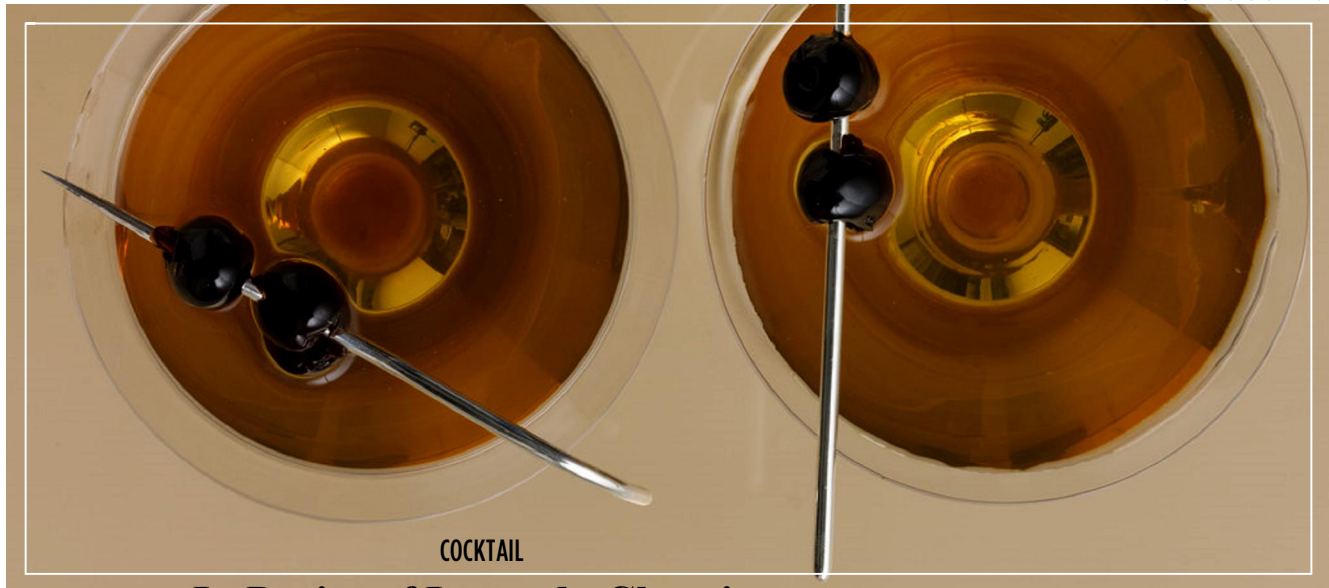


PHOTO BY ROMULO YANES



In Praise of Luxardo Cherries

TOMMY WERNER / 10.16.15

My first cocktail garnish was ruby slipper-red. Squished in the bottom of a Shirley Temple, cocktail cherries made me feel like a grown-up. And I don't think I'm alone. Who didn't love getting the cherry on top of ice cream?

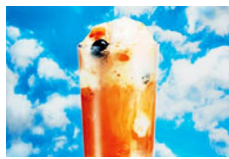
But as I've grown up, my garnishes have, too. And I found out that candy-like treat, which I called a maraschino cherry, wasn't everything I thought it was. The modern "maraschino cherry" was created in a lab; the OG maraschino cherry was grown in a field and jarred in Italy. I'm talking about [Luxardo cherries](https://www.zingermans.com/Product.aspx?ProductID=P-INO) (<https://www.zingermans.com/Product.aspx?ProductID=P-INO>). They're the real deal as far as maraschino cherries go.

200 YEARS OF CHERRIES AND BOOZE

Before they ever sold cherries, though, [Luxardo](http://www.anchordistilling.com/brand/luxardo/) (<http://www.anchordistilling.com/brand/luxardo/>) was a distillery on the Croatian coast. Founded in 1821, they made their name with a [cherry liqueur they called maraschino](http://www.astorwines.com/SearchResultsSingle.aspx?search=16019) (<http://www.astorwines.com/SearchResultsSingle.aspx?search=16019>). The distillery started jarring cherries in maraschino around 1905, thus creating the original maraschino cherry. The original recipe called for [Marasca sour cherries](http://www.cooksinfo.com/marasca-cherries) (<http://www.cooksinfo.com/marasca-cherries>) (found in the sandy soils of Croatia as well as in northern Italy) simmered with sugar, cherry juice, and plenty of maraschino liqueur.

During World War II, one family member, Giorgio Luxardo, escaped the Nazi invasion of Croatia. Luxardo fled to Veneto (in the northern Italy), taking a cherry sapling and the written recipe for the liqueur. Luxardo cherries have been made in Italy ever since.

So how did we end up with the neon version found in dive bars across the country? Around Prohibition, Ernest Wiegand, a horticulturist at Oregon Agricultural College, [found a way to approximate the flavor of the Italian cherries](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/magazine/who-made-that-maraschino-cherry.html?_r=1) (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/magazine/who-made-that-maraschino-cherry.html?_r=1) using a brine, calcium salts, and American cherries. The American version was redder, plumper, and sweeter than the classic maraschino. Add almond flavoring and red dye, and suddenly, the maraschino cherry looked and tasted nothing like the imported Italian cherries.



VANILLA FLOAT WITH BITTERS AND CHERRIES

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THE LUXURIOUS LUXARDO

Out of the jar, they're not like the candy-apple red lumps bartenders plunk into kiddie cocktails. These are a work of class, the dark finishing touch to a stiff drink. Their red is so deep, it's almost black; the syrup thicker than molasses on a chilly day.

The taste is nutty like Amaretto and fruit forward, without the sticky and acrid taste that those waxy red cherries have. You can have the humblest of cocktail ingredients, and with a Luxardo cherry, boom, it's suddenly an elegant drink. The fake maraschino cherry is for when you're three people deep at a dive bar. These make you feel special. Luxe, even.

I'll spoon a few cherries into a icy Manhattan the sweet cherries play off of drink's red vermouh and reduce the bite of the bourbon. Like sours? The maraschino cherry is an outrageously good complement to the sour mix. Try the jarred cherry syrup stirred into an amaretto sour.

I won't even begin to describe Luxardo cherries on ice cream. That's a story for another time.

Now, are you sipping with me?



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