

SAVEUR



DRINK

6 ESSENTIAL ALPINE SPIRITS THAT TRANSPORT YOU TO THE SKI CHALET OF YOUR DREAMS

These centuries-old mountain spirits are getting new love—here's why they're worth getting to know

BY ELVA RAMIREZ MARCH 30, 2017

It may be 2017, but in bars across the country, people are drinking like it's 1605. Alpine booze, a storied category dating back centuries, is loosely defined as **any of the spirits and liqueurs originating from across the eight countries that make up the mountainous region of the Alps**, including France, Switzerland, Italy, and Austria. Long popularized in Alpine ski resorts as après-ski sippers, more variations of the local liquids are now finding their way stateside and cropping up on menus nationwide.

The broad label encompasses everything from Austrian pine liqueurs to [French aperitifs](#) and several Italian amari—including some of the oldest known liqueurs still in existence, such as France's Chartreuse, which was originally developed by apothecaries and monks to soothe a range of minor ailments. These days, ask any bartender about them and you'll understand the new excitement behind this unique and evocative category.

"When you hear the word 'Alpine,' you're immediately transported," says Chad Solomon, co-creator at [Midnight Rambler](#) in Dallas, Texas. "I think of 'green,' 'piney' and 'coniferous,' but there's also the root side of it as well which is best represented by gentian." He adds that novice drinkers may find Alpine spirits and liqueurs "medicinal." "That's because they are products that harken back to the world of the apothecary and the Enlightenment era," the bartender explains. "They are almost like time capsules."



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Amers, flavored with wild Alpine roots, are subtle, complex, and don't get the appreciation they deserve
BY MARI UYEHARA

Will Elliott, bar director of the French-inflected [Sauvage](#) and [Maison Premiere](#) in Brooklyn, New York says the category is defined by the local ingredients that flavor the alcohol. "In my mind, what really exemplifies the style are sweetened liqueurs infused with localized botanicals and green herbs," says Elliott.

And while those piney sips, redolent of Christmas trees, are linked with visions of winter wonderlands, the same flavors may also inspire memories of summer camping and fall hunting season for some. "There is an association with the mountains," says Eric Seed, president of [Haus Alpenz](#), a New York-based importer of alpine liqueurs. But when introducing people to Zirbenz, a liqueur made from the fruit of Arolla stone pine, he's had reactions that range from "summer cabins" to "golf course" to "hunting season."

As bartenders continue to serve Alpine spirits and liqueurs beyond their natural mountainous habitat, it becomes clear that they are as diverse and versatile a category as any. From herbal gentian to smoky Sfumato, here are the essential Alpine bottles to know right now.

Dolin Génépy des Alpes



Dolin Génépy des Alpes

Matt Taylor-Gross

Considered the historic predecessor to Chartreuse, [génépy](#) is a type of Alpine wormwood, which is different, but related, to the wormwood found in vermouth and absinthe. "[Génépy] is a simplification of Chartreuse," Elliott says. "It's lighter, not as symphonic." According to Elliott, it's the use of tarragon that best teases out the signature anise quality of [génépy](#) from the supporting flavors of mint and green herbs.

Despite the fact that [génépy](#) had been readily available in Alpine villages for centuries, Will Elliott remembers the first time it became available to New York bars. "It was so exciting. What had ever entered the market that tasted anything like Chartreuse," Elliott recalls of the first time [génépy](#) was brought into Maison Premiere. "I would say that was 2014. That was the first time anyone had tried it unless they'd gone skiing."

Fast forward a few years and [génépy](#) is one of the alpine liqueurs featured prominently on Elliott's menu at Maison Premiere's sister restaurant, Sauvage. Look to Sauvage's Vin Parfait, which fuses it with bright Beaujolais and lemon cordial in a light, refreshing quaff.