

Chapter 6

Aperitifs, Cordials, and Liqueurs

In This Chapter

- ▶ Serving up some tasty before-dinner drinks
- ▶ Examining the vast world of cordials and liqueurs

This chapter is a catchall for a handful of different liquor categories. Aperitifs were developed specifically as pre-meal beverages. Cordials and liqueurs have a variety of purposes. Some are great mixers, others are good after-dinner drinks, and a few make good aperitifs as well. Go figure.

Whetting Your Appetite with Aperitifs

Aperitif comes from the Latin word *aperire*, meaning “to open.” An aperitif is usually any type of drink you’d have before a meal. Most aperitifs are usually low in alcohol and mild-tasting.

You can drink many of the cordials and liqueurs listed later in this chapter as aperitifs as well. I don’t have much more to say about aperitifs other than to list the individual products that are available, such as the following:

- ✔ **Amer Picon (French):** A blend of African oranges, gentian root, quinine bark, and some alcohol. Usually served with club soda or seltzer water with lemon.
- ✔ **Campari (Italian):** A unique combination of fruits, spices, herbs, and roots.

- ✔ **Cynar (Italian):** A bittersweet aperitif that's made from artichokes. Best when served over ice with a twist of lemon or orange.
- ✔ **Dubonnet (American):** Produced in California and available in blond and red. Serve chilled.
- ✔ **Fernet-Branca (Italian):** A bitter, aromatic blend of approximately 40 herbs and spices (including myrrh, rhubarb, camomile, cardamom, and saffron) in a base of grape alcohol. Mint-flavored Fernet-Branca is also available. It's called Branca Menta.
- ✔ **Jägermeister (German):** Composed of 56 botanicals, including citrus peel, aniseed, licorice, poppy seeds, saffron, ginger, juniper berries, and ginseng.
- ✔ **Lillet (French):** Made in Bordeaux from a blend of 85 percent fine Bordeaux wines and 15 percent fruit liqueurs. Lillet Blanc is made from sauvignon blanc and semillon and has a golden color. Lillet Rouge is made from merlot and cabernet sauvignon and has a ruby-red color.
- ✔ **Pernod (French):** Comes from the essence of badiane (anise star) and from a spirit made from natural herbs, such as mint and balm.
- ✔ **Punt e Mes (Italian):** Vermouth with bitters and other botanicals added.
- ✔ **Ricard (French):** Made from anise, fennel (green anise), licorice, and other Provençal herbs.
- ✔ **Suze (French):** French bitters distilled from gentian root. *Gentian* is a large, originally wild flower with golden petals that's grown in the Auvergne and Jura regions.

Cordials and Liqueurs

Cordial comes from the Latin word *cor*, meaning “heart,” and *liqueur* is derived from a Latin word meaning “melt or dissolve.” Both words are interchangeable, although cordials are more popular in the United States, and liqueurs are more popular in Europe. From this point on, I use the word cordial to describe both.



What's Angostura?

Angostura aromatic bitters are a blend of rare tropical herbs and spices used to flavor and season a great variety of food dishes and certain alcoholic and nonalcoholic drinks.

Dr. Johann Siegert, surgeon-general in the army of the great liberator of South America, Simón Bolívar, first compounded the formula in 1824. Siegert's headquarters were in the Venezuelan port of Angostura, a city now known as Ciudad Bolívar. The doctor experimented for four years before finding the exact formula that he was after. He wanted to use the bitters to improve the appetite and

well-being of his troops. Sailors pulling into the port discovered the bitters and bought bottles to carry away with them. Soon the fame of Angostura bitters spread around the world. Angostura bitters are used in many cocktails, including the Manhattan, the Old Fashioned, and the Rob Roy.

There are many other bitters (more than 75) you can check out. The next highest selling brand is Fee Brothers from Rochester, New York. Another label is Peychauds Aromatic Cocktail Bitters from New Orleans. Every day a new bitters product comes out from a different bartender or company.

Cordials are made by infusing the flavor of fruits, herbs, spices, and other plants with a spirit, such as brandy or whiskey. As you discover from the list later in this chapter, cordials come in many different varieties. Most are sweet. In fact, cordials sold in the United States contain up to 35 percent sugar and must contain a minimum of 25 percent sugar by weight.

Within the cordial category are crèmes and fruit-flavored brandies. Crèmes have a high sugar content, which makes them, well, creamy. Usually, the name of such a cordial indicates what it tastes like. Crème de banana tastes like bananas, and apricot brandy tastes like apricots.

The world has more cordials than any one person can list. What I try to do here is describe the ones that you're likely to see in the recipes in this book. Someone somewhere probably makes a soy-sauce-and-aloe-flavored cordial, and maybe it tastes great, but nobody I know is ever going to ask for it, so I don't list it. Instead, I give you the following common cordials:

- ✔ **99 Bananas** is a rich-flavored, 99-proof banana cordial. Also available are 99 Apples, 99 Oranges, and 99 Blackberries. (See Chapter 5 for an explanation of proof.)
- ✔ **Absente** is a product from France that's similar in flavor to absinthe but without the bad reputation or toxic side effects (see the following bullet).
- ✔ **Absinthe** is often called the Green Muse because of its pale greenish color and the dreamy state it induces in imbibers. Absinthe is 65 percent alcohol, or a whopping 130 proof. Because it contains wormwood (a plant that many believe is a narcotic and also toxic, causing death and/or madness), absinthe was for many years outlawed in most of the world. The fears over absinthe's alleged lethality were probably overstated, and absinthe is now widely available.
- ✔ **Agavero Tequila Liqueur** is a blend of blue Añejo and Reposado tequilas with natural damiana flower.
- ✔ **Akvavit** is a barley-and-potato distillate that's clear, colorless, and potent. It's a Scandinavian drink originally made in Aalborg, Denmark.
- ✔ **Alizé** is a blend of passion fruit juices and cognac. It's available in several varieties.
- ✔ **Amaretto** is an almond-flavored cordial.
- ✔ **Amarula Cream Liqueur** is made from the fruit of the marula tree from Africa and added to the highest quality cream.
- ✔ **Anisette** gets its name from the aniseed, which imparts its rich, licorice-like flavor to this cordial. Practically every Mediterranean country has a variation of the anise liqueur, such as Sambuca in Italy, ouzo in Greece, and so on.
- ✔ **Applejack** is distilled from the mash of apples and is the best-known and most typical fruit brandy in the United States.
- ✔ **Baileys Irish Cream** is made from fresh dairy cream, Irish whiskey, and natural flavorings. The Irish whiskey acts as a preservative for the cream, which is why Baileys doesn't need to be refrigerated. It also comes in caramel and mint chocolate flavors, among others.
- ✔ **Bärenjäger Honey Liqueur** is a honey liqueur made in Germany.

- ✔ **Benedictine** contains more than 27 herbs and spices, including cardamom, nutmeg, cloves, myrrh, and vanilla. B&B, which stands for Benedictine & Brandy, is a blend of Benedictine and cognac.
- ✔ **Black Haus** is a schnapps made from blackberries.
- ✔ **Blue Curaçao** is essentially the same as Orange Curaçao except that a deep blue color has been added, and it's slightly lower in proof.
- ✔ **Bols** produces a complete line of flavored brandies and cordials.
- ✔ **Bunratty Meade** is a blend of honey, selected herbs, and wine.
- ✔ **Calvados** is an applejack made in Normandy and aged about four years.
- ✔ **Carolans Irish Cream** combines Irish spirits and whiskey with rich double cream and subtle flavors, principally honey.
- ✔ **Celtic Crossing** is created by combining Irish malt whiskeys and cognac with a hint of honey.
- ✔ **Chambord** is made with framboise (small black raspberries) and other fruits and herbs combined with honey. It has a dark purple color.
- ✔ **Chartreuse** comes in green and yellow varieties and is made with more than 130 herbs and spices. It's normally sold at 4 years of age (aged in the bottle), but 12 year old labels are also produced.
- ✔ **Chocoviac** is a smooth, aged cognac blended with dark chocolate from Switzerland and a rich vanilla from Madagascar.
- ✔ **CocoRibe** is a liqueur of wild island coconuts laced with Virgin Island rum.
- ✔ **Cointreau** is a clear cordial made from a blend of sweet and bitter oranges.
- ✔ **Crème de Cacao** is made from vanilla and cacao beans. It comes in white and brown varieties.
- ✔ **Crème de Cassis** is made from black currants imported from France and other selected fruits and berries.
- ✔ **Crème de Framboise** is a raspberry-flavored liqueur.

- ✔ **Crème de Menthe** is made from mint and spearmint. It comes in green and white (clear) varieties.
- ✔ **Crème de Noyaux** is made from a combination of sweet and bitter almonds.
- ✔ **Cuarenta Y Tres (Licor 43)** is made from a secret formula containing vanilla beans, citrus, and other fruits found in the Mediterranean, as well as carefully selected aromatic plants.
- ✔ **DeKuyper Schnapps** come in several flavors, including Blueberry, ButterShots, Hot Damn!, Key Largo, Old Tavern Rootbeer, Peachtree, Peppermint, Sour Apple, Tropical, Spearmint, and WilderBerry.
- ✔ **Der Lachs Goldwasser** is a mysterious blend of 25 herbs, spices, and real 22-karat gold flakes.
- ✔ **Domaine de Canton** is fresh baby ginger married with fine eau de vie (a clear, colorless fruit brandy), V.S.O.P., and X.O. Grande Champagne cognacs crafted with fresh Tahitian vanilla beans and Tunisian ginseng.
- ✔ **Drambuie** is made with the finest Highland malt whiskies (no less than 15 years old), heather honey, and special herbs that are prepared in secret.
- ✔ **Echte Kroatzbeere** is made with blackberries.
- ✔ **Fragoli** is made with hand-picked wild strawberries.
- ✔ **Frangelico** is made from wild hazelnuts blended with berries and flowers.
- ✔ **Galliano** is a golden-colored liqueur made with lavender, anise, yarrow musk, and juniper and blended with exotic flavors, such as vanilla and fragrant balm. In all, it contains more than 30 ingredients.
- ✔ **Godet Belgian White Chocolate Liqueur** is a blend of Belgian white chocolate and aged cognac.
- ✔ **Godiva Liqueur** is flavored with the same chocolate used in Godiva chocolate.
- ✔ **Goldschläger** is an 87-proof cinnamon schnapps liqueur imported from Switzerland. It features real flakes of 24-karat gold.
- ✔ **Grand Marnier** is made from wild oranges and cognac.

- ✔ **Hpnotiq** is a blend of cognac, triple-distilled vodka, and natural tropical fruit juices.
- ✔ **Illy Espresso Liqueur** is an espresso liqueur made in Italy.
- ✔ **Irish Mist** is a derivation of a heather wine.
- ✔ **Kahlúa** is made from coffee and the alcohol distilled from cane sugar. People also discern a chocolate flavor, but the recipe contains no chocolate. Its origin is a mystery. Some say Arabia; others say Turkey or Morocco. Today, as indicated by the sombrero on the label, it's made in Mexico with Mexican coffee beans.
- ✔ **KeKe Beach Key Lime Cream Liqueur** blends the flavor of Key lime pie with a hint of graham.
- ✔ **Kirsch** is distilled from cherries.
- ✔ **Kirschwasser** is a true fruit brandy or eau de vie distilled from fermented cherries and cherry pits. It's clear and dry.
- ✔ **Kummel** is made from caraway seeds, cumin, and aniseed. It's most esteemed as a digestive.
- ✔ **L'ile Supreme** combines tropical rum with an assortment of fruits, including orange, lychee, mango, lime, and goyavier.
- ✔ **Limoncello** is made from the finest grain spirits infused with the juice and peel of lemons from Italy's southern Amalfi coast.
- ✔ **Lochan Ora** is a Scotch whisky liqueur flavored with honey.
- ✔ **Luxardo** is the original maraschino liqueur.
- ✔ **Malibu** is a clear blend of coconut and Caribbean rum.
- ✔ **Marie Brizard Liqueurs** offers a complete line of extremely fine liqueurs from A to Z.
- ✔ **Midori** is a green, honeydew melon spirit.
- ✔ **Mozart Chocolate Liqueur** is made from praline-nougat and milk chocolate blended with kirsch.
- ✔ **Nassau Royale** is predominantly citrus-flavored with undertones of coffee.
- ✔ **Opal Nera** is black Sambuca with an added lemon twist.

- ✔ **Orange Curaçao** is made from the peel of the bittersweet Curaçao orange, which grows on the Dutch island of Curaçao in the West Indies.
- ✔ **Orangecello** is a combination of orange juice, orange peels, and grain spirits from Italy.
- ✔ **Ouzo** is an anise-based liqueur from Greece.
- ✔ **PAMA Pomegranate Liqueur** is made with all-natural California pomegranates.
- ✔ **Passoa Passion Fruit Liqueur** is a blend of Brazilian *maracuja*, or yellow passion fruit, with red berries and citrus and tropical fruits.
- ✔ **Patrón Citronge** is an orange-flavored liqueur from the famous tequila maker.
- ✔ **Patrón XO Cafe** is a coffee liqueur that combines coffee and Patrón Silver. Patrón XO Cafe Dark Cocoa adds Criollo chocolate from Mexico to the mix.
- ✔ **Pucker Flavored Cordials** are available in Raspberry, Peach, Watermelon, Sour Apple, Grape, Cheri-Beri, Strawberry Passion, and Island Blue.
- ✔ **Rock & Rye** is an old-time American favorite made with a special blend of aged rye whiskies and fresh fruit juices.
- ✔ **Rumple Minze** is a peppermint schnapps imported from Germany.
- ✔ **Sabra** is an Israeli chocolate-orange liqueur originally made in the 1960s from the sabra cactus that grows in Israel and around the southern and eastern Mediterranean. You can also find a coffee version.
- ✔ **Sambuca** is made from two main ingredients, witch elderbush (*sambucus nigra*, hence the name of the drink) and licorice, which gives this liqueur its dominant taste. It's related to the licorice-flavored anise and pastis drinks of France, ouzo of Greece, mastika of the Balkans, and raki of Turkey.
- ✔ **Schönauer Apfel Schnapps** is produced from wheat and rye and then blended with the juices of apples from "Altes Land," one of the best-known fruit-growing areas of Germany.

- ✔ **Sloe Gin** has a confusing name. It's not a gin (although small amounts of gin are used in its making). Sloe comes from *sloeberry*, a small, deep-purple wild plum that grows principally in France.
- ✔ **Southern Comfort** is made from a secret recipe that contains bourbon, brandy, bitters, peaches, and herbs.
- ✔ **St-Germain Elderflower Liqueur** is made in France from freshly hand-picked elderflower blossoms.
- ✔ **Strega**, named after the Italian word for “witch,” is made from more than 70 botanicals.
- ✔ **Tequila Rose Cocoa Cream** adds the taste of fresh strawberries and chocolate to the cream of Tequila Rose.
- ✔ **Tequila Rose Java Cream** is the taste of coffee added to the cream of Tequila Rose.
- ✔ **Tequila Rose Strawberry Flavor Cream Liqueur and Tequila** is a blend of strawberry, cream, and a hint of tequila.
- ✔ **Tia Maria** is a Jamaican rum liqueur based on Blue Mountain coffee extracts and local spices.
- ✔ **Triple Sec** is made principally from imported orange peel, the wild Curaçao orange, and the sweet, aromatic Spanish Valencia. *Triple sec* means triple dry or three distillations.
- ✔ **Tuaca** is an aged brandy flavored with orange and other fruits and botanicals indigenous to the Tuscan region of Italy.
- ✔ **Ty-Ku Liqueur** is a sake and Asian vodka-based liqueur with more than 20 all-natural fruits and botanicals.
- ✔ **Vandermint** is a Dutch minted-chocolate liqueur.
- ✔ **Vermeer** is an outstanding Dutch chocolate cream liqueur.
- ✔ **Wild Spirit** is a special recipe of strong spirits, natural wild herbs, and a touch of fire-brewed cocoa.
- ✔ **Yukon Jack** is a Canadian whisky-based liqueur with citrus and herbs.

Storing and Serving Suggestions

As I mention earlier in this chapter, you should serve aperitifs before a meal. Most can be served either straight up or on the rocks.

Most cordials are served after dinner or mixed as cocktails and served over crushed ice as frappés.

Store an unopened aperitif, cordial, or liqueur bottle in a cool, dry area that's always out of direct light. After a bottle is opened, it should have a shelf life of three years.