



## 21 Liqueurs to Know to Read a Cocktail Menu With Confidence

WORDS: STEPHEN BRADLEY

ILLUSTRATION: SRISHTI BHAWAL

PUBLISHED: JUNE 8, 2026



When ordering a classic cocktail, drinkers can anticipate how the beverage will likely taste. But as more craft cocktail bars open and drink programs lean into bespoke recipes, predicting the flavor of an unfamiliar menu item becomes a bit more difficult. Rather than relying on previous experiences with well-established concoctions like the Negroni or Old Fashioned, drinkers must consider the ingredients in each drink and imagine how they might taste when mixed together.

Understanding a cocktail menu with offerings other than the classics requires a basic knowledge of the liqueurs that go into each beverage. To read a cocktail menu with confidence, it's important to familiarize yourself with the most prevalent liqueurs used at bars. That may seem like an overwhelming task, but we're here to help. We've collected the most common liqueurs and explained the history, flavor profile, and typical uses of each one.

### Amaro Nonino Quintessentia



Amaro Nonino Quintessentia — often abbreviated as Amaro Nonino on menus — is the flagship amaro from the producer [Nonino](#). The brand was founded in Friuli, Italy, in 1897, and its grappa-based amaro has since become a mainstay on bar shelves in the U.S. Where other amari are bold in flavor and unctuous in body, Amaro Nonino delivers a more inviting, entry-level flavor profile. It both brightens and mellows out cocktails with its orange peel taste and a velvety, caramel quality. This popular amaro is most notably found in the [Paper Plane](#), though it welcomes blending with a range of spirits.

---