

Suze: The French Apéritif Your Cocktail Is Missing

Bitter, vegetal, and surprisingly complex

by Kat Odell, June 9, 2016

Some might know Brooklyn, New York barman Will Elliott as a key member of the **Maison Premiere** team, the Williamsburg bar which nabbed a James Beard award **last month** for its Outstanding Bar Program. Maison Premiere transports its patrons to New Orleans' French Quarter circa, say, 1900, both in terms of drinks and decor—and Elliott's vintage and modern libations call for a slurry of rare spirits, liqueurs, and bitters—one of which is French apéritif, Suze.

Will Elliott of Maison Premiere Explains Suze



Maison Premiere's Peacock Throne cocktail, which incorporates Suze.

WHAT IS SUZE?

Suze is a French apéritif made from gentian—an aromatic plant used as a bittering agent in a whole slew of French digestifs. It **tastes very vegetal, like eating dandelion greens**, but it **also offers citric tones, like pomelo and perfume-y citrus**—not lemon or lime.

Suze was created in the late 19th century by French distiller Fernand Moureaux, and was featured in tons of advertisements during France's Belle Epoque era. The liqueur has very strong ties to café culture—and this café culture served as inspiration in constructing Sauvage's cocktail program.

HOW TO USE SUZE

Personally, I think **Suze is delicious by itself on ice**, though some might find this preparation to be aggressively bitter. Because of its citric tones, I also love serving Suze simply with a lemon twist.

Suze does very well with carbonation—so I recommend mixing it with soda water, tonic water, or sparkling wine. It is also great with **pét-nat wine**, as it tastes vegetal and funky in a similar way. Suze also pairs excellently when given a **minor role** with eau de vie, Cognac, and gin.

For home bartenders, I would recommend **adding a teaspoon to a martini**. Another fun way home bartenders can experiment with Suze is by using it as a **cocktail rinse**, or to atomize. To atomize at home, just buy a small spray bottle, pour in Suze, and spritz.

Something else worth noting about Suze is its amazing color—it is almost a neon yellow. This is a fun way for a home bartender to brighten up a party.

- **Flavor Notes:** vegetal, quenching, floral, delicate, bracing
- **Perfect Pairings:** tonic, soda water
- **Liquors that Jive:** Armagnac, gin, framboise eau de vie
- **Stay Away From:** flavored vodka, amaro, American whiskey, molasses-driven rum, Branca Menta

PRO TIP

Perhaps **my favorite thing about Suze is the way it acts as a seasoning, almost like salt and pepper** does for food. Just a teaspoon is the perfect way to add complexity and to add a depth to a drink's texture through its viscosity. It will imply a bright, citrusy note, and offer a tingly bitter finish.

RECIPES

Maison Premiere presently serves three cocktails with Suze, recipes for two of which are below.



High Chicago

4 dashes Angostura Orange Bitters
 1/4 teaspoon **Kümmel** (Dutch liqueur flavored with caraway seed, cumin, and fennel)
 1 tsp Suze
 1/2 ounce Dry Curaçao
 1/2 ounce Pineau de Charentes
 3/4 ounce **Mastiha** (a Greek liqueur made from the resin of a small evergreen tree)
 1 ounce apricot eau de vie, such as Blume de Merrilen

Add all ingredients except the eau de vie in the order listed above into a mixing glass with ice, then stir until the glass starts to sweat. Strain mixture into a coupe glass, then spritz with the eau de vie. If one does not have a spritzer, rinse the coupe with the eau de vie prior to straining the mixture into it.



House of Windsor

1 dash celery bitters
 1 teaspoon Suze
 1/2 ounce lemon
 3/4 ounce lemon cordial
 3/4 ounce Pineau de Charentes
 3/4 ounce grapefruit riesling
 1 ounce gin, such as Ransom
 springs of dill, for garnish
 lemon zest, for garnish

Fill half a Collins glass with crushed or cracked ice, then add ingredients in the order listed above. Pour the mixture between two Collins glasses until chilled, then top with another half glass of crushed ice. Add a straw, sprigs of dill, and shave lemon atop.

*To make grapefruit riesling, remove the skin from one grapefruit and cut the fruit into wedges. Infuse the wedges in a bottle of riesling for eight to 10 hours.