



The niche, limited-edition subcategory of amaro is on the rise stateside. Here are the bottles to seek out, and what sets them apart.

The world of amaro is vast and ever expanding. Diving into this world leads to many potential detours, whether it's exploring a specific style like alpino or fernet, or hunting down vintage bottles from the 1960s to experience a taste of the past. Pursuing the "riserva" style of amaro has been a more specialized challenge, as many of these bottles are available only in Italy. But with more imports on the horizon and a growing number of American producers experimenting with their own interpretations of the style, there's never been a better moment to take the plunge into this particular subset.

In the wine world, the category of riserva is used as an official signifier to describe wine typically made with higher-quality grapes that has undergone a longer aging period, resulting in a wine of greater standing. Italy's amaro category doesn't have as many (or any, really) standardized rules. But when you encounter a riserva amaro, you can generally expect an expression that has experienced additional aging, a slightly higher percentage of alcohol by volume, and, in almost every case, a unique bottle and special packaging produced in limited quantities. These riserva offerings also come with a higher price tag, but for fans of amaro, they offer a deeper dive into the category. It's akin to having a signed first edition of a book from your favorite author on your shelf, but not so rarified that you'll never pop the cork or twist the cap to actually enjoy with friends.

"A riserva, in my experience, has always been the standard product (or very close to it), from a botanical and process perspective, up until the time it's, well, not," says Skip Tognetti, the founder of Seattle's Letterpress Distilling. "This generally has meant some sort of barrel aging or additional aging, or a different type of barrel if the flagship version of the product is already barreled." Tognetti also notes that a riserva is, in a literal sense, "reserved"—that is, limited to a smaller production. For Forthave Spirits owners Daniel de la Nuez and Aaron Sing Fox, who recently released their own Reserve 1 Amaro, the key is an additional age denomination. "It has to have

more age, and possibly a different production treatment, that can transform an existing product into something very special,” says de la Nuez.

Within the realm of highly coveted “suitcase amaro,” worthy of a treasure hunt, riserva bottles should be at the top of your list. Although the category is still fairly niche, new releases rolling out from Italian legacy brands as well as innovative takes by amaro producers on the domestic front promise that it’s a subcategory worth your attention—and patience. Here are seven amaro riservas worth seeking out. But remember, they’re limited: If you see a bottle, pick it up.

Amaro Nonino Quintessentia® Riserva

\$100

FROM:

**Percoto, Friuli-Venezia
Giulia, Italy**

ABV:

35%

Created as a tribute to third-generation distiller Antonio Nonino, Amaro Nonino Quintessentia Riserva calls on the family’s proprietary *Uve Nonino* grape distillate, aged more than five years in oak barriques and small casks. Now, for the first time, the entire amaro blend undergoes an additional two years in barrels. Representing the sixth generation of the Nonino distilling family, the brand’s web communications manager Francesca Nonino notes, “To us, the Riserva tastes like a perfect meeting point between an amaro and a spirit. You can definitely taste our Quintessentia, but this double-aging brings it to a new level of depth and complexity.”

In the Riserva, the citrus notes of the classic Quintessentia take a back seat to the more woody, autumnal forest floor profile, all balanced with dried fruit and vanilla that will take your Paper Plane on a whole new trajectory or make a more nuanced substitute for Cynar in a Little Italy. But the higher cost will likely have most drinkers savoring it as a special-occasion digestivo rather than a go-to cocktail ingredient.

Currently available in select markets in Europe, the first U.S. wave of Amaro Nonino Quintessentia Riserva will be limited to 3,000 bottles, likely allocated to bars and limited retail outlets in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Though it was originally scheduled to be released this summer, due to the ongoing supply chain issues its arrival has been delayed to January 2023; it will be well worth the wait.

