

AMARO



THE SPIRITED WORLD OF
BITTERSWEET, HERBAL LIQUEURS

BRAD THOMAS PARSONS

WITH COCKTAILS, RECIPES,
AND FORMULAS

THE EUROPEAN TRADITION of making bittersweet liqueurs—called *amari* in Italian—has been around for centuries. But it is only recently that these herbaceous digestifs have moved from the dusty back bar to center stage in the United States, and become a key ingredient on cocktail lists in the country's best bars and restaurants. Lucky for us, today there is a dizzying range of amaro available—from familiar favorites like Averna and Fernet-Branca, to the growing category of regional, American-made amaro.

Amaro is the first book to demystify this ever-expanding, bittersweet world, and a must-have for any home cocktail enthusiast or industry professional. Starting with a rip-roaring tour of bars, cafés, and distilleries in Italy, amaro's spiritual home, Brad Thomas Parsons—author of the James Beard and IACP Award winner *Bitters*—will open your eyes to the rich history and vibrant culture of amaro today. With more than 100 recipes for amaro-centric cocktails, DIY amaro, and even amaro-spiked desserts, you'll be living (and drinking) *la dolce vita*.





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PHOTOGRAPHS BY ED ANDERSON



TEN SPEED PRESS
Berkeley

AMARO NONINO QUINTESSENTIA

Percoto, Friuli, Italy

ALCOHOL BY VOLUME

35 percent

KNOWN INGREDIENTS

Bitter orange peel, cinchona bark, galangal, gentian, licorice, quassia, rhubarb root, saffron, tamarind

NOTES

Amber color. Subtle herbal bitterness and gentle spice with primary notes of orange peel and caramel sweetness.

From the design of the label and bottle to the contents within, Amaro Nonino Quintessentia is one of most elegant expressions of amaro around. Known worldwide for their award-winning grappa from Friuli, the Nonino family is a true family business; Benito (pictured at right) and Giannola actively run operations with their daughters, Antonella, Cristina, and Elisabetta. Their amaro story begins in 1933, when Benito's father, Antonio Nonino, made a grappa-based amaro he called Amaro Carnia, named after the nearby mountains. In 1984, Benito and Giannola developed their proprietary ÛE Grape Distillate, a unique distillation of the whole grape—skins, pulp, and juice—that captures the production elements of a wine distillate with the craft of grappa. In 1987, reformulating the family amaro recipe using a base comprised of the ÛE and grappa distillate, the amaro was then aged for five years in barriques from Nevers and Limousin, as well as former sherry barrels, making its debut in 1992. (See "Meet the Noninos," page 44.)

AMARO RAMAZZOTTI

Canelli, Piedmont, Italy

ALCOHOL BY VOLUME

30 percent

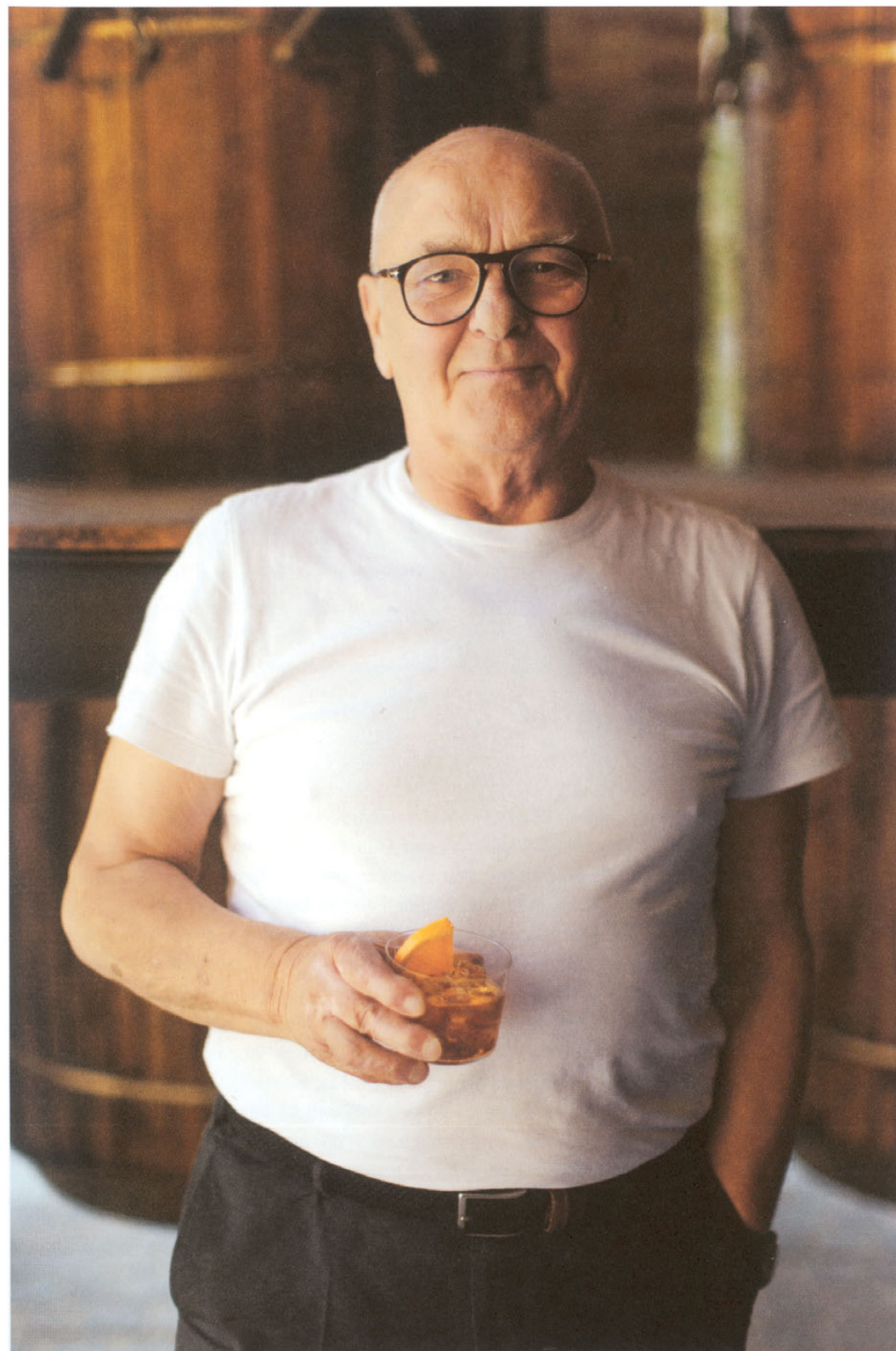
KNOWN INGREDIENTS

Bitter orange, cardamom, clove, galangal, myrrh, star anise, sweet orange

NOTES

Cola color. Notes of root beer, orange peel, cinnamon, and aromatic, herbal bitterness.

One of the oldest commercial amari available, Amaro Ramazzotti was created in Milan in 1815 by Ausano Ramazzotti and celebrated its bicentennial in 2015. The proprietary blend of thirty-three different fruits, herbs, and botanicals rose to prominence three decades later through Café Ramazzotti, which Ausano opened in 1848 near the La Scala opera house and was famous for selling Ramazzotti in place of coffee ("we've secretly replaced their regular coffee with Ramazzotti . . ."). The Milan production facility was destroyed in World War II but was rebuilt in 1959. The company was later acquired by Pernod Ricard in 1985 and is now produced in Canelli in Piedmont. Under their label, Ramazzotti also makes an aperitivo, an aperitivo rosa, a menta, and a sambuca. I've seen the sambuca in the wild but at the time of writing the other bottlings are not yet available in the United States.





MEET THE NONINOS

In 2012, I had an article on amaro in *Bon Appétit* that included a full-page photograph of a bottle of Amaro Nonino Quintessentia. After the story ran, I received a very kind, handwritten letter from Elisabetta Nonino, who with her sisters and mother and father, runs the Nonino family business in Friuli, Italy. Since that introduction, I've had the pleasure of meeting Elisabetta (pictured above left) in person whenever she's in New York during her travels throughout the United States. Both times we've met at Maialino for a personal tasting of her family's grappa and amaro, and that's where I learned that her preferred way to drink their namesake amaro is in a small glass with two ice cubes and an orange slice. I quickly adopted this method as well and never fail to refer to it as "Elisabetta style" when I order. When I had the chance to finally visit the Noninos in Italy, I found out, in true O. Henry fashion, that Elisabetta and her mother, Giannola, would be in New York when I was in Friuli. Naturally, her sisters Antonella and Cristina were excellent hosts, and in her absence, we drank a round of their amaro Elisabetta style before lunch and had a toast in her honor.

FRIÛL LIBAR

MAKES 1 DRINK

1½ ounces
*Amaro Nonino
Quintessentia*
½ ounce navy
strength gin,
preferably
Genius Navy
½ ounce freshly
squeezed lemon
juice
¼ ounce Demerara
syrup (see page 118)
2 dashes
Peychaud's Bitters
Garnish: lemon
zest

My friend Bill Mann used to be the general manager at Prime Meats in Brooklyn but now he's down in Austin, Texas, where he spent a few years holding the same position at Paul Qui's eponymous restaurant, Qui. When I stopped in to have dinner and catch up with him at Qui, he recommended I start with the Friûl Libar, a cocktail created by Justin Elliott, then the bar manager, that featured a local Texas gin and Amaro Nonino. When I asked about the name of the drink, Elliott told me "*Friûl Libar*," or "free Friuli" is the slogan of the autonomy movement of the Friulian people in northeastern Italy, where Nonino is produced. While this cocktail doesn't share too much with the Cuba Libre, it is worth noting that there is some precedent for naming cocktails after the calls to arms graffitied by revolutionaries. But ultimately, he notes he has "at best, a cursory understanding of Friulian politics. Sometimes I just can't help but enjoy watching people wrestle with how to pronounce funny words." However you say it, the result is a winter-appropriate sour that is "light, drinkable, and most important, craveable."

Combine all of the ingredients except the garnish in a cocktail shaker filled with ice. Shake until chilled and double-strain into a chilled coupe or cocktail glass. Express the lemon peel over the surface of the drink, then, per Elliott, "garnish sexily" by putting a notch in the peel and affixing it to the glass. "I hate things floating around in my drink," he explains.

