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A Bracing Sip That's Catching On

An expert on bitter drinks explores the world of amaro.

By ROBERT SIMONSON

Brad Thomas Parsons doesn't seem like a bitter guy. Garrulous and friendly, he's a well-liked regular at several restaurants and bars in his Brooklyn neighborhood, Carroll Gardens.

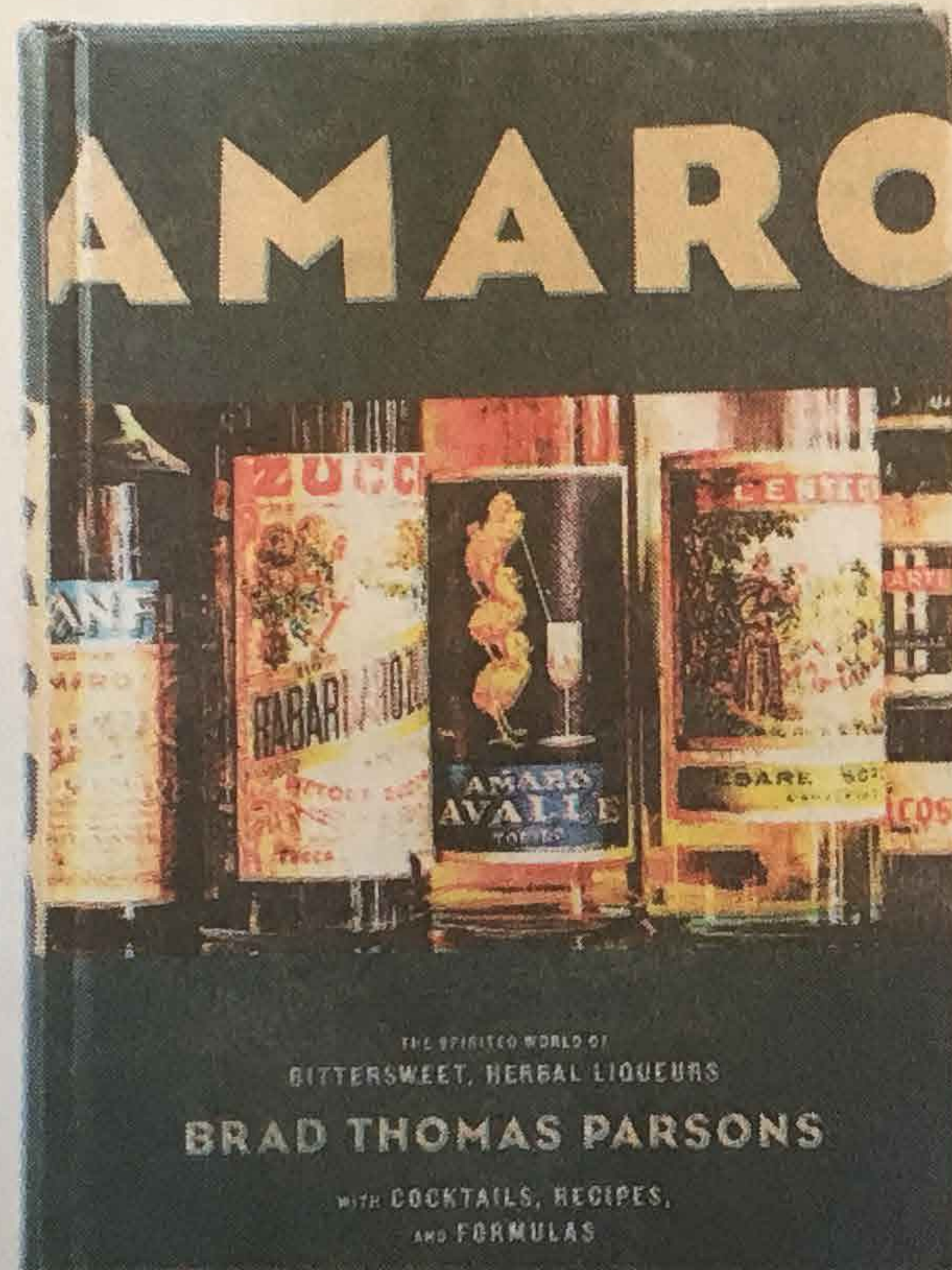
Nonetheless, Mr. Parsons is Mr. Bitters in the cocktail and spirits worlds. He wrote "Bitters," a 2011 book that took a long, loving look at those little bottles whose contents are dashed into drinks. Some credit its success with helping to seed the current bumper crop of cocktail books.

For his follow-up, he's back on the bitter beat. "Amaro: The Spirited World of Bittersweet, Herbal Liqueurs" (Ten Speed Press, \$26), which will go on sale Oct. 11, takes on a genre of distillations that are primarily native to Italy.

As with "Bitters," the book is ideally timed: Many Americans in the last few years have discovered the bracing pleasures of drinks like Campari, Aperol, Cynar and even the acerbic Fernet Branca.

"I think we're in a place with amaro that we were with bitters four or five years ago, where more and more bottles are popping up," Mr. Parsons said.

The same could be said of Mr. Parsons's apartment, where one wall is taken up by shelves laden with liquor bottles, a great many of them amari he has brought home



COLE WILSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES (PARSONS);
NATHAN WEBER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES (COCKTAIL);
PATRICIA WALL/THE NEW YORK TIMES (BOOK)

from Italy. He has the usual suspects (Averna, Lucano, Meletti and Ramazzotti) but also obscure specimens like Amaro Silano, a Calabrian liqueur that has conifer trees on the label yet tastes of oranges; and Kapriol, a rare clear amaro that tastes of juniper.

Like most Italian liqueurs, the last two are regional specialties. The amari explosion in the United States notwithstanding, most brands don't leave the old country. Mr.



Brad Thomas Parsons with his collection of amaro bottles he brought back from Italy. B...

Parsons recalled his time in Rome: "They had three shelves long of amari I had never seen before."

For Mr. Parsons, the idea of researching the history of what he was writing was generally accepted. The recipe proposed of alcohol, sugar and a probiotic botanicals, it gets government has said amaro can or can't be fernet — a subca...

Though the vast majority of most Italians that they call "bitters" are not in the States, makers insist that in Italy, though the distillers have started pretensions.

Mr. Parsons is approaching. "I see it cover the German liqueurs, the French Mexican fernet,"

He quoted Alvin Billy Sunday, an author from Chicago: "We could walk in Chicago



BITTER GIUSEPPE

ADAPTED FROM STEPHEN COLE, THE VIOLET HOUR, CHICAGO

YIELD: 1 DRINK

- 2 ounces Cynar
- 1 ounce Carpano Antica Formula sweet vermouth
- ¼ ounce lemon juice, plus lemon twist for garnish
- 6 dashes orange bitters, preferably Regans'

Combine liquid ingredients in a mixing glass three-quarters filled with ice. Stir until chilled, about 30 seconds. Strain into an old-fashioned glass over large ice cube. Garnish with twist.