

# APERITIF: THE PALATE MOOD-SETTER

By Avantika Bose

**Aperitifs are slowly but surely gaining popularity in India and there's really no reason to fight it, because honestly, who doesn't love an excuse for a drink?**



As French author Paul Morand famously put it, “L’apéritif, c’est la prière du soir des Français” — “The aperitif is the evening prayer of the French”.

First impressions are extremely important — as the adage goes, “first impression is the last impression”. Whether it’s the start of a presentation, opening words in a flirtation, or the first step in ballet — the initial moves make or break the situation. Then why is the aperitif, the traditional mood-setter for a meal, so neglected?

To be honest, most people, including countless professional bartenders, are confused about what an aperitif is and what it’s supposed to do. Questions like ‘is it similar to a cocktail?’ or ‘if not, then how is it different?’, keep floating in people’s minds. It’s sad how the role of the aperitif is grossly underestimated. Technically a before-meal cheerleader, an aperitif should be light (low alcohol content) with a flavour profile designed to spark the appetite.

Though the ritual of a pre-dinner drink is quite common in France, Italy, and other parts of Europe, aperitifs have largely been under-appreciated. However, these oft-overlooked beverages are growing in popularity. In fact, 2015 was apparently the year of aperitifs.

An aperitif (the word comes from the Latin *aperire*, “to open”) is a light, dry, and modestly alcoholic beverage meant to spark the appetite without overwhelming the senses. The typically low-ABV drinks are easy on the stomach and help stimulate the appetite, readying the drinker for the culinary indulgence awaiting them. And while an aperitif may be as simple as a glass of dry white wine or Champagne; a true aperitif has a little more flair, flavour and colour. Aperitifs like Campari and Lillet, go (mostly) by one name and almost always are concocted from secret herbal recipes.

## HISTORY

Aperitif was made popular in the mid-1800s by a French chemist, Joseph Dubonnet. He created a wine-based drink to mask the unpleasant flavour of malaria-fighting ‘quinine’. However, it was Antonio Benedetto Carpano who first introduced it with the creation of Vermouth in the mid-1700s. Despite the fact that the drink was mainly used for its medicinal properties in its early days, it has come a long way to now being celebrated in the mainstream.

Today we drink aperitifs, but for different reasons. The whole concept behind an aperitif is to prepare your taste buds and palette for an upcoming meal. An added benefit of serving aperitifs before dinner is that guests have time to relax and unwind before sitting down for a meal.

‘Aperitifs’ —usually served straight up, chilled or on the rocks, is a simple start before a meal begins. For those who have never indulged in this sort of drink, or perhaps did so albeit unknowingly, here are some popular aperitifs:

## Campari (Italy)

One of the most famous and favourite aperitif amongst drinkers — Campari is a unique blend of fruits, spices, herbs and roots. Bright red in colour, it is safe to say the bitter Italian aperitif is definitely an acquired taste.



Image: [www.camparigroup.com](http://www.camparigroup.com)

## Aperol (Italy)

The brand was created in Italy in 1918. With an ABV of 11 per cent, this aperitif is a lighter and fruitier version of Campari. Vivid orange in colour, Aperol has a bitter-sweet taste, but not as bitter as Campari.

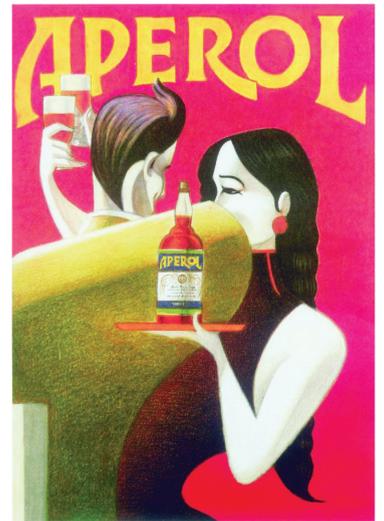


Image: [www.camparigroup.com](http://www.camparigroup.com)

## Suze (France)

Established in 1889, Suze is made from gentian roots, which is grown only in the mountains of France and Switzerland. The ABV in Suze stands at 15 per cent. It has a bitter taste too.

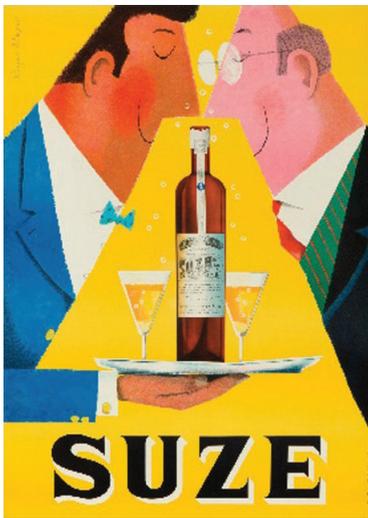


Image: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

## Amer Picon (France)

A blend of African oranges, gentian root, quinine bark, and some alcohol. It is usually served with club soda and is often used to add a bitter bite to beer, 'Picon-Bière'. It is a bitter-sweet French aperitif with an orange flavour.



Image: [www.homeandabode.com](http://www.homeandabode.com)

## Byrrh (France)

Pronounced 'beer', this bitter aperitif is best served chilled in a wine glass or served neat over ice. Byrrh has a wine base and contains coffee, orange, and cacao along with other bitter elements.

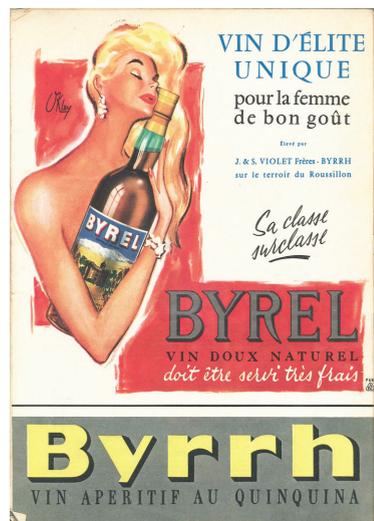


Image: [www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)

## Dubonnet (USA)

Dubonnet, produced in California, is a wine-based, sweet, aromatic aperitif with 15 per cent ABV. It's available in rouge as well as blanc varieties and is best served chilled.



Image: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

## Luxardo Bitter (Italy)

This Italian liqueur is an aperitif which is obtained with the infusion of several fruits and herbs. It's zesty and mildly bitter with notes of rhubarb, candied walnut, bitter orange, and marjoram.



Image: [www.vintagepostersnyc.com](http://www.vintagepostersnyc.com)

## Lillet (France)

Made in Bordeaux from a blend of 85 per cent fine Bordeaux wines and 15 per cent fruit liqueurs, Lillet is classed as an aromatised wine. Lillet Blanc is made from Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon, and has a golden colour. Lillet Roug is made from Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon and has a ruby-red colour.



Image: [www.antiqueposters.com](http://www.antiqueposters.com)