Sweepstakes

SUBSCRIBE

FOOD

RESTAURANTS

NEWS

TRAVEL

WHAT TO BUY

ABOUT US

DRINKS > SPIRITS

Aperitif vs Digestif: What's the Difference?

Bookend your next meal with a bright and bubbly beginning and a bittersweet finish.

By **Kate Dingwall** Published on July 1, 2024





digestif

magnificent meal."

Evenings start with aperitivo, a pre-dinner custom involving light snacks and brightly-hued drinks like Campari and sodas, spritzes, or icy cold shots of herbaceous Chartreuse. To wrap the night and help settle the stomach, they turn to a digestivo such as bittersweet liqueurs, grappas, or other brandies. These two categories of drinks – aperitif and digestif – are often confused, and are differentiated by both the style of drink and the occasion during

As the workday winds down, many Europeans begin a nightly ritual.

which it's consumed. Aperitivos (or aperitif, in French-speaking countries) are for kicking off an evening, and digestivos/digestifs are for winding down. **RELATED:** Italian Amaro vs Red Aperitivo Liqueurs: What's the Difference? "An aperitif sets the tone for the evening – it's almost like an introduction

of what's to come," says Yannick Bigourdan, the owner of Lucie, a finedining restaurant in downtown Toronto. "The digestif is the closing act, a

civilized way to finish dinner and a time to reflect." We asked beverage experts to explain the difference between these two styles of drinks, what cocktails and liqueurs fall into which categories, and how to enjoy these drinking rituals the European way.

When to choose an aperitif or a

Aperitifs and digestifs are both occasions and beverage categories. Aperitifs are enjoyed the hour before dinner. They tend to be bright, low-ABV beverages meant to open up your palate to food. Digestifs are the

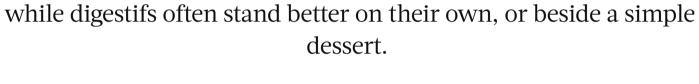
closer, beverages that signify the end of an evening and traditionally

contain botanicals that aid in digestion. "Aperitivo is a signal that your workday is through and it's time to settle into the evening," says Nate Hayden, beverage director for Mother Pizzeria and Giusto in Newport, Rhode Island. "It's a small ceremony to mark that your time is now yours. On the other hand, digestivo is for when the meal

is over but you're still enjoying your company. It's a way to elongate your

meal and relax with friends over one last drink."

Aperitifs play well with other flavors and match a variety of foods, while digestifs often stand better on their own, or beside a simple dessert.



Aperitifs play well with other flavors and match a variety of foods,

"Aperitifs are perfect for any dining occasion," says Bigourdan, who was raised in the South of France by three generations of chefs. "The category is so broad, so you can adjust to the mood and spirit of the evening. Digestifs

are more serious. They should be enjoyed after a celebratory dinner or a

Raymundo Arvizu, the lead bartender at Bar Sprezzatura in San Francisco, pairs aperitifs with sunny-day finger foods: crudo and oysters. "For digestivos? Tiramisu is perfect," he says. "Aperitivo is best paired with light, salty snacks and finger foods like cured meats, cheeses, and olives," says Hayden. "For me, digestivo rides alone."

The concept of aperitivo dates back to ancient times, when Romans would gather before dinners to enjoy grapes and sip wines infused with

botanicals. The addition of bitter herbs into the wine was said to help the

stomach to relax and open (the Latin verb aperire meaning "to open"). Around a similar time, St. Diadochos of Photiki, a Greek theologian in the fifth century, called an aperitif a drink that "opened a way to the stomach

for the vast meal which is to follow."

What is an aperitif?

sunset.

Aperitif Fast Facts

• Starts before a meal

- In modern times, the word aperitif and its derivatives can take different forms, though all lead back to the same intentions. Aperitivo can refer to a
- Served alongside light bites • Usually lower ABV and light on the palate • Often involves a carbonated element

Aperitif can also refer to cocktails that are lower-octane and light on the palate. They're not overly fussy or bogged down with a dozen ingredients. Usually, aperitifs are just a liqueur (traditionally a botanical-based or infused one), citrus, and sometimes, seltzer or another carbonated element. "For aperitifs, I prefer something on the lighter side, like Lillet Rosé," says Bigourdan. "I like to prepare mine with some ice cubes, an orange zest, and

specific moment in the day, the golden hour after the daily grind winds

down and before dinner begins. If a friend invites you to aperitivo, you'll

probably end up nibbling on finger foods and sipping spritzes around

Aperitif can also loosely refer to a style of liqueur that shines in aperitifstyle cocktails, including Italian classics like Cynar, Campari, and Cocchi Americano, French aperitifs like Lillet, Dubonnet, and Chartreuse, as well as next-generation products like Italicus Rosolio di Bergamotto and Bruto Americano.

"My favorite [aperitivo] are Aperol, Ramazzotti Rosato, Cocchi Americano,

or Select – the original bitter used in the very first spritzes," says Arvizu.

a touch of soda water." At aperitivo hour, Hayden sticks to a Spritz.

What is a digestif? Digestifs are after-dinner drinks, or "the perfect nightcap," says Arvizu. Hayden adds that "it's best served after a meal as both a way to settle one's stomach and to spend a little more time with your friends and family."

alcoholic, end-of-meal drink. Today, digestifs are served after the main course has been served, the dessert eaten, and the espresso finished.

Initially, digestifs were used medicinally as a salve for stomach woes and

other medical ailments. Eventually, drinkers grew wise to the category's

more enjoyable qualities and digestifs have transitioned to become an

Digestif Fast Facts • Served after a meal

- digestifs
- Often served on their own • Amari and bitter, herbal liqueurs as well as brandies are popular

• Once used medicinally, still used as a way to settle one's stomach

Hayden has an extensive list of amari at both Mother and Giusto, but he's particularly fond of the fernet and amari from Faccia Brutto. Bigourdan is

delicious. "I'd go for a Cognac like Martell XO or a bourbon, perhaps the Eagle Rare bottling," he says.

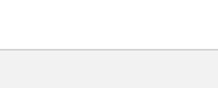
keen on anything that adheres to his "GBD" mantra: gold, brown, and

Arvizu favors Amaro Sibilia, Braulio, or "a good aged palo cortado," but also 1960 Branca Menta, a mint-ified Fernet Branca, and Sicilian-made Etrusco amaro from 1970. "They're my deathbed drinks," says Arvizu.

Was this page helpful?

Other popular digestifs include brandies like grappa and Calvados, the

latter is often served in Normandy as a palate cleanser between courses.



Follow Us

NEWSLETTERS

FOOD&WINE

FOOD DRINK RESTAURANTS TRAVEL WHAT TO BUY

Editorial Guidelines Product Vetting Privacy Policy Terms of Service Advertise Careers Contact

About Us

Please review our updated Terms of Service.

Anti-Racism Pledge