

French masterpieces

An exhibition of the rarest works from the Cognac region

The canvas: the French countryside. The oils: the white wines that become the eaux de vie. The brush: the master blender who crafts this “water of life.” The composition: the ultra-premium Cognac, whose artistry is as apparent as the luxurious crystal decanter that is its home.

Although each Cognac is a creative expression of the distillery where it’s produced, the rules of production are as rigid as the laws legislating the usage of its name: Cognac must be produced in its namesake region on the coast, be twice-distilled in copper pot stills and aged in oak casks. Its classifications – based on the age of the youngest Old Pale (VSOP) to XO (Extra Old)... and beyond.

The aficionados of this digestif are just as diverse as its aromas and flavors: Napoléon to Churchill to 50 Cent have enjoyed the elegance of this spirit. Why not add yourself to the list of its admirers?

SELECTIONS BY **EVANGELOS MIHELIS & HARRIS SIEGEL** “POPPIES, NEAR ARGENTEUIL” (1873) BY **CLAUDE MONET**

Camus Jubilé

Encased in Baccarat crystal, this blend was crafted in 1913 to honor the 50th anniversary of the company. Created from the oldest house cognacs, there are as many facets to its taste as there are to its decanter. Price: \$700

Courvoisier Erté

In 1988 Art Deco master Erté created seven lush decanters depicting the cognac-making process. Shown is “Degustation” (“tasting”) when the spirit is swirled to release the aromas. The spirit of the artist is captured inside as well: The 1892 vintage – the year of Erté’s birth – is part of the recipe. Price: \$850

Richard Hennessy

Before partaking in a glass of Hennessy, 18th-century French politician Talleyrand said one must “inhale deeply and then ... set it down and discuss its virtues.” This politician was telling the truth: The aromas seduce you before you ever indulge. After the floral and spices recede, the nuances of this cognac – simply and appropriately named for its founder – are what one would expect from deftly combining more than 100 eaux de vie and aging them for up to two centuries. Magnifique. Price: \$1,300

Hardy Perfection

Created from pure eaux de vie dating back to the 1870s, this is the “oldest known unblended cognac.” Four glorious crystal vessels (each limited to 300 pieces) symbolize the elements: fire, air, earth and water (shown). Quite simply, this 140-year-old is unrivaled by any other spirit in its rarity, complexity and beauty. Price: \$6,000

Martell L’Or

At 60 years this is a relative newcomer on the cognac spectrum, but the rich flavors rank this among the elite of our French nobility. How best to package this liquid gold? In a decanter with 24-karat gold-plated cap and shoulders, of course. Price: \$1,000

Pierre Ferrand Ancestrale

The 300 bottles released annually forgo the extensive blending of its brethren, preferring instead the purity of the spirit. Due to evaporation (or “the angel’s share”) during its 70 years of rest in oak, 100 bottles of wine are needed to produce 750 mL of this elixir. Price: \$500

Louis XIII de Rémy Martin

From its place of honor high atop many bars, Louis XIII has a mystique as tangible as the centuries-old barrels used to age the more than 1,200 varieties of eaux de vie. Only grapes from the Grande Champagne region enter the special cellar reserved for this flagship of the Rémy line. Price: \$1,300

BOTTLES: WINE LIBRARY PHOTOGRAPHS; PETER ACKERMAN PHOTO ILLUSTRATION; JEFF COLSON

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