of the world.

Nowadays, much more than wormwood flowers goes into vermouth. Up to 100 different herbs, spices and botanicals can be used, and, typically, one type of good vermouth may contain a blend of 40. In addition to such familiar flavours as vanilla, anise, cinnamon, allspice, orange peel, nutmeg and rosemary, one may also find more exotic ones such a blessed thistle, dittany of Crete, hart's tongue, European century and zeodary. Needless to say, every vermouth maker's blend of ingredients is a closely guarded secret.

There are probably as many methods of making vermouth as there are labels. Generally, the base wine is aged and fortified, and then infused with the mixture of herbs for several weeks or months, perhaps at an elevated temperature. The entire batch may be infused with the herbs or an extract prepared with a smaller portion of more highly fortified wine that is added back later. After infusion, the wine is filtered, fined, and further fortified. Other finishing and stabilizing procedures, pasteurization, refrigeration and more filtering will take place. Processing, however, is kept to a minimum to prevent loss of flavours. In some cases, the vermouth will undergo more aging after infusion.

OTHER APERITIFS

There are certain processes peculiar to the French dry vermouth. Rather insipid Midi wine such as Picpoul, Bourret or Clairette from the base. These may be blended with white port or angelica, and fortified with cognac to about 16%. The wine is aged outside in oak casks (one maker uses Canadian oak), exposed to sun and rain for up to 2 years. After aging, a "mistelle" of unfermented Muscat juice, fortified with brandy, is added to the wine before the herbs are introduced. Four to five years is needed to make a quality French vermouth.

Italian or sweet vermouth begins usually with an unspectacular Muscat or muscatel wine from the southern plains of Italy. As well as brandy to fortify the wine, caramel is added to give it the dark colour. The wine is aged in wooden casks, but not outdoors. The remainder of the method is similar to that for French vermouth, but does not take as long.Typically, the entire process for Italian vermouth is complete in about two years.

There are a great variety of herbed Apéritifs other than vermouths, but two distinctive flavours are common quinine, or cinchona bark, and liquorice, or anise. Ingredients vary widely, but the method

is essentially the same as with vermouth: a base wine is fortified, aged, and infused with the appropriate blend of herbs.

The common quinine flavoured Apéritifs such as Dubonnet, St. Raphael, and Byrrh begins with a red wine, often Algerian. Most tend to be sweet, but there are drier variations, white Dubonnets for example.

Apéritifs of the anise family are found all around the Mediterranean: various types of pastis in France such as Pernod and Ricard, Ouzo in Greece, and arak or raki in the Middle East. Many of these are distilled and end up with high levels of alcohol, but they are generally considered Apéritifs nonetheless. Anise grows wild throughout the Mediterranean, along roadsides and in vacant lots. Much of the pastry in any bakery is flavoured with anise seed.

Finally, there are a few Apéritifs that have distinctive flavours of their own, but do not conveniently fit into any other category. Some, such as Campari, Fernet Branca and Amer Picon and actually bitters. Others such as lillet and Pineau des Charantes tend to be sweet. Campari, 25% alcohol, qualifies as a spirit, but it is essentially wine-based. Only three or four people know the formula. One either adores or cannot abide its bittersweet taste.

CINZANO

Cinzano vermouths date back to 1757, in the Turin herbal shop of two brothers, Giovanni Giacomo and Carlo Stefano Cinzano, who created a new “Vermouth Rosso” (red vermouth) using "aromatic plants from the Italian Alps in a [still-secret] recipe combining 35 ingredients (including marjoram, thyme and [a species of Achillea called] musk yarrow)."[1] What became known as the "vermouth of Turin" proved popular with the bourgeoisie of Turin, and (later), Casanova.

Cinzano Bianco followed, based on a different combination of herbs that included artemisia (wormwood), cinnamon, cloves, citrus and gentian; it was followed by an Extra Dry version.

Exports began in the 1890s, to Argentina, Brazil, the USA, among others.

In Paris in 1912, Cinzano was the first product to be advertised with a neon sign. [citation needed]

Cinzano remained a family-run business until 1985. Beginning that year, the Marone family, Turin industrialists, began to sell shares of the business, culminating in 1992 with an agreement to turn Cinzano International S.A. entirely over to International Distillers and Vintners Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Grand Metropolitan.

At the time of its sale, Cinzano's share of the vermouth market in Europe was measured in the low single digits, sales that placed it a distant second to Martini.

As a result of a 1997 merger, Grand Metropolitan became Diageo; two years later, Diageo sold Cinzano to the privately-held Gruppo Campari.

DUBONNET

Dubonnet is a wine-based aperitif similar to Buckfast Tonic Wine. It is based on wine and herbs, with fermentation being stopped by the addition of alcohol.

Dubonnet was first sold in 1846 by Joseph Dubonnet. The brand-name Dubonnet was taken over by Pernod Ricard in 1976. It was re-popularised in late 1970s by an advertising campaign starring Pia Zadora.

Dubonnet is commonly mixed with lemonade or bitter lemon, and forms part of many cocktails. Reputedly it is the preferred beverage of:

- The French Foreign Legion,
- The late Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother (who liked gin and Dubonnet: 30% gin, 70% Dubonnet with a slice of lemon under the ice). She once commented before a trip,
  "...I think that I will take two small bottles of Dubonnet and gin with me this morning, in case it is needed..."liked it.
- Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II who also likes Dubonnet and gin

Dubonnet is now available in both Rouge and Blanc varieties.

STONE'S GREEN GINGER WINE

The origins of Stone's Ginger Wine the UK's favourite ginger wine are well documented. The drink's roots go back to 1740 and the foundation of a company called The Finsbury Distilling Company in the City of London.

The drinks business was booming and distilleries were flourishing across London. This was the era of Hogarth's 'Gin Lane' and the widespread drunkenness in parts of London was becoming cause for concern, with the result that, in 1751, an Excise Act was passed, prohibiting distillers from selling direct to the public.

The Finsbury Distilling Company, like other distillers, had to build a retail network, which included a Joseph Stone, grocer of High Holborn. An important customer of the distillers, his name was given to their Ginger Wine.

Made then, as it is today, from the finest quality raisins and pure ground ginger, Stone's Ginger Wine quickly became the flagship of The Finsbury Distilling Company's British wines division.

Sales of Ginger Wine continued to grow during the 19th century. In 1832, sales were boosted by a cholera epidemic and a widely held belief that ginger offered protection against the disease.

Ginger's medicinal properties - it has also been hailed as an aid to digestion and as an effective aphrodisiac - undoubtedly contributed to the lasting popularity of ginger wine At about this time, the Stone family's links with the Finsbury Distilling Company were re-established when Joseph Stone's son John joined as an apprentice. He rose through the company to become a travelling salesman for their British wines including Ginger Wine. Joseph Stone retired to Barnet, where he died in 1896. He would, no doubt, be astonished to find that over 100 years later, his name has become one of the best-known in the drinks industry, not just in the UK, but all over the world!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The sections, *TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS* through *OTHER APERITIFS* were compiled in 1994 by Jack Ziebart. The other bits are compiled in 2008 by me, Kate Neudorf, who, at the time, was recovering from a cold and sampling various herbed aperitifs.