



RAISING A GLASS

Words by Karyn Noble & Photographs by Orlando Gili

Essential Italian *aperitivo* experiences.

It's *aperitivo* hour in Venice and I'm cheating on my favourite cocktail with another delicious Italian contender. All the wicker chairs outside Il Caffè Rosso, a bohemian haunt on Campo Santa Margherita in Dorsoduro, are fully occupied as the late-afternoon light illuminates the ruby glow of the Spritz just within reach of my hand, which lazily drifts between lifting the bittersweet cocktail to my lips and dipping into the accompanying glass bowl of wafer-thin potato crisps. Chunks of ice clink in the Lamborghini-red fizz, and the hum of chatter intensifies when the sun-warmed pavement fills with locals spilling out of workplaces.

Much like the historical Il Caffè Rosso, the Spritz has its origins in the late 1800s. From the German word for 'splash', the Spritz came into being when the Veneto region was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Purportedly, the Austrian soldiers found Italian wine too strong for their more beer-accustomed palates, so would add a splash of water. This splash eventually became a whole lot more interesting, evolving into sparkling soda, Prosecco, fortified wines and liqueurs. Today's Spritz is generally three parts Prosecco, two parts bitter liqueur and one part soda water. In Venice, unless you specify otherwise, your bitters will likely be Select, a blend of 30 botanicals distilled in post-war Venice in 1920. Its (arguably better-known) competitor Aperol was invented in Padua in 1919, and if you want a lively topic to debate during *aperitivo*, it's definitely the merits of Select versus Aperol.

It's rare for me to diverge from the Negroni, my all-time favourite, but I like to drink local when I travel. For this reason, I need to get myself to Florence where (if rumours are to be believed), in 1919, Count Camillo Negroni ordered an Americano made with gin rather than soda water, and cocktail history was made with the birth of the Negroni (one part gin, one part vermouth rosso and one part Campari). Incidentally, Campari - another fine Italian invention - hails from Piedmont's Novara, emerging in 1860 thanks to the efforts of drinks manufacturer Gaspare Campari.

If you wish to visit the source of the Americano and Negroni Sbagliato, then add Milan to your Italian drinks travel itinerary. Head straight to Camparino in Galleria in Plaza del Duomo, open since 1915 on what was the original site of Gaspare's Caffè Campari, home of the Americano (Campari, sweet vermouth and sparkling water). Though, back in the 1860s, the drink was called a Milano-Torino; you have American tourists to thank for its change of name in the 1920s and 1930s. It was also the first cocktail ordered by James Bond in the 1953 novel *Casino Royale*, fact fans.

As for the Negroni Sbagliato, you can still try that where bartender Mirko Stocchetto first mixed it in 1972: Bar Basso in Milan. The clue to the 'invention' is in the name - *sbagliato* meaning 'wrong/broken/bungled' in Italian. Mirko had intended to make a Negroni, but reached for the Prosecco instead of the gin.

Perhaps the most modern of Italy's classic cocktail creations is the Hugo: a Spritz dreamt up in South Tyrol's Bar San Zeno in 2005 by Roland Gruber. It's one for lovers of lower ABV cocktails, with its elegant composition of elderflower cordial/syrup, Prosecco and soda water. A smack of fresh mint either muddled into the drink or used as a garnish makes this a super-refreshing summer sipper.

Back in Venice, I'm abruptly snapped out of my cocktail reverie with plans for our next bar-hopping mission: to try the Bellini (Prosecco and peach puree) at its point of creation, which happens to be Harry's Bar, a Venetian landmark, going strong since 1931. *Cin cin.*

Left & Previous: Select Spritz at Aman Venice
Right: Il Palazzo Experimental, Venice

