



od sports

MEN'S FASHION SPRING 2007
Richard Gere

Lady Slings the Booze

BARTENDER, MAKE HERS A CAMPARI.

The Samurai Sipper does not on principle parade her family around like sock puppets at preschool. But how else to salute Campari, the classic *aperitivo*, without mentioning the Samurai Spouse? Born on Riverside Drive, weaned in the San Fernando Valley, the Spouse spent his preteen years on Via Statilio Tauro on the outskirts of Rome. Home-schooled by his Canadian mother, the Spouse scavenged and sold scrap metal for a fistful of lire, ate horse meat without censure and lugged straw baskets home from the neighborhood *osteria*, where chianti flowed from spigots. His father, an American opera singer born in Shanghai to a Russian mother, was a basso, meaning he played tough guys, which for him was not a stretch. The Spouse, too, is tough, silent but fierce, an über-Samurai. He handily wins the prize for the most cosmopolitan man in Manhattan.

Naturally he scorns girly drinks: no cosmopolitans or Manhattans pass his lips. He's been a Campari metrosexual ever since his ship hit New York Harbor. Arriving the first day of school in Queens in short pants, he had the mortadella beaten out of him, undoubtedly driving him to drink. For him, Campari is *la dolce vita*, *la donna è mobile* ("woman is fickle") and the prelude to many a *lombata di vitello*. The Spouse takes Campari in an icy glass, with a splash of siphoned soda and a twist — exactly as they do in Rome. And everyone knows that, when in Rome. ...

Campari wasn't born in the Eternal City but in Milan, where the master drink maker Gaspare Campari founded the company in 1860 and began selling his oneiric brew of herbs, aromatics, quinine bark, peels, etc. Only one man at Campari's factory in Novi Ligure knows the exact formulation, and he's not talking. But it does contain wormwood, which has the same active substance as absinthe, the zillion-proof swill that Van Gogh allegedly drank prior to donating part



of an ear to posterity. *La donna* may be *mobile*, but artists are *molto pazzi* (crazy). Luckily for humanity, Campari drinkers tend toward bottom pinching rather than rampant ear chopping.

Campari's a bitter; drink it neat, and it will bite. The Sipper loves its bitterness, especially mixed with any citrus. Campari tingles the taste buds and issues travel alerts to the stomach that food is en route. It's a spirit-based aperitif, not a wine-based one like Lillet. And it's as red as Dorothy's shoes. (The color used to come from a dye sourced from beetles, making Campari the original Beetlejuice.) It doesn't taste the same here as it does in Italy, but what does? But with the revival in retro cocktails, a new generation of lounge lizards is drinking this old *aperitivo* in many new guises — and in many new places.

At the grand (but not grandiose) Bar Seine in the Hôtel Plaza Athénée, on East 64th Street, my bartender gladly spiked a garden-variety *mimosa* (Champagne + O.J.) with Campari — to savory effect. Add leather floors and Moroccan mirrors over leopard ottomans, and the amorously inclined will be altogether stoked.

After a marathon shopping safari, the Samurai Sipper headed for the Bar, inside the lobby of the Four Seasons Hotel, on 57th Street, where the well-heeled nursed their **Silly Gooses**: Grey

Goose Vodka L'Orange, blood orange purée and Campari on silver trays with icy shakers holding seconds; a side of intensely flavored dried cherries adds even more punch. The lounge does Singapore Slings and Harvey Wallbangers, too, but nostalgia's not an option in such postmodern surroundings.

Flatiron Lounge, 37 West 19th Street, is dark, Deco, lite-FM jazzy; there, mixologists really go for broke. **Eden** is a paradise of Plymouth Gin, lemon, rose syrup, Campari; **Siesta** is Campari with tequila, fresh lime and grapefruit. One part Campari to one part whatever other liquor you fancy is the general rule in my house.

Pegu Club, 77 West Houston Street, is another lushly lit, atmospherically swell style magnet. Billie Holiday accompanies the low-key hum of happy-hour players. Audrey Saunders, a celebrated mixologist often in residence, can be persuaded to do Campari "flights" for skeptics who haven't sampled better living through alchemy. The **Cornwall Negroni** is gin, Campari, Punt e Mes, sweet vermouth and utterly wicked. Add minuscule orders of summer rolls, and picture yourself on a boat on a river.

The most incomparable Camparis were at 202 in the Chelsea Market, on Ninth Avenue. The Sipper found Stefan Trummer, Austrian *barista* extraordinaire, who invented three new cocktails on the spot that *bit* the spot: the **Sipper Special** is Campari, sugar cane syrup, a squeeze of lime and White Star Champagne (sweeter than Brut and with more depth), and a dash of Sicilian mandarin orange oil; the **Spice Girl**, which is mandarin-infused vodka and Grand Marnier, spiced cranberry purée and White Star; and the **Rising Star** is, well, let's just say by then the Sipper was singing "Rigoletto" in pig Latin while swinging from the rafters. Next time you're in 212, head over to 202 and find Stefan after 4 p.m. Tell him the Sipper sent you. ■