

Ago Perrone, Director of Mixology at The Connaught Bar, is shown in a close-up, focused on pouring a drink from a bottle into a glass. He is wearing a light-colored blazer over a striped shirt. The background is a blurred bar setting with shelves of bottles and warm lighting.

# Ago Perrone of The Connaught

DIRECTOR OF MIXOLOGY AT THE CONNAUGHT BAR AN INDUSTRY LEGEND, AGO PERRONE, SHARES HIS LIFELONG CAREER STORY WORKING AND BUILDING SOME OF THE BEST BARS IN THE WORLD.

**IN YOUR PREVIOUS LIFE, YOU WERE A PHOTOGRAPHER. WHAT DREW YOU TO HOSPITALITY?**

Photography has been a lifetime passion that unexpectedly led me to bartend. It was a bit of a lucky accident. Back in the days, I had decided to enrol in a photography college in my home town in Lake Como and to fund the course I started bartending. I was quickly drawn in. I was fascinated by the whole vibe of the hospitality industry. I discovered how much creativity and personal input I could apply to the profession. Photography is still very much a prominent interest, and I seize every opportunity to continue looking at the world through my camera lens, whether during my travels or at the bar.

**YOU LANDED INTO LONDON IN 2003, WHAT WAS YOUR PLAN THEN?**

After a period working across bars in Lake Como, I decided to integrate my spontaneous and passionate flair for bartending with some professional training. After a course at the 3F American Bartending School I thought the next right step would be to go and gain some international experience, so I flew to London. I thought I would give the city six months, just the time to learn and see what the innovative bar scene there had on offer. I would have never thought that 16 years down the line I would still be here and call London home.

**WHERE WERE YOU BEFORE THE FAMOUS AND HIGHLY**

**AWARDED THE CONNAUGHT BAR, MAYFAIR?**

Salvador & Amanda in Soho was where I first started in London. There I had the chance to come across some of the industry's most legendary bartenders and become part of that amazing community, and family, of incredibly inspiring professionals. The next move was Dusk in Battersea, arguably the hottest bar in South London at the time. Under the guidance of Nidal Ramini, I found a fertile ground to nurture my drive. It did not take long before I got hooked with cocktail competitions and big projects such as the opening of Montgomery Place in Notting Hill. At Montgomery Place, I really came into my own, developing my personal taste

and touch for modern classics. The visibility I gained, alongside flattering accolades such as CLASS Bartender of the Year in 2006, caught the attention of Galliano and established our long-standing collaboration and paved the way for the life-changing role at The Connaught.

**YOU WERE BROUGHT ON BOARD TO OPEN THE NEWLY REFURBISHED THE CONNAUGHT HOTEL, DESCRIBE THIS EXPERIENCE?**

After two years at Montgomery Place, I was approached by The Connaught. The hotel's F&B manager and the future bar manager came to see me at Montgomery Place. I still recall how they laid the plans out on the bar while I was on duty.

When I went to visit them at the hotel and saw The Coburg Bar and what The Connaught Bar would look like. I thought that wouldn't be my pair of shoes. At the time, I had never worked in a hotel bar, so I didn't know what the role would entail nor the expectations linked to it. However, I felt right away The Connaught was never meant to be just another hotel bar. Creativity and innovation were going to be at the centre stage integrated with the impeccable and classy service of a five-star establishment. To me it was clear that it would be something unique and never-seen before, and that's where I saw a real opportunity. The beginning was crazy with lots of positive challenges that made us grow day after day. We had to put together a drinks list that would go beyond expectations, surprise guests and open the doors to a new generation of drinkers, while staying true to the inherent elegance of the hotel.

**HOW DID YOU FIRST SET UP THE BAR/ SPACE AS TO WHAT IT IS NOW? WHAT ORIGINAL IDEAS / CONCEPTS DID YOU PUT INTO PLACE?**

The new Connaught Bar space carried the distinctive mark of David Collins' luxury interiors. We had to build our area, keeping that in mind while also thinking about the equipment and facilities necessary to bring to life an innovative stand-alone bar. I designed the back bar and the bar station - which has stayed the same for over ten years and has only been replaced in June 2019 - with a functional and practical mindset. I planned the fridges behind the bar with a special drawer in order to always

have the freshest ingredients at disposal, as well as two freezers to cool the glassware. I planned a multifunctional preparation area in the back to craft both hot and cold infusions. We were also the first hotel bar to have an ice ball moulder, and we sourced a full set of Japanese tools. Once everything was set up, we started, and the first couple of years were packed with learnings. It was all about adapting, tweaking and tailoring our service and cocktail making according to the feedback of our guests, hotel staff and industry peers. For example, when we designed our signature Martini and Bloody Mary, we infused them with unique elements to make them stand out from the classics that drinkers couldn't find anywhere else. However, we had no idea they would become our best-sellers, so we had to adapt to the delivery of big volumes of these serves.

**YOUR TEAM HAS WON AN EXTRAORDINARY AMOUNT OF AWARDS. CONGRATULATIONS. CAN YOU SHARE WITH US THE CULTURE AND DAY TO DAY BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE TEAM?**

Since day one, The Connaught Bar team has been key to the making and success of our bar. I have always been surrounded by great professionals who have an incredible dedication to hospitality and believe in what we do in our bar; from Erik Lorincz and Santino Ciccieri in the early days, to Rusty Cerven and current key team members such as Giorgio Bargiani and Maura Milia, all who have been at The Connaught for many years, as well as Riccardo Semeria, who joined us as junior mixologist, left to travel the world and came back as Bar Manager today. At The

Connaught, we instil passion for five-star mixology and hospitality to keep the highest professional standards while giving everyone the opportunity to grow within the team and develop their own style and personality. For these reasons, I think that The Connaught Bar distinguishes itself from other bars for retaining talent. We have a mission to deliver a world-class drinking experience while leaving a mark in our guests' memory; not only through our signature drinks but also through the way we welcome and accompany them during their stay at the bar. To achieve this, the whole team come into play with no exception. We work closely together, almost like a family, supporting each other and constantly communicating to deliver a strong cohesion and harmony which translate into a flawless service.



Ago Perrone (left), Director of Mixology at The Connaught Bar with Giorgio Bargiani  
Photo Credit: Niklas Hallin

**YOU ARE AN ADVOCATE OF THE VALUES EMBODIED BY THE TRULY AUTHENTIC ITALIAN BRAND GALLIANO, AND BEING ITALIAN, THIS IS RATHER FITTING. WHAT DOES THIS ENTAIL?**

Galliano was one of the first brands to approach me when I was still at Montgomery Place. It was rather flattering to see such an authentic brand believing in what I was doing. I find Galliano, and I always shared the same values. I was brought on board to support the re-launch of Galliano L'Autentico at a time when the discovery of the forgotten classics was very hot on the scene. It was a pleasing feeling to become almost a spokesperson and the face of a product that is strongly rooted in my home country and craft drinking culture. I had the chance to travel the world to share my passion for mixology and hospitality as well as my blend of Italian and British approach to bartending. Not only has it been a journey of sharing, it has also meant discovering, connecting and finding new sources of inspirations from countries, people and produce all over the world.

**WHAT IS IT YOU LOVE ABOUT GALLIANO?**

I was first intrigued by the beauty of the liquid. The taste complemented the charm of the bottle of L'Autentico, which reminded me of ancient apothecary products. Then I had the chance to visit Maraschi & Quirici in Turin, where Galliano is produced with the same care and commitment to quality since

its inception in 1896 in Livorno. The way they produce Galliano is overwhelmingly inspiring. It's produced with traditional equipment dating back 200 years, and the entire process is artisanal. Automation comes into play only at the end for quality and stock checks. Their commitment to the tradition and authentic flavours of Italy is not a limit though. There's been a lot of experimentation in order to innovate and craft new products. I am thinking of Galliano Ristretto that is not just a coffee liqueur, but an espresso liqueur, therefore a piece of Italian culture.

**WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DOES GALLIANO GIVE YOU AS AN ESTABLISHED ADVOCATE OF THE BRAND?**

The long-standing collaboration with Galliano has represented a great opportunity for me to bring my experience and passion for hospitality abroad, alongside The Connaught Bar culture. With Galliano we have been working to spread the best of Italian authentic flavours and approach to fine drinking to the community of bartenders and to drinkers alike all over the world. The producers, Maraschi & Quirici, in Italy, have been an outstanding source of inspiration and knowledge for me, therefore it's been a mutual exchange of trust and enthusiasm.

**CAN YOU SHARE WITH US ANY EXCITING PLANS FOR 2020?**

2020 is going to be another exciting and busy year. After 11 years of activity at The

Connaught we're really set in stone. We have cemented a solid service and signature cocktail style, so we will continue to hold our high standards while working with partner brands and industry professionals to experiment and innovate. Spreading The Connaught Bar culture around the world will still be one of our key objectives, and I am looking forward to visiting Australia again with Galliano. Australia has many amazing bartenders who have boosted a vibrant bar scene, so it will be a pleasure to share my experience with them and discover local trends, new cocktails and produce. It is going to be an exciting opportunity to amplify my dedication to this industry and inspire bartenders and drinkers with lots of events involving trade, consumer and media.

**WHEN DO YOU BEST ENJOY GALLIANO, AND HOW DO YOU RECOMMEND DRINKING/ CONSUMING GALLIANO?**

We always refer to Galliano as a famiglia because throughout the years, we have been working closely together to create a range of flavours that can make any moment or occasion truly special. Galliano L'Autentico has a vibrant herbaceous nature with a distinctive spiciness, anise hint and a strong body. This liqueur is suitable for a variety of drinks from aperitif to digestive and refreshing, fruity serves. Its complexity makes it a perfect ingredient for my signature Mulata Daisy, a modern classic now, served across 30 bars all over the world

after winning a global cocktail competition. For easy home use I would suggest L'Autentico with ginger beer and a fresh squeeze of lime. If you prefer a lighter taste, try to swap it for Galliano Vanilla. Galliano Vanilla is also a great ingredient to convey a stronger character to the Mimosa – grapefruit juice and prosecco – which is ideally enjoyed over brunch.

Galliano Ristretto stands out when compared to other coffee liqueurs. It's an espresso liqueur with its Arabica and Robusta blends offering a perfect balance of bitter and sweet beans which make it a versatile cocktail ingredient. Use its complexity in long drinks – for example in wine-based cocktails or cobbler for an amazing length of flavour. Ristretto is also ideal in one of the big classics, the Espresso Martini. I love mixing coffee cocktails as I reminisce of the first time I took a cocktail shaker in my hands to make a 'caffè shakerato' – shaken coffee – in a small classic bar in the heart of Como. With Galliano, I can elevate the experience and play with the flavour combinations of my drink – for example to give it more nuttiness I use Galliano Amaretto, and for a more refreshing finish I like Galliano Sambuca, which is also a classic pairing in Italy.

**LIVING IN LONDON...WHAT DO YOU MISS ABOUT ITALY AND THE CULTURE?**

What really strikes you when travelling around Italy is the endless array of local produce you can encounter and the local





Ago Perrone (right) and Giorgio Bargiani  
Photo Credit: Niklas Hallén

knowledge and taste for craft. Each region, county, and even the tiniest area has some unique products and a peculiar savoir-faire that distinguish them from their neighbour producers 10km away. The richness and diversity of the landscape and wildlife, together with the highly fragmented and diverse cultural heritage across Italian regions, makes it possible for every artisanal product to be specific and unique to that singular territory – be this a distillate, a variety of vegetable or a cooking method or tool.

**ITALIAN CULTURE IS ALL ABOUT THE APERITIVO AND DIGESTIVO MOMENT. SHARE WITH US A SIGNATURE SERVE OF GALLIANO, FOR EACH OCCASION.**

**Aperitivo Serves:**

**ITALIAN STORM**

30ml Galliano Vanilla  
30ml Light rum  
10ml Fresh lime juice  
Ginger beer  
Garnish with a lime wedge

**GALLIANO MIMOSA**

20ml Galliano Vanilla  
30ml Fresh grapefruit juice  
Top with prosecco

**Digestive Serves:**

**ESPRESSO MARTINI**

20ml Galliano of choice (L'Autentico, Vanilla, Amaretto or Sambuca)  
20ml Galliano Ristretto  
20ml Vodka  
1 x Shot espresso coffee  
1 x Dash Sugar syrup

**A Connaught Bar's Signature**

by Ago Perrone:

**WOOD**

30ml Barsol Pisco infused wild cherry bark  
10ml Aged Rum  
15ml Galliano Aperitivo or Italian bitter  
45ml Americano Cocchi  
10ml Catuaba bark syrup  
10ml Galliano Ristretto  
Grapefruit and Rosemary  
London essence tonic