

Back in my Boston days, I was fortunate enough to have had a terrific job in sales with lots of interesting customers and very few grumpy purchasing managers to deal with. Business was very good and held up quite nicely for a good number of years. But – and there is always a BUT – there was a task that was part of the job description that took some discipline.

The task was entertaining customers, or to put it another way it was the Devil in Disguise. For me the bulk of the entertaining was lunches or tickets to the Red Sox or Bruins. And there was the third ingredient called Alcohol – lots and lots of alcohol, i.e. the three martini lunch. In the mid-seventies an Angel of the Lord descended upon the greater Boston area, and probably many other areas of the country. He was instrumental in having many corporations put in place a strict policy on "entertaining and gifts."

There was to be a significant reduction in alcohol consumption during working hours, gifts of any kind were forbidden, and employees could only attend social functions that were sanctioned by their own company. It was a tough policy but it worked. If I went back to Boston today, I am sure that I would see the policy still in effect. It actually took some pressure off me and many other salesmen.

So, what happened? What took the place of the mighty three martini lunch? In what seemed like a nano instant, my customers started to drink Dubonnet on the rocks, Campari, wine, or just a soft drink. (This was probably an attempt to keep their jobs rather than enforce company policy.) In my humble opinion, Dubonnet is a very pleasant and versatile drink. It lends itself equally to both classic and innovative cocktails. Nearly two centuries after the introduction of Dubonnet, it is the number one selling aperitif brand in the United States. It is still made according to the original French family recipe. Its 19% alcohol content assures a refreshing drink in the summertime, and its port-like flavors promise a hint of holiday in the winter. In addition to the more well-known Rouge, Dubonnet Blanc also makes a unique cocktail as well as an outstanding cooking ingredient.

What is an Aperitif?

Originating from the Latin word "aperio," aperitifs were originally conceived to "open" the appetite or to prepare the appetite for a meal. While there are different types of aperitif, aperitif wines such as Dubonnet make up a special class called "aromatized" wines. These are wines that have been flavored with herbs, roots, barks, and many other botanicals.

There is evidence that the ancient Egyptians believed in drinking a small amount of alcohol before a meal, although aperitifs did not peak in popularity until the nineteenth century. By that time Dubonnet was exporting over three million bottles per year. Dubonnet is produced in France.

Where do we place Campari?

Campari is in the same aperitif class as Dubonnet. It is the Italian contribution with slightly more alcohol. Coleen Graham is a writer for ABOUT.COM. She tells us that Campari is a bitter Italian aperitif. It is a proprietary blend of herbs and spices, is brilliant red in color, and has an extremely unique flavor that may require getting used to. Here again we have a secret family recipe. It was developed in 1860 by Gaspare Campari in the town of Novara, Italy near Milan. When first tasting Campari, you may find it to be quite bitter. It is suggested that adding orange juice (building your drink like a screwdriver), or any other fruit drink will assist in developing an appreciation for using Campari as an aperitif.

Much to my regret, I never developed an appreciation for Art until I found myself in the business world. This was not the case at Campari. Soon after the product was introduced The Campari group realized that they wanted some form of image, besides the label on the bottle, to accompany their product. Campari was successful in developing some of the most memorable advertising posters. They used both drawings and photography. They captured images of famous people and famous scenery . . . wherever an aperitif was appropriate. Go to the Internet and have some fun viewing at least 150 drawings and photographs of their advertising over the years.

WINESPEAK

I entered into a discussion on Dubonnet and Campari because, in some small way, these two drinks did contribute to a reduction of the three martini power lunch, at least in the Boston area. In addition to this, there was a minor explosion in the sales of wine. Starting in the seventies and continuing right up to the present, wine sales have been outstanding. (I frequently talk with friends in the distribution arena and they substantiate this fact. The truth-teller is found in sales statistics where you find sales of wine up 12-15% each year and liquor up barely 2 %.) My opinion again is that the atmosphere at lunches, dinner parties and parties in general is so much more relaxed with wine as the drink of choice instead hard liquor. I guess we are drinking responsibly.