

BITTERMAN'S

Field Guide

To

BITTERS

AND

AMARI

500 BITTERS • 50 AMARI  
123 RECIPES *for* COCKTAILS, FOOD  
& HOMEMADE BITTERS

MARK BITTERMAN



6  
THE  
FIELD GUIDE TO  
AMARI

WHAT'S IN A SIP  
OF AMARI?



TASTING NOTES

AROMATIC

BITTERNESS

SWEETNESS

INSPIRED USES

**MEKHONG; BANGYIKHAN DISTILLERY; THAILAND; 35% ABV**

Launched in 1941 at the culmination of the border conflict between Siam (the old name of Thailand) and Vichy France, Mekhong is billed as the "Official Spirit of Thailand." Often referred to as flavored rum, Mekhong has the bitter-syrupy, botanical nature of a mild amaro. Think Aperol with galangal. It has been sold in the United States since 2008.

Golden amber color; elderflower nose; flavors of elderflower and sweet corn caramel, non-barrel-aged whiskey, indecipherable herbs

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Use as a spiced rum; famous in Sabai Sabai; Shake 1½ oz Mekhong, 1½ oz lemon juice, and ¾ oz simple syrup; strain over ice; top with seltzer and 2 bruised basil leaves.

**MELETTI AMARO; DITTA SILVIO MELETTI; ITALY; 32% ABV**

Silvio Meletti, inspired by his mother's homemade anise liqueur, launched a company to hone and then commercialize his mother's genius and to express his own. This amaro reflects the rich botanical diversity and historical obsession with distillation in the area.

Straight amber color; syrupy consistency and barely a bitter finish, with a floral base and a hint of cardamom, cinnamon, saffron; somehow chocolaty

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20<sup>th</sup> Century; Shake 1½ oz gin, ½ oz Cocchi Americano, ¾ oz Amaro Meletti, ½ oz lemon juice, and 2 dashes chocolate bitters; strain into a cocktail glass.

**MONTENEGRO AMARO; AMARO MONTENEGRO; ITALY; 23% ABV**

Created in 1885 by Stanislao Cobianchi, who eschewed the ecclesiastical life preordained by his parents in favor of making infused spirits, it is the more or less official drink of Bologna, but was created after Cobianchi visited Montenegro and sampled the local digestif.

Pale coppery goldenrod; root beer, clove, flamed tangerine peel nose; flavor of PEZ candy, rose petals, honeysuckle, orange peel, coriander, cassia bark, saffron

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Sophisticated but easygoing mixer in most any spirit, especially calvados, armagnac, rum, and tequila

**NARDINI AMARO; DITTA BORTOLO NARDINI; ITALY; 31% ABV**

Producing grappa since 1779, Nardini also makes an amaro that benefits from the quality of the grape spirits used and centuries of tradition. Although they make four million bottles of grappa a year, their amaro is all about craft. Contains bitter orange, peppermint, and alpine yellow gentian. Other Nardini amari include: Nardini Bitter, Rosso, and Rabarbaro (page 189).

Garnet red color; mint and menthol, fruit compote nose; flavors of mint, cherries, prunes, ginger, dates, anise

4	3	3
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Straight, chilled, or on the rocks; good in cocktails, especially when softened with yellow Chartreuse or Bénédictine

**NONINO AMARO QUINTESSENTIA; NONINO DISTILLERS; ITALY; 35% ABV**

In 1984 Benito and Giannola Nonino began making grappas that reflected the elegance of individual grape varieties. Amaro Nonino was created in 1992 from distillates of Ribolla, Traminer, and Verduzzo grapes. The spirit is infused with herbs from the surrounding Friuli region and aged in oak barrels.

Topaz color; mild aroma of mountain herbs, bitter orange, honey, dandelion, and caramel. One flaw: excessively drinkable.

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Neat, substitute for sweet vermouth, and with a little adjustment, any aromatic or citrus bitters

**PELINKOVAC GORKI; BADEL; CROATIA; 31% ABV**

*Pelin* is Croatian for "wormwood," and Pelinkovac is bitter wormwood-dominant liqueur. Founded in 1862 and now the largest and oldest alcoholic beverages producer in Croatia, Badel does not cut corners. Approximately twenty herbs are tinctured, barrel aged, and bottled in replicas of the original nineteenth-century bottle. Other amari made by Badel: Badel Pelinkovac Orange, Antique Pelinkovac, and Biljni Liker Amaro.

Ruby-red color; caraway, rye, dill seed aroma; intriguing salinity, thicket of green herbs: mint, basil, wild tarragon

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Adds mint to mojitos, caipirinhas; excellent sipper; drunk after a meal with a slab of Croatian goat cheese