



# VNY *La Voce di New York*

The First Italian English Digital Daily in the US

Editor in Chief: Giampaolo Pioli

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## Food & Wine

March 2, 2023

# Turin: The Vermouth Capital of the World

## The Cinzano family began their production of sweet white vermouth in 1757

*Italian Hours*  
Lucy Gordan



Several of the Vermouths represented by the Consorzio del Vermouth di Torino. Photo Courtesy of the Consorzio.

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Vermouth is an aromatized fortified wine, flavored with ubiquitous Artemisia, various roots, barks, flowers, seeds, herbs and spices. The most usual are cloves, cinnamon, quinine, citrus peel, cardamom, marjoram, chamomile, coriander, juniper, hyssop, ginger, and labdanum. A similar drink dates to the Chinese Shang and Western Zhou dynasties (1250-1000 BC), so it's probably the oldest alcoholic beverage in the world, except for ancient Egyptian beer.

In Europe vermouth's earliest recipes date from around 400 BC in ancient Greece. Its most popular ingredient was, and remained until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Artemisia—alias wormwood—believed to be an effective treatment for stomach disorders and intestinal parasites.



Commonly imbibed in Hungary and Germany during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the name “vermouth” is the French pronunciation of the German word Wermut or wormwood. Also during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a merchant named D’Alessio began producing in Piedmont a similar “woodworm wine” with botanical ingredients competing with brands developed shortly thereafter in nearby southeastern France and still rivals today.

Modern versions of vermouth were first produced in the mid-to-late-18<sup>th</sup>-century in Turin, first for medicinal purposes, but soon served in the city’s fashionable cafés as an aperitivo. Although still imbibed solo in Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century vermouth became popular with bartenders— and still is —as a key ingredient for cocktails, especially the martini, a favorite of Ernest Hemingway, Humphrey Bogart, and the fictional James Bond. It’s a main ingredient in the Manhattan, Roy Rob, and Negroni.

Almost always made with a white wine base, vermouths (75% wine and herbs, 17-22% ABV) can be extra dry white, dry white, sweet white, red, amber, and rosé or bitter, depending on their amounts of sugar, alcohol, and choice of other ingredients.

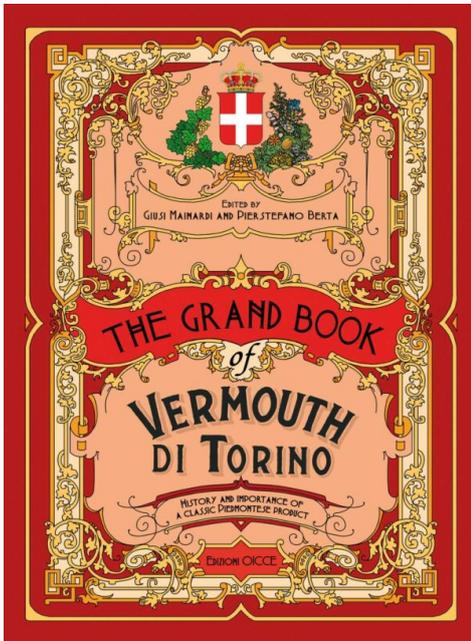
The Cinzano family began their production of sweet white vermouth in 1757 in Turin. Seven years later, Martini & Rossi was founded. Today it’s the top-selling international brand of vermouth, producing both dry and sweet vermouths, but best known for its Rosso. Cinzano and Martini & Rossi both also produce rosé vermouths, which are mainly distributed in Italy and France.

Another early Piedmontese manufacturer was Antonio Benedetto Carpano, who in 1786 at his distillery Murandazzo, off Turin’s most celebrated Piazza Castello, aromatized muscat wine with an infusion of spices and wormwort. (This ingredient was prohibited in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but is still sometimes included in artisan products.)

Today Carpano’s descendants still produce several brands including Punt e Mes, a deep red vermouth with sweet and bitter flavors, and the Antica Formula Brand, a bitter, fuller-flavored version. In 1982 Distillerie Fratelli Branca of Milan bought 50% of the Giuseppe B. Carpano Company and acquired the company outright in 2001.

In 2019 the Consorzio del Vermouth di Torino was established to protect, promote and valorize local vermouths. It represents 34 producers, who yield annually some 6 million bottles sold in some 82 countries worldwide with Italy as its largest client, followed by the United States, the United Kingdom, and South America, in particular Argentina, because of the huge number of Piedmontese immigrants. Each brand uses c. 30 herbs and spices, 60% of which come from all over the world so yes, vermouth is Torinese, but also international.

Beginning in January 2023 until December 31, 2025 the Consorzio is sponsoring L’Ora del Vermouth di Torino. Click on [www.turismotorino/vermouth.org](http://www.turismotorino/vermouth.org) and then scroll to locali aderenti for recommendations of where to enjoy Torino’s typical aperitivo.



At home, the Consorzio advises that vermouth should be kept in the refrigerator and served cold. Once the bottle is opened, it should be consumed within three months.

I suggest heading to one of these four Vermouth bars. My first choice is Bar Cavour at the super-elegant 3-Michelin-star restaurant Del Cambio, founded in 1757 and a favorite of Camillo Benso, Conte di Cavour, where every day a table is still set for this protagonist of the Unification of Italy (Piazza Carignano 2). Another favorite



Camillo Benso, Conte di Cavour-Wikipedia

of Cavour's was Bar Stratta (Piazza San Carlo 191) founded in 1836 as a confectionery. Still another benchmark is the Caffè Mulassano (Piazza Castello 15), owned by torinesi Angela and Onorino Nebiolo from 1925, when they returned home from Detroit, until 1937. Farther afield, on the Po's right bank, at Barz8 (Corso Moncalieri 5) Salvatore Romano and Luigi Iulia specialize in cocktails made with over 40 labels of vermouth.

For a detailed history, purchase *Il grande libro del vermouth di Torino. Storia e attualità di un classico prodotto piemontese*, also available in an English edition. 50 euros.

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**Lucy Gordan**

*Italian Hours*

Former editor at the American Academy in Rome and at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, with journalistic accreditation in Italy and the Vatican, I'm culture editor of the US monthly Inside t...

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