Why You Should Give Vermouth Another Shot

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So I have a theory, which I've heard other bartenders say too.

The reason people don't like vermouth is that they've been drinking expired, bad vermouth their whole lives.

Fun fact #1: Did you know that vermouth should be refrigerated and is only going to last about a month? Maybe two?

Yeah. How long has that dusty vermouth bottle been on your bar cart? It's probably time to throw it away and get a new bottle…

Because vermouth is awesome!

It just gets a bad rap. I can't tell you how many times I have had guests ask me for a Martini extra dry, or a Martini but no vermouth. Ordering a Martini dry or extra dry means with less, or way less, vermouth.

I so badly want to ask why. I'm a firm believer in drinking what you like, judgment-free. If you like to put ginger ale in your wine, please do; I'll just be happy that you're happy. But in this case, I just don't think people realize how much better their Martinis could be if they only gave vermouth a shot. I just want to help!

Martinis started out as equal parts gin and vermouth. Over time they've evolved into a two-to-one ratio: two parts gin to one part vermouth. Martinis are a very personal cocktail, so I'm not going to say you shouldn't order a three-to-one, or a three-to-a-half, if that's what you really enjoy. But let me convince you of how amazing vermouth is, and how great it is in your Martini.

Vermouth (and when I say vermouth, I mean fresh vermouth) is the glorious connection between Campari and gin in a Negroni. Without it, there would be no Negroni. Without the Negroni, there would be no Boulevardier. And honestly, who wants to live in that world? Not Stanley Tucci, I can tell you that much.

Without vermouth there would be no Martini! And without the Martini, James Bond would not look nearly as cool as he does when he orders. Can you imagine him ordering a Gin Fizz? Great drink. But not the same as saying, "Martini… shaken, not stirred."

In cocktails, vermouth is one of the most welcome ingredients. If cocktails were Michael Scott, vermouth would be Holly Flax. Their two personalities could not be more compatible. They bring out the best in each other. As does vermouth in cocktails.

So what is vermouth?

To make it simple, it's wine. Fortified wine. It's not a spirit, and it's not technically a liqueur. That's why it needs to be kept in the fridge and why it doesn't last very long. Imagine drinking wine that has been uncorked and sitting out for six months.

I worry that's what most people are doing at home with their vermouth, and then they proclaim, "Gross! How does anyone enjoy this?" Well, it's pretty safe to say that no one would enjoy that. Just as oxidation is bad for wine, so it is for vermouth.

Not all vermouths are the same. The variety in vermouth is wide, which is partly what makes vermouth so amazing. Each company has its own proprietary way of making it, which is why recipes often call for a very specific vermouth. The wine is fortified with a neutral spirit and combined with herbs, spices, barks, fruits, etc., depending on which vermouth you buy.

I recommend trying out a new vermouth each time you go to pick one up. This lets you experiment with the different notes they all have to offer and discover your favorites. Be sure you use all of it before it goes bad; buying smaller bottles helps with this. A better solution, though, would be to step up your vermouth game in your cocktails. And trust me, there is A LOT to explore. This is because vermouths come in three types, and within each type, each producer varies greatly in taste.

The three types are sweet, dry, and blanc (or white).

Fun fact #2: Europeans (and Americans too, generally speaking) drink vermouth on the rocks or neat. No mixing needed. Vermouth was meant to be an aperitif or digestif and tastes great on its own. In fact, most vermouths come from Europe, mainly France and Italy, although not exclusively.

Dry vs. Sweet vs. White/Blanc Vermouth

Honestly, these names are pretty self-explanatory, but keep in mind that if vermouth is coming from Europe, the base wine must make up at least 75% of the finished product. So when we say sweet vermouth, it's not liqueur sweet. It's just sweeter than dry vermouth.

The last point I'll make is that in general, regardless of the finished color, vermouths are mostly all made with a base of white wine, not red. I would say all, but I'm sure there is vermouth out there somewhere made with red. But 99% do not have red wine in them. So with that in mind, let's just break it down real easy.

- **Dry vermouth:** generally a pale color, drier (obviously), and a little bitter.
- **Sweet vermouth:** generally a caramel or red color, and sweeter than it is dry.
- **Blanc/white vermouth:** generally transparent like a vodka, and falls between sweet and dry vermouth in application.

Each type of vermouth is used differently in cocktails, as each has its own unique notes and sugar levels and accompanies different spirits better than others. For example, sweet vermouth is used in the Manhattan and Negroni, whereas dry vermouth is used in the Martini and the Brooklyn. There are even occasions to use both, like in the Perfect Martini.

Isn't it about time? For vermouth?

With all this said, why don't we give vermouth another shot? I encourage you to head to your local liquor store and pick up a sweet and a dry vermouth. If you're on a budget, Martini & Rossi makes a great budget vermouth. Each bottle will be less than $10. So there is no reason NOT to adopt a beautiful vermouth and welcome it into your family.

Need some recipes that use vermouth? Lemme help you out. But remember! Toss out that old bottle before you make these. Fresh vermouth almost makes me believe in God. Yeah. It's that good.

Here are three recipes to get you started, each using a different type of vermouth. Let me know if you give vermouth another shot and what you think!

The Negroni / Boulevardier

1 1/2 oz gin or rye whiskey (Negroni with gin, Boulevardier with rye whiskey)

3/4 oz Campari

3/4 oz sweet vermouth (I prefer Cocchi di Torino or Carpano Antica in this)

Stir with ice and strain. Garnish with an orange peel (be sure to express the oils of the orange into the drink before you drop it in).

Martini (my favorite way)

2 oz gin (I use Plymouth or Beefeater)

1 oz dry vermouth (I prefer Dolin Dry in this)

3 dashes orange bitters

Stir with ice and strain. Garnish with an orange peel; you can also garnish with a lime or lemon, but orange is my favorite.

El Presidente

1 1/2 oz blended rum (I like Appleton Estate Signature Blend for this)

1 oz blanc vermouth (I use Dolin Blanc for this)

1/2 oz orange liqueur (I use Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao for this)

1 tsp grenadine

Stir with ice and strain. Using an orange peel, express the oils over the top of the cocktail and then discard. Garnish with a cherry if desired.