

# Vermouth comeback at Contratto

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The Rivetti family helped the Contratto [Vermouth](#) di Torino now to make a comeback (Photo: label / Contratto Vermouth)

ITALIEN (Piemont) - Vermouth is not a drink against melancholy but it is above all to give cocktails their finishing touch and can also be used to refine food. Carpano, Cinzano, Stock, Martini are famous brands, the latter being as well a name for a cocktail preferred by James Bond – “shaken, not stirred”. Antonio Benedetto Carpano from Torino is considered as the inventor of this aromatic drink containing 15 to 18 “volt” of alcohol. In those days, in 1786, wine was not yet a very stable product; it often oxidized or perishes in any other way. At that time, it was out of the question to dispose of it; so, it was aromatized and fortified and then sold again.

Around the year 1800, vermouth was a fashion beverage at the Torino royal court, and it remained en vogue for a long period of time also internationally. As late as after World War II, it became somewhat unfashionable. However, it is step by step regaining the interest of some epicures, who also acknowledge that not only wine, herbal essences and alcohol are mixed but a long production process is necessary to obtain a fine drink. Certainly, wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*), which is able to influence the taste by bitter substances remarkably, is an essential basis. It was known as early as 1600 B. C. in ancient Egypt. Nowadays, the French prefer the dry version, whereas the Italians, its inventors, prefer the sweet version and, thus, add sugar to their vermouth – and in the red version also caramel. Apart from that, each producer uses his own recipe with its specific seasoning mix. Amongst other spices, balm, sage, gentian, sandalwood, cinnamon, violet, roses, cloves, lemon peel, basil, chamomile, quinine, rhubarb, peel of bitter orange, peppermint, tea and marjoram are added.

Since recently, an Italian producer is making efforts for vermouth to gain more importance. The Contratto house in the Piedmont region (founded in 1867 and actually known for excellent sparkling wines) used to produce vermouth as a by-product in order to process wine residues that were left from disgorging the sparkling drink (removing yeast from it). Later, the Contratto Vermouth di Torino developed to an in-drink in the Piedmont region. But when, in the 1960ies, the demand decreased considerably, the production was given up. At that time, the Contratto house was overtaken by the Rivetti family, owner of the La Spinetta wine estate.

he Rivettis now launched a comeback. Since recently, they are again producing Vermouth Bianco (18 % vol., sugar content 180 g/l), Rosso (17 % vol., sugar content also 180 g/l) as well as the substantial Americano Rosso with its delicate sweetness (16.5 % vol., 200 g sugar per liter) and a Fernet (30 % vol., 60 g sugar per liter) that tastes quite bitter but is undoubtedly easier on the stomach. The beverages are noticeably more expensive than those of the competitors (20.95 euro for the Bianco, 26.34 euro for the Fernet), but they are as well of very good quality.

The basis are correct basis wines from Cortèse grapes native in the Piedmont region, recipes from the starting time of vermouth in the 19th century, top-quality Italian brandy, natural herbal essences but no industrial preparations like in cheap vermouth, completed with sophisticated production methods. The bottles got pretty, nostalgic labels referring to the tradition of the product. Vermouth is drunk cool, ideally pure or with a touch of lemon. Certainly, they also fit in diverse cocktails. (*r.knoll*)

