

# A Star Is Born

No longer a sidekick, vermouth takes on a leading role.

| By Lisa Shames |

While you probably haven't given much thought to vermouth recently—martinis and Manhattans aside—odds are, you have a bottle of it in your bar. (Hint: It's that dust-covered one way in the back.) With plenty of new and interesting vermouths hitting the market, we think it's high time you gave it the attention it deserves. Here, Nico Osteria ([nicoosteria.com](http://nicoosteria.com)) Head Bartender—and vermouth aficionado—Matty Eggleston offers details on seven to help get you started. You're welcome.

## Hammer & Tongs Sac'Resine Fine Vermouth, Portland, Ore.

"There is so much going on with this vermouth that we think it's a shame to add another spirit. It's a cocktail on its own," says Eggleston. "The botanicals and resins make it a transportative spirit evocative of another place and time. There is lots of citrus and honey underneath the bitter." He recommends serving it with a wedge of fresh grapefruit. 750 mL for \$40, available by special order at *Perman Wine Selections*, 802 W. Washington Blvd., 312.666.4417, [permanwine.com](http://permanwine.com)

## Ransom Dry Vermouth, Sheridan, Ore.

"This is the prettiest vermouth of the lot," says Eggleston. Unlike most producers' adherence to recipe secrecy, Ransom lists the botanicals on the label. Stirred thoughtfully with one's favorite American gin and served up in a chilled cocktail glass with a lemon twist is the best way to enjoy it, he says. 500 mL for \$24, *The Noble Grape*, 802 N. Bishop St., 312.846.1204, [noblegrape.net](http://noblegrape.net)

## Martini & Rossi Gran Lusso, Turin, Italy

Released as a special-edition bottling to celebrate Martini & Rossi's 150th anniversary, you can taste the time and thought that went into the recipe, says Eggleston. "There is a great dry spiciness that layers over the sweetness and makes for a great special-occasion sipper." 1 L for \$30, [martini.com](http://martini.com)

## Vya Extra Dry Vermouth, Madera, Calif.

"This one stands tall and can carry lots of different cocktail options," says Eggleston, adding that its crisp freshness works well in a Brooklyn cocktail with full-flavored rye. "I also like it shaken as a Collins with fresh lemon juice and honey syrup." 375 mL for \$17, *The Noble Grape*, 802 N. Bishop St., 312.846.1204, [noblegrape.net](http://noblegrape.net)



**Carpano Antica  
Formula Vermouth,  
Milan, Italy**

"This was everybody's sweet-vermouth darling when it hit a few years ago, and for good reason," says Eggleston. "It's a big expressive vermouth dripping with flavor and begs for bigger spirits to balance." He recommends it for overproof bourbon Manhattans or spritzed on the rocks with dry sparkling wine. 1 L for \$35, *Binny's Beverage Depot*, 1720 N. Marcey St., 312.664.4394, [binnys.com](http://binnys.com)



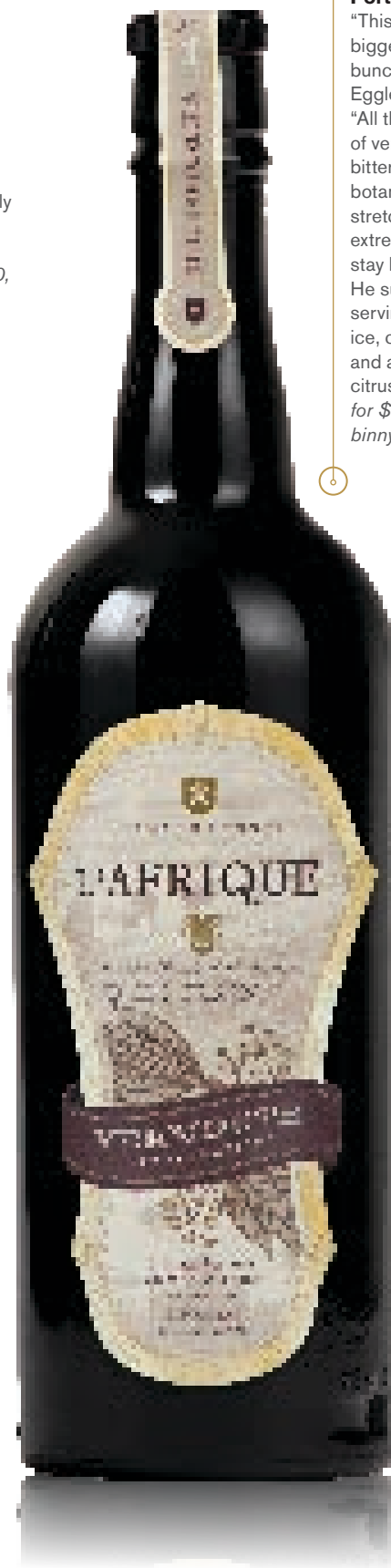
**Imbue Bittersweet  
Vermouth,  
Portland, Ore.**

"The only downfall with this vermouth is that it doesn't ship in a bigger bottle," says Eggleston, who thinks it's a great fit for many cocktail applications. "It's so approachable and a great standard for what American vermouth can be: refreshing, bracingly bitter and pleasantly sweet." 750 mL for \$25, *Warehouse Liquors*, 634 S. Wabash Ave., 312.663.1850, [warehouseliquors.com](http://warehouseliquors.com)



**Hammer &  
Tongs L'Afrique  
Vermouth Vin  
Aromatique,  
Portland, Ore.**

"This one is the biggest of the bunch," says Eggleston. "All the points of vermouth—bitter, sweet, botanical—are stretched to the extreme but still stay balanced." He suggests serving it with ice, club soda and a twist of citrus. 750 mL for \$35, [binnys.com](http://binnys.com)



**Pouring It On  
Europe has been  
enjoying this tasty,  
complex spirit  
all along.**

If you've spent any time in Europe, the thought of drinking vermouth on its own with a few ice cubes and an orange slice—throw in an olive if you're in Spain—doesn't sound so strange. It's a different story here, though, where the fortified wine, which comes in a variety of styles, ranging from sweet to dry and including both red and white wine as a base, has never been known as a solo performer.

But that's changing. At Chicago's Nico Osteria, Head Bartender Matty Eggleston has been singing the praises of vermouth since the Italian seafood-focused restaurant opened in 2013, offering a dozen varieties on their own as well as including it in plenty of cocktails. "As the mixology movement in general has moved through different categories seeking out the better spirits, the same thing is happening now with vermouth," he says. To convince nonbelievers, bartenders often pour a sample for them to try. "People are often surprised at its range of flavor and depth," says Eggleston.

Need more proof vermouth's time has come? At Chicago's soon-to-open Artemisia, mixologist Annemarie Sagoi plans on featuring at least 30 different vermouths at the art deco-inspired bar. "Vermouth always adds a complexity and bitter herbaceousness, and lowers the alcohol by volume while still maintaining a full, rich texture," she says. "I love everything about vermouth."