

SIMMER, STEEP, STRAIN AND SERVE

CUSTOMIZE YOUR COCKTAILS WITH HOMEMADE VERMOUTH.

When Sebastian Zutant, wine director at Washington, D.C.'s Proof restaurant, wants to mix up a vermouth-based apéritif, he grabs a stockpot and heads for the stove. "Why buy something when you can make it yourself?" questions Zutant. He favors vermouth for its clean taste, and his take on the dry and sweet versions includes a lengthy list of herbs and aromatics. But Zutant is quick to point out that it's neither daunting nor difficult to mix up a batch at home, and his version elevates vermouth's status from that of dependable mixer to a concoction you can sip all by itself.

Zutant starts with a crisp, neutral white wine like Pinot Grigio or Grüner Veltliner, to which he adds a mélange of herbs and spices before steeping overnight. After fortifying with Sherry and straining, the vermouth is ready to sip. He prefers a straightforward cocktail preparation: chilled, with a twist of orange for the sweet version, and a twist of lemon for the dry. Zutant also suggests mixing equal parts dry and sweet for a

beverage that pairs wonderfully with cheese. "I like the fact that it's so malleable," he says. "You can make it whatever you want it to be." If you really enjoy citrus flavors, increase the amount of orange or lemon in the recipe. On the flip side, since wormwood may be difficult to obtain, it's fine to omit it, or replace it with a preferred herb or spice.

Vermouth is traditional yet timeless, and making it from scratch gives you the chance to impart a personal stamp. "Cocktailing," says Zutant, "is an art form, and I'm seeing a lot of people that are interested in developing that art, not just throwing some juice and liquor in a glass." So heat the stove and find that stockpot. For Zutant's vermouth recipe, go to www.winemag.com/Vermouth.

—KELLY MAGYARICS



Sebastian Zutant