



Michael Moberly (left) and Joe Cannella operate Ferino's massive Fourth Street barroom and distillery, respectively.
PHOTO/MATT BIEKER

Bitter nature

Ferino Distillery opened on Fourth Street in early November. After renovating the old Reno Bike Project building, the distillery now contains a cocktail bar and coffee shop, both serving drinks full of the *amaro*—an Italian herbal liqueur—made in the back and distributed to bars both locally and nationally. Owner and founder Joe Cannella bought the space after he moved his family to Reno last year.

“We actually launched commercially in 2015 out of San Francisco,” Cannella said. “As we sort of gained distribution, got more and more positive feedback, you know, some medals and awards for our spirits, we realized that we had, I think, an opportunity to bring it in-house, to build a home for ourselves essentially.”

After a family trip to discover his Italian roots in 2010, Cannella (which is actually Italian for “cinnamon”) started making *amaro* from a neutral base spirit—in this case, brandy—and sometimes dozens of botanical flavorings. He began with a traditional Italian cinnamon liqueur in 2015 and now makes three different types: the original Cannella Cinnamon Cordial, Fernet Ferino (named for the new digs in Reno) and the Amaro Cannella.

The first thing that struck me about Ferino—besides the simple, pour-over coffee bar directly beyond the door—is how big the barroom is. It features vaulted ceilings, a long bar and three massive murals by local artist Summer Orr.

“I really wanted it to feel like no other bar in Reno, because there are so many bars that are similar in feeling ... or just kind of general aesthetic,” said Ferino’s creative director Michael Moberly.

Moberly also designed the 11 cocktails on the menu, all of which have at least some addition of the house *amaro*, whose bitterness, Moberly said, can be compared to Campari. I’d never tried *amaro* before, so I sampled all three straight.

First was the cinnamon cordial, which to some might conjure up the sickly sweet specter of the likes

of Fireball. In contrast to “flamin’ hot” whiskey, though, the cordial is spicy and warm—made with real cinnamon instead of its chemical approximation—and above all, dry.

“Anything under 10 percent sugar can be classified as a ‘dry,’” Cannella said. “So those aren’t like your super cloyingly sweet liqueurs.”

Next was the classic *amaro*, which started with a floral, citrus and almost perfume-like high, followed by a mellow, earthy bitterness like anise and black pepper. It was intense and delicious.

Finally, the newest addition to Ferino’s lineup is the fernet, which was developed by Moberly and Cannella as a Nevada-specific spirit.

“The botanicals for it to be classified as a fernet are things that grow in rougher and more arid and mountainous climates,” Moberly said. “Now, our fernet has quite a bit of sage and saffron in it, and, to me, it smells like the desert when it rains.”

I agreed wholeheartedly, and—while it wasn’t my favorite of the three—I enjoyed how it washed through my palate much like a raincloud, soaking everything with flavors of pine and juniper and leaving an almost menthol-like freshness.

“Most of the fernet on the market were hiding a lot of the ingredients behind sugar, behind that sort of like mint-forward kind of profile,” Cannella said. “And by dialing both of those things back ... I was able to expose all of these, like, amazing ingredients that everyone talks about but you can’t really experience.”

With production at Ferino Distillery topping out at 60,000 bottles per year and a steadily growing list of local vendors, I’ll probably be tempted by their products pretty regularly, no matter where I go to drink. □

Ferino Distillery

541 E. Fourth St.

Ferino Distillery is open Wednesday through Sunday—the coffee shop from 11 a.m. till 3 p.m. and the cocktail bar from 3 p.m. till midnight. Learn more at ferinodistillery.com.

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