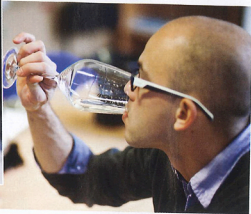


THE WORM^(WOOD) TURNS

IF YOUR IDEA OF DRY VERMOUTH IS A FRENCH BOTTLE GATHERING DUST ON THE BACK BAR, YOU'VE NOT BEEN PAYING ATTENTION. **CLINTON CAWOOD** JOINS A PANEL AS THEY PUT SOME TO THE TEST

Two separate and persistent trends in the cocktail world have brought the spotlight back onto the vermouth category in recent times. A move towards lower-alcohol cocktails has had bartenders looking for suitable ingredients, while ongoing interest in vintage cocktails has seen a revival in old drinks categories. There's crossover between the two, in some cases, where rediscovered recipes put vermouth in the starring role.

As ever with these things, the established players are scrambling to take advantage, while new products begin to emerge – sometimes from the most unexpected places.



PANEL

Clinton Cawood, *Imbibe*; **Damiano Madeddu**, Rivoli Bar at The Ritz; **Andy Mil**, Steam & Rye; **Ondrej Pospichal**, MASH London; **Chris Strong**, The Luggage Room

RESULTS

Blackdown Sussex Bianco Vermouth

This stood out in the group. Not because it's a vermouth from England — or because it has a silver birch wine base. It was, instead, the bianco style that set it apart from the extra dries in this tasting.

But while tasters identified it as atypical, they certainly had good things to say. The sweetness was noticeable, but it was nicely balanced by some drying, almost quinine herbal elements, as well as a 'new oak, new bar top' woodiness. Most of the bartenders commented on how well this would work on its own, or on the rocks. **14.7% abv. RRP £24.99/70cl. Liberty Wines, 020 7720 5350**

Dolin Dry Vermouth

Dolin offered a very mixable, decidedly French, addition to this line-up, with admirable elegance and restraint, from its light colour to some bright lemon pith and quinine aromas. Fuller on the palate, it achieved a fine balance between big fruit flavours (apricot and pear) and more evident herbal notes, from big quinine flavours, to menthol and elderflower. Fruity acidity provided some lift, and an oaky element pulled it all together.

'Great overall,' said one taster. 'Fantastic mixability,' said another. All in all, a class act. **17.5% abv. RRP £15.30/75cl. Amathus Drinks, 020 8951 9840**

Martini Extra Dry

While Martini Rosso is widely accepted as a benchmark product in its category, the same isn't necessarily the case when it comes to its Extra Dry, and our

panel were suitably underwhelmed.

Opening with some musty, vegetal notes, this turned out to be sweeter and fuller than expected for a dry vermouth, on both nose and palate. Tasting notes included chocolate, truffle, dry apricot, and green apple. Some drying bitterness emerged in time, contributing to a clean finish. Good for a dry Vodka Martini, according to one taster, as some gins would overpower this.

15% abv. RRP £11.60/1l. Bacardi Brown-Forman Brands, 01962 762450

Noilly Prat Original Dry

Like Dolin, this conveyed its Frenchness quite vividly — while managing to be nothing like Dolin at all. One panellist described this as 'Picpoul de Pinet and

camomile', while another liked the fresh lemon, pine and elderflower aromas, as well as some distinct wormwood character — not as common a descriptor in this tasting as you'd expect.

The palate showed some more herbaceousness, and a little initial sweetness, but more importantly had some really distinctive dryness. An excellent, versatile vermouth, good for both light and dark spirits, but specifically suited to rum and cognac, or 'drunk on its own'.

18% abv. RRP £11.99/75cl. Bacardi Brown-Forman Brands, 01962 762450

Vya Extra Dry

The two Vya vermouths, hailing from Quady Winery in California, inspired much animated discussion from our panel. Neither were examples of the dry vermouth old guard and each taster had their preference between the two. However everyone had next to nothing but praise for both expressions.

This one was big and bold, with an assertive herbal, floral hit on the nose,

accompanied by some full, zesty fruit — gooseberry and lemon balm. Some woody notes added complexity on the palate, with some well-balanced acidity too. 'The perfect accompaniment to a punchy gin,' was one taster's summary, whether that's in a Gin Martini, or a classic Clover Club.

17% abv. £19.99/75cl. Hallgarten Druiit, 01582 722538

Vya Whisper Dry

This second entry from Quady Winery is a more recent, supposedly less herbal addition to the range. Our tasters thought it plenty herbal, however. Botanicals identified included turmeric, fennel and herbs de Provence, alongside some ripe peach, apricot and mango.

This vermouth was full-bodied on the palate, and not overly dry. But that only inspired our panel to think of more interesting ways to use it. Bourbon and more heavily spiced gins were popular suggestions.

17% abv. £19.99/75cl. Hallgarten Druiit, 01582 722538

PANEL COMMENTS

CLINTON CAWOOD, IMBIBE

'The majority of the products here would do excellent service on their own, or on the rocks, and should really be promoted that way too.'

DAMIANO MADEDDU, RIVOLI BAR AT THE RITZ

'The lighter styles would work with vodka, whereas with the juniper in gin, you need something punchier.'

ANDY MIL, STEAM & RYE

'It's not as easy to increase your

selection of vermouth as you would your spirit selection, since over time they will start oxidising.'

ONDREJ POSPICHAL, MASH LONDON

'If nothing else, these create a space for chat and interaction with customers that haven't heard of a vermouth from America, for example.'

CHRIS STRONG, THE LUGGAGE ROOM

'There's growth in the category — the aperitivo is coming back. If you don't have three, particularly in London, the bar down the road will.'

