

Drinks International



Features Travel Retail | Profile | Wine Zone | Bar Zone

Special reports Tequila | Italian wine | Cognac | Cachaça & Shochu

Contents

Editor Christian Davis

+44 (0)1293 763 502 christian.davis@drinksint.com

Deputy Editor David Longfield

+44 (0)1293 763 517 david.longfield@drinksint.com

Senior Reporter Lucy Britner

+44 (0)1293 763413 lucy.britner@drinksint.com

US correspondent J Herbert Silverman

Travel Retail correspondent Joe Bates

Production editor Jaq Bayles

+44 (0)1293 763427 jaq.bayles@drinksint.com

Advertisement Manager Justin Smith

+44 (0)1293 763 293 justin.smith@drinksint.com

Senior Sales Executive Carmen Poel Francesch

+44 (0)1293 763 295 carmen.poel@drinksint.com

Sales Executive Renata Stefanovich

+44 (0)1293 763 296 renata.stefanovich@drinksint.com

Events Director Caroline Berry

+44 (0)1293 763 304 caroline.berry@drinksint.com

Events Sales Executive Jo Morley

+44 (0)1293 763455 jo.morley@drinksint.com

Accounts Annette O'Connell

+44 (0)1293 763 427 annette.oconnell@agilemedia.co.uk

Publisher Russell Dodd

+44 (0)1293 763 256 russell.dodd@drinksint.com

Drinks International

Shaw House

Pegler Way

Crawley

West Sussex

RH11 7AF

United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)1293 763 000/035

Reader services/Subscriptions

please contact:

Drinks International

Subscriptions Department

Tel: +44 (0)20 8606 7533

E-mail: mandy.scott@optimabiz.co.uk

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News

5 Business News

8 People and Events

10 Travel Retail

12 Launches

Analysis

15 Chile

Richard Woodard finds the country finally presenting a united front on wine

16 Neil Towns

Head of the buying team for P&O Ferries

Features

18 Tequila

Premium brands are beginning to call the shots in a category previously blighted by its association with slamming, reports Jaq Bayles

26 Italian wine

David Williams tries to make sense of the fiendishly

complicated Italian wine system and asks: couldn't it all be made a little simpler?

30 Cognac

Drink Longfield reports back from a recent visit to the region, where he finds producers optimistic about exports, despite the recession

36 Cachaça & Shochu

Two unusual spirits are starting to create a buzz in cocktail culture. Larry Walker discovers why they are seducing bartenders

The Zones

40 Show zone

Previews of Prowein and IAADFS in Florida

42 Wine zone

Updates from across the viticultural world

44 Bar zone

News from the drinks industry frontline

46 Departure zone

How you can own a piece of a Tuscan vineyard

News in Brief

Champagne sales drop for first time in sixteen years

Champagne sales fell for the first time in 16 years in 2008. Worldwide Champagne shipments dropped by 4.8% and 16.3m bottles to 322,453,852 bottles, according to the Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne.

Collectively, European countries outside France saw the largest average fall of 6.5%, the equivalent of just over 5.9m bottles, with the major houses bearing the brunt of this and their European shipments down 7.3% to 71.63m bottles.

In France, thanks largely to an increase in sales at the cellar door for growers who achieved 1% growth in total shipments, French domestic shipments held up better than had been expected after

two bad months post-credit crunch in October and November.

Although down 5.64% at the end of November, thanks to a better than expected December, the French market only fell by 3.6% overall – just over 6.4m bottles – with the major houses' shipments down 6.9% to 92.4m bottles but growers ahead 1.1% to 72.12m bottles.

“Our campaign for growers’ Champagnes has borne fruit,” said Patrick le Brun, president du Syndicat General des Vignerons, the main growers’ union. While the major houses saw overall sales slip by 6.7%, co-president of the CIVC Ghislain de Montgolfier points out: “Shipments in 2008 are better than they

were in 2006, this is the third best year ever for Champagne [after 2007 and 1999].”

Shipments outside Europe fell back by 6.2% to 55,751,974 bottles. The most significant fall here came in the USA where shipments fell by nearly 20% from the 21.72m bottles imported in 2007 (which was in turn 6.21% down on 2006).

On the plus side, sales in China and South Korea jumped by 50%, the former nearly reaching the 1m-bottle mark (656,208 in 2007). There were significant rises also in Austria (up 23% on the 1,066,611 shipped in 2007), Brazil (+ 17% on the 600,714 shipped in 2007), Russia (+16% on the 1,033,477 shipped in 2007), Poland (up



Ghislain de Montgolfier

13%) and Australia (+12% on 3.31m in 2007).

In the UK market, where off trade sales fell by 11% in volume and 6% in value (Nielsen to 27/12/2008), the latest available shipment figure to the end of November shows an 11.44% drop to 31.29m bottles.

Spirits contest open for entries

The International Spirits Challenge, the world’s most prestigious spirits tasting competition, is now inviting entries from vodka and white spirits producers.

The competition has been enhanced this year by staggered entry deadlines, allowing individual product areas to be judged separately. Results will be announced across six issues of Drinks International and published on a new, fully searchable website, internationalspiritchallenge.com, where entry forms are also available.

The deadline for vodka and other white spirits entries is March 27.



Constellation Europe has opened Europe’s largest wine warehouse and distribution centre near Bristol, England.

The €50m development will allow Constellation to bottle high-volume Australian brands in the UK – which the company said would increase efficiency as well as reduce CO2 emissions. The 80,000 sq m complex, dubbed Constellation Park, will be fully functional by May1.

- **Moët Hennessy** wines and spirits has posted a 0.2% rise in profits in 2008, compared to 2007. Profit from recurring operations was €1,060m, compared to €1,058m in 2007. Overall trends were positive in Europe but demand was less dynamic in the US and Japan. Emerging markets, such as China, Russia and the Middle East, recorded high growth.

- Chilean wine producer **Caliterra** has teamed up with the **University of Talca** to develop the Colchagua Sustainable Protocol for wine production. The company said the project would act as a “blueprint for encouraging a move to sustainable practices across the entire Chilean wine industry”.

- **Havana Club** rum expects to reach 5 million 9-litre case sales by 2013. The joint venture between Pernod Ricard and Cuba Ron announced 13% annual sales growth in 2008 from 3 million cases to 3.4 million.

- The University of California, Davis is building a major research and teaching winery this summer. The project also includes a Brewing & Food Science Laboratory. The new facilities are part of the **Robert Mondavi Institute for Wine & Food Science**.

- More than 75,000 jobs could be at risk in the UK drinks industry if the government keeps its pledge to increase alcohol duties above the rate of inflation for the next four years, trade leaders have warned. The **Wine & Spirit Trade Association** says the increase will result in an 11% drop in alcohol sales over five years and put retail prices up by 17%.

News digest

Foster's wine – no sale

Foster's has given up any immediate plans to offload its wine business – though it is ready to sell 36 vineyards, 37 brands and three wineries to help save \$100m a year.

The company's in-depth review of its wine business was expected by many to result in a decision to sell its wine operations, which have cost it around A\$7 billion to assemble since the 1996 purchase of Mildara Blass.

But difficult economic conditions have persuaded the company to abandon the idea of a sell-off and concentrate instead on separating a reshaped wine division from the Foster's brewing business.

Foster's chairman David Crawford said: "In light of the operational opportunities available to improve performance, the board has determined that shareholder value will be maximised by retaining the wine business."

"The current difficult conditions in debt and equity markets mean this is not the appropriate time to sell or demerge Foster's wine business."

He added: "The performance of our wine business has been unsatisfactory. In large part this has been the product of poor execution in the Americas and pursuing a multi-beverage model in Australia. We are modifying our strategy and dramatically changing how we operate the wine business by installing a new management team under Ian Johnston."

Guala defends closure

A leading producer of screwcap closures has ended its "dignified silence" by criticising "erroneous claims made by certain cork producers".

Guala Closures has issued a public statement claiming that screwcaps are recyclable, can be produced anywhere in the world, reduce CO2 emissions – and are safe.

It said: "The cork indus-



The Glenlivet's 7% volume growth in the first half of the financial year contributed to a strong performance for Chivas Brothers and parent company Pernod Ricard. The malt turned in a solid performance in the US, France and the UK, justifying the decision to expand the

Speyside distillery with a new mash tun, six new stills and eight new wash backs to accommodate increased production. Work is expected to be completed at the distillery later this year. Pernod Ricard's profits from recurring operations were up 24% at €1.2bn. Sales were 13%

up in the six months to Dec 31. The company reported organic growth of 18% in Asia and a 46% rise in sales in the Americas. There were strong sales in Germany, Sweden, Russia, Poland and Romania but more difficult trading conditions in Spain, the UK and Italy.

try says there are dioxins in the plastic seal used in screwcaps. This is wrong and misleading.

"The liners used are all certified as suitable for food packaging and the claim that there is 'aluminium contamination' is nonsense. Aluminium has long been used to wrap or bottle all kinds of food and beverages with absolutely no risk of contamination."

Diageo profits up

Diageo has reported a 6% increase in operating profit for the six months to Dec 31. The company's £1.6bn came from sales of just over £5bn.

European volumes were down 5% and Asia Pacific by 8%, but Diageo said North America was ahead by 2% and

the performance in Africa was "very strong".

Chief executive Paul Walsh (below) admitted that the second half of the financial year was "difficult to predict" and announced a restructuring



programme aimed at making annual savings of £100m.

He said: "We will be yet more agile in our response to changing consumer demand and we will continue to invest behind our business while achieving efficiencies across the regions, particularly in marketing spend where we are seeing strong media rate deflation."

Cognac balloon bursts

Spirits experts have agreed that tulip-shaped glasses – rather than the traditional brandy balloon – are the most suitable glasses for Cognac.

At the second International Cognac Summit in France, 50 international sommeliers, Cognac aficionados and cellar masters were asked to put 10 different types of glass

through their paces and to vote for their favourites.

The judges were asked to assess each glass on its size, appearance and feel – but also the intensity and complexity of the aromas it conveyed to the taster.

The tulip glass was the "clear favourite", according to the Bureau National Interprofessionnel du Cognac, which organised the summit and the judging.

"Thanks to its wide bowl and narrow neck, it concentrates the Cognac's nose and allows the taster to really appreciate the subtlety and layers of aromatic complexity," it said.

Judges agreed that balloon glasses were most suitable for drinking younger Cognacs, especially over crushed ice.

People & events

Comment

Always look on the bright side

Among all the global carnage – financial and manufacturing markets in disarray as demand dries up along with credit – looking at the results of some of the drinks sector's big guns, you have to conclude we don't appear to be doing too badly.

When you look at the car industry, for example, major producers are having to be bailed out, mothballing factories and sending their workers away for a couple of months in the hope that demand will catch up with supply.

Obviously, the unit price of a car is far greater than that of a bottle of scotch or vodka. We all comfort ourselves with the adage that a drink is an affordable luxury but, for many, a car is a necessity and the bottom has dropped out of the market.

Diageo has come in with a 6% increase in operating profits for the six months to the end of December (see news pages and website) and Pernod Ricard reported profits from "recurring operations" up 24%, with sales in the same period up 13%.

In an indication that all is not rosy in the sector, Diageo has intimated it is going to have to restructure – which means redundancies. Chief executive Paul Walsh would not be drawn on the level of lay-offs. In fact, he got quite tetchy when pressed. You could almost feel the apprehension among the Diageo staff, mostly marketing and PR, who stood by as Walsh and his management team fended off some searching questions from the fourth estate.

Also, the long awaited announcement from Foster's regarding the future of its wine division does not bode well. Many interpret its decision as meaning it has not been able to find a buyer.

A few months ago there were rumours that Pernod was about to divest some of its wine interests to reduce its debt following the acquisition of Absolut. People working for its wine subsidiaries in

Christian Davis
Editor



Spain and Argentina were, and probably still are, anxious about those rumours.

The wine side seems to be taking quite a hit. Although unit prices are lower, production costs – with the vagaries of vintages, plant that is only used once a year and buildings full of expensive oak barrels – mean margins are low. Certainly in the UK wine trade, a number of companies are quietly shedding staff.

The perceived wisdom is that there is a significant shift away from consumption on-premise to staying at home, particularly in the US. That tends to mean trading down from super to just premium and/or brand to own-label. Walsh said premium spirits were holding up, standard predictably was picking up but super and ultra were treading water.

What is bailing out the drinks industry is demand coming from Asia. David Longfield's feature on Cognac (p30) shows how the mature markets in Europe are declining while demand from Singapore, a hub of the region and China, is positively exploding. It remains to be seen if that continues, bearing in mind Chinese industries have been hit by falling demand, particularly in the US. All in all it could be a hell of a lot worse. We just need legislators and tax raisers to stop hitting on the industry.

Appointments

Chivas Brothers, the Scotch whisky and premium gin business of Pernod Ricard, has made **Eric Benoist** marketing director. He replaces Martin Riley who has been promoted to chief marketing officer of Pernod Ricard in Paris. Benoist, who was marketing director at Pernod Ricard subsidiary Martell Mumm Perrier-Jouët in France, reports to Chivas chairman and chief executive Christian Porta and will be a member of the management committee.

Moselland, Germany's largest co-operative exporter, has promoted **Matthias Dockendorff** to area export manager. He takes responsibility for eastern and southern Europe, Asia and Australia and the UK, as well as maintaining contact with the company's agents, importers and direct customers.

Golden Kaan has made **Nicola Blanchard** sales director for Europe. She succeeds Marco Lustenberger, who has decided to pursue his career outside the wine industry. She will be responsible for Golden Kaan's sales development in various European markets.

Brintex, organiser of the London International Wine Fair and Distil, has appointed **Nick Blair**, wine director at Pernod Ricard UK, the new chairman of the shows' advisory board.

Paula Kornell is the new president of the Napa Valley Vintners board of directors. Kornell, who is general manager of Oakville Ranch winery, takes over from Pat Stotesbery, of Ladera Vineyards.

Forth Wines, an independent supplier in Scotland, has made **Kenny Gray** its new managing director. He has worked for Diageo, Scottish Courage, Mars and Coca-Cola. Forth Wines is part of the UK wholesaler, Matthew Clark, which is partly owned by Constellation.

Provence Wines, which represents 580 producers, 66 négociants and 95% of the region, has appointed **Géry Viziale** as marketing director.

Percy Fox has expanded its champagne team with the appointment of **Adrian Beckett** as brand executive for the Vranken Pommery Monopole portfolio.

Tim Lockwood is Grant Burge Wines' new European sales manager. Previously he was a marketing executive at the generic body, Wine Australia.

Nathan Last is United Wineries' new national account manager, responsible for the impulse channel and grocer accounts. He comes from E&J Gallo, where he looked after UK cash & carries.



Eric Benoist



Paula Kornell



Matthias Dockendorff

Diary

● International Sparkling Wine Symposium

March 18

Denbies Wine Estate, England
sparklingwinesymposium.com

● IAADFS, Fort Lauderdale

March 22-26

iaadfs.org

● Prowein

March 29-31

Düsseldorf, Germany
prowein.de

● VinAustria

March 29-April 1

Salzburg, Austria
vinaustria.at

● Vinitaly

April 2-6

Verona, Italy
vinitaly.com

● World Wine Meetings America

April 17-19

Lakefront, Chicago
wwm.fr

● Alimentaria Lisboa

April 19-22

Feira Internacional de Lisboa, Portugal
alimentaria.com

● WSWA Annual Convention & Expo

April 25-28

Orlando Grande Lakes, Florida
swsa.org

● VDP Weinbörse

April 26-27

Mainz, Germany
vdp.de

● Vinoélite

April 26-28

Valencia, Spain
vinoelite.feriavalencia.com

● International Grape & Wine Film Festival

May 8-10

Nuits St George, France
oenovideo.oeno.tm.fr

Travel retail

Ryanair carry-on rules concern industry

Europe's largest low-cost airline, Ryanair, has caused consternation within the continent's duty free and travel industry by insisting on a new one-bag carry-on allowance.

Passengers are now required to pack all their hand luggage, including any duty free or travel retail purchases, into a single bag weighing no more than 10kg.

Anyone flouting this rule now faces a €30 fine and will have excess bags stowed in the plane's hold.

Ryanair insists the new rule has been introduced because

more and travellers are abusing the current rules and taking additional luggage.

"Passengers are made clearly aware of their cabin allowance at the time of their booking and it also printed on their online boarding cards," said Ryanair spokesman Stephen McNamara.

"Passengers who are unable to place items into one bag and refuse to make the additional payment will not be permitted to travel."

Travel retailers and the mainly regional European airports from where Ryanair

operates, fear the rule will discourage customers from making airside purchases.

Frank O'Connell, president of the European Travel Retail Council, believes the airline's crackdown on the personal hand luggage allowance could have "serious repercussions" for airport retailing.

"How it is implemented will determine the level of disruption to airside shopping. We need to work with our airport and airline partners to ensure that our shops can continue to operate unhindered," he said.



Icewine pays off for Niagara Duty Free



Niagara Duty Free has seen sales of Canadian icewines increase by a fifth since the opening of an in-store display and promotional area last September.

The border store worked with its three best-selling icewine brands – Inniskillin, Peller Estates and Pilleteri – on the design of the unit.

It features four large transparencies showing the extreme weather conditions needed to produce icewine, as well as a 50-inch plasma screen displaying constantly changing advertising images.

"The size and scope of the display have allowed us to broaden our selection and

increase the number of SKUs we are recommending," said general manager Steve Richardson.

Increased staff training and sampling were the other elements in the operator's efforts to maximise the potential of the category, which accounts for more than 20% of the retailer's total liquor sales.

"We have a matching icewine tasting unit, which has a fridge inside to keep the icewine cold ready for individual or bus tour tastings," Richardson added.

"This has allowed us to offer superior service at all times, regardless of staffing schedule."

42 Below vodka tasting bar opens at Auckland international airport

Bacardi Global Travel Retail Division has joined forces with DFS Group to open a permanent in-store tasting bar dedicated to its 42 Below vodka brand at Auckland international airport.

The bar is located in DFS's new arrivals shop, one of the largest in Asia/Pacific, which opened last March to widespread industry acclaim.

It features a branded entrance and merchandised gondolas stocking the entire range of 42 Below flavours.

Commenting on the opening, 42 Below brand ambassador at Auckland airport Michael Jackson said: "New Zealand is the birthplace of 42 Below, and it is the perfect locale for travellers to savour our speciality cocktails we are mixing freshly."

"Travellers have their choice of tasting the variety of flavours, such as 42 Below Feijoa with either apple juice, Chi water, kiwi mixed with pineapple, or cranberry and apple juices, as well as 42 Below Manuka cocktails with ginger beer."



Rémy in Piper-Heidsieck price hikes

Rémy-Cointreau has revealed it plans to increase duty free prices on its Piper-Heidsieck champagne brand, despite the gloomy economic outlook.

Director for travel retail Asia/Pacific Walter Kooijman blamed rising production costs for the increases. "We have to put the current recession in perspective of our absolutely record sales in 2007 in combination with the production capacity constraints which remain in the sector," he said.

Kooijman added the company was still committed to investing in the travel retail channel in spite of a sales slowdown towards the end of last year. "We remain committed to our investments and brand building programmes," he said. "Piper-Heidsieck has

been running premium and impactful promotions towards the end of the year during the key months in most of the premium airports around the world. In this way we

have been able to continue building the brand in developed markets and recruit new consumers in emerging markets."

Kooijman added that the super-premium Piper-Heidsieck Rare Vintages, which were launched at last October's TFWA World Exhibition, had been listed in every key airport worldwide with their own supporting merchandise.



Pernod Ricard reveals strategy for Americas

Pernod Ricard Travel Retail (PRTR) Americas has pledged to offer better support and faster response times for duty-free customers as market conditions in the region continue to worsen.

Commenting on the strategy, PRTR Americas president Christophe Lemarié said: "While tactical promotions will comprise the majority of our [promotional] activations, we will continue to reinforce our premiumisation activity – appealing and impactful merchandising and point-of-sales materials will become core in our communications message to consumers.

"We will also use special secondary packaging to tempt consumers to trial and trade-

up to premium products as we have done with our Kahlúa mini-packs at airports.

"We will also step up sampling promotions with the introduction of the new Chivas advertising campaign, Chivalry, in key Caribbean markets such as Puerto Rico.

"Finally, primary promotions will continue offering 360-degree leverage at store level, including point of sale development, consumer price and interactive promotions, as well as staff incentives."

Lemarié said PRTR Americas had not been badly affected by the global credit crunch so far. "Sales in US duty free have been especially strong, as well as in Brazilian duty free. Obviously we are

monitoring the situation given the accumulation of worrying news such as the decline in [passenger] traffic and the depreciation of the Mexican peso and Brazilian real."

● At the IAADFS exhibition in Fort Lauderdale this month, the focus for PRTR Americas will be on duty free exclusive products in key liquor categories such as The Glenlivet 25 Year Old, Jameson Signature Reserve, Beefeater 24 and Absolut 100.

The company will also host two cocktail events during the show to mark the relaunch of Absolut 100 and the introduction of the previously mentioned Chivas Regal advertising campaign, Chivalry.

Lufthansa top in Cellars in the Sky

German flag carrier Lufthansa emerged as the clear winner from the annual Business Traveller magazine Cellars in the Sky wine awards, which were held in London last month.

The airline picked up four awards – Best First Class White Wine (Wente Riva Ranch Chardonnay 2005), Best First Class Sparkling Wine (Piper-Heidsieck Cuvée Rare), Best First Class Wine Cellar and an overall award for the Consistency of Wines across Business and First Class.

Qatar Airways also performed strongly, winning awards both for business class (Best White Wine for Bernkasteler Doctor Loosen Riesling Kabinett 2005) and for first class (Best Red Wine for Morton Estate Pinot Noir 2005).

Cathay Pacific picked up an award for Best Business Class



Red Wine (Palliser Estate Martinborough Pinot Noir 2005), while Qantas' entry was judged Best First Class Fortified or Sweet Wine (Morris of Rutherglen Old Premium Liqueur Tokay Muscat).

Commenting on the awards, one of the judging panel, wine critic Charles Metcalfe, said: "Some carriers really succeed in finding fine wines that suit

the conditions of air travel. It's not enough just going for a famous name.

"Not all wines that taste great on the ground will work in the air. It's not easy to find wines that satisfy the expectations of a business or first class traveller and taste good onboard."

A total of 29 airlines submitted entries to this year's awards.

News in Brief

Gebr Heinemann has appointed **Rüdiger Stelkens** liquor, tobacco and confectionery buyer. He replaces Adolf Paschek, who retires from the German travel retailer after 23 years' service.

Bahrain Duty Free saw liquor sales rise 31% last year, ahead of overall turnover, which increased 17% to reach about BD36.5m. It is the Middle Eastern operator's second biggest product category.

World Duty Free and **Diageo** have created a new menu at Bar 5, their joint-venture cocktail bar at London Heathrow's Terminal 5. The menu features a range of 11 new core cocktails made using Diageo brands, and a regularly updated "Special" cocktail.

Distilleria Bottega has launched a prosecco at this month's International Association of Airport Duty Free Stores exhibition in Fort Lauderdale. Il Vino dei Poeti Gold – which is described as having a fruity bouquet and tasting of apple, pineapple and mango – features a gilded bottle and is priced in duty free at \$35.

Saba Tahir has become purchasing and research manager at Dubai Duty Free, which is restructuring its purchasing team after last year's opening of Dubai airport's Terminal 3.

Brown-Forman has made a major breakthrough in the Scandinavian travel retail market after gaining multiple listings for Jack Daniel's, Southern Comfort and Finlandia vodka with Swedish company Inflight Service, which distributes to regional ferry lines, airport retailers and cruise lines.

Launches



Aconcagua Costa Sauvignon Blanc Single Vineyard 2008

Brand owner Viña Errazuriz
Price £9.99
Markets Europe, Far East, Americas
Trade contact Hatch Mansfield +44 1344 871 800 (UK); or Carlos de Carlos, commercial director, cdecarlos@chadwickwines.cl

This wine is aimed at consumers willing to trade up and try Sauvignon Blanc outside the traditional New Zealand or Loire offerings. The new wine represents the first vintage from the Errazuriz Manzanar vineyard within Aconcagua Costa. It is made with 100% Sauvignon Blanc and has an abv of 13.5%.



Shiraume Umeshu Plum Sake

Brand owner Akashi-Tai Sake Brewery
Price £11.99, ¥1200 (500ml)
Markets Japan, UK
Trade contact Malcolm Cowen, cowen.co.uk

The Umeshu is produced by infusing Wakayama plums in premium ginjo sake for two years. Targeting both male and female cocktail drinkers aged 25-plus, as well as lovers of Japanese food and drink culture, Shiraume is recommended neat over ice or as a base in cocktails. At 14% abv, it can also be used as an aperitif or an alternative to dessert wine.



Bunnahabhain Islay Single Malt Manzanilla Sherry Wood Finish

Brand owner Burn Stewart Distillers
Price £70
Markets Northern Europe
Trade contact enquiries@burnstewartdistillers.com

Burn Stewart's Bunnahabhain Islay distillery has released a new limited edition – a single malt scotch with Manzanilla sherry wood finish.

The spirit is aged in traditional oak on the Hebridean island for 12 years before being transferred into Manzanilla sherry casks for another four.

There are only of 3,792 bottles of this non-chill filtered, higher strength (53.2% abv) single malt.

Tasting notes include of dark chocolate and dry sherry flavours, a developing, roasted nutty maltiness with hints of liquorice and eucalyptus.



Vieux Carré Absinthe Superieure

Brand owner Philadelphia Distilling
Price US\$60
Markets US eastern states, with western states following soon
Contact Philadelphia Distilling, (1) 215 671 0346

The spirit is batch-distilled using double maceration with both grand wormwood and petite wormwood. The flavour profile includes green and star anise, fennel, doux provence, hyssop and spearmint. The flavour and colour derive entirely from natural herbs.



Prucia Umeshu de France

Brand owner Isake

Price £27.99; Europe €25-€30

Markets Japan, UK; Europe to follow

Contact info@isake.co.uk; JCVincent@louis-royer.com (international)

Working in partnership with Cognac Louis Royer and Suntory, UK sake specialist Isake has taken its know-how in the production of the Japanese plum spirit, Umeshu, and applied it to a new plum liqueur made in France.

Prucia is produced using Golden Japan plums grown in Moissac, south west France – reputed to be the country's best plum-growing region. The fruit is macerated in French grape spirit for 11 months in stainless steel tanks before a final month finishing in used French brandy casks.

The launch follows two years of research and is described as "a fusion of eastern and western cultures". At 15% abv, Prucia is recommended to be served over ice in an Old Fashioned glass.



Wakefield Estate Pinot Noir

Brand owner Wakefield Wines

Price £9.49, US\$18, €12.50

Markets UK, Ireland, US (from May), Australia and New Zealand

Trade contact sales@stratfordwine.co.uk

Produced in Clare Valley, Australia, Wakefield Estate Pinot Noir has just been launched in the UK and is due to appear in the US in May. The 14.5% abv wine is aimed at both the on- and off-trades and has an abv of 14.5%.

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International Bartenders Association
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Riding out the storm

A combination of good fortune and sound business practice means Chile's developing wine sector is well placed to tough out the worst of the recession, says Richard Woodard

Chile has always had lots going for it as a winemaking country: perfect climatic conditions, varied soils and, thanks to the Andes, a ready water supply to ward off drought.

Turn the clock back – let's say to my first visit in 2000 – and the wines were promising, if a little inconsistent, while investment in quality vineyard sites was beginning to impress. But the country lacked a coherent generic marketing strategy and meaningful brands.

Wines of Chile now presents a united front, boosted by government support and a dynamic UK office under Michael Cox. In 2009, it hopes to repeat the trick with a new US office under ex-Moët Hennessy executive Lori Tieszen in New York. Meanwhile, producers – led by the dominant Concha y Toro – are gaining traction with brands such as Casillero del Diablo and Cono Sur.

It's been an impressive evolution, but far from smooth. In fewer than five years, Chilean companies watched the value of the peso against the US dollar move from CLP730 in late 2003 to CLP435 in early 2008.

For an industry built on exports, that ain't good. Most companies pay costs in pesos and earn income in foreign currency, so profitability is a pipe dream for many. Investment began to dry up as companies tightened their belts.

Then came the global economic downturn. Paradoxically, this brought some good news for Chile, as demand for natural resources such as copper declined sharply, sending the peso tumbling to almost CLP700 against the dollar. By early February, it had rallied to CLP624.

Double-edged sword

So – what now? In theory, the currency shift should have left companies in better shape to revive investments in vineyards and infrastructure, but is such a strategy sustainable in the economic climate? And should Chile persist with its



Northern valley areas such as Elquí are adding new wine styles

focus on higher-priced products as its main markets enter recession?

Michael Cox notes that the recent currency movements, while helping overall profitability, are also a double-edged sword: “The trouble is most exporters in Chile export in US dollars, so it's making their products a bit more expensive – or in the case of the UK, a lot more expensive,” he says. “It's better, but it's still not ideal.”

The downturn has slowed growth for Chile, but it has, to date, evaded the worst. Late last year, Wines of Chile president René Merino was in relatively bullish mood, noting a slight upturn in demand for 2009.

In the UK, volumes are edging down in line with the market, but value continues to rise, leaving Cox cautiously optimistic. The key, recognised by Cox and Merino, is the combination of Chile's drive for higher quality and prices – and its reputation for value for money.

“On the surface you would say pursuing higher prices was not very realistic,” says Cox, “but I am quite optimistic because Chile does still offer extraordinary value for money.”

Resilient structure

There's also optimism in the resilience of companies. As profits dwindled in recent years, it seemed consolidation was inevitable.

But, with exceptions, it hasn't happened. Last July's merger of

Tarapacá and San Pedro is the only high-profile deal of the recent past.

Why is this? Arguably the most significant reason is many owners of Chilean wineries make their money elsewhere – through mining, salmon, avocados and so on – and are not reliant purely on wine.

This naturally engenders a more long-term approach, which equips the country to ride out the worst of the current economic storm.

And, although it may have slowed, the investment back into Chilean vineyards continues. Companies such as Viña Ventisquero and VC Family Estates are pushing the credentials of areas such as coastal Lolol and Bío-Bío, while the northern valleys of Limari and Elquí are adding more wine styles. A move to restructure wine appellations – swapping political boundaries for DOs based on winemaking style – can only help to raise the profile of these new vineyard areas.

No wine-producing country is going to find the next couple of years easy – particularly not one as reliant on exports as Chile. But, if it holds its nerve and resists the temptation to return to the bargain basement, the prospects look bright for Chile to cement its position as a fully grown-up producer of quality wines at higher prices – but still with that vital reputation for providing good value for money.



Wines of Chile president René Merino: bullish mood



Who pays the

Neil Towns heads the buying team for ferry operator P&O, with responsibility for sourcing everything from BWS to sausages and toilet rolls for the fleet. Christian Davis catches up with him

For most people in the trade, the idea of travel retail conjures up images of airport shopping malls, well appointed and spacious stores, T5 at Heathrow, Dubai – not forgetting glitzy shows such as TFWA Cannes and IAADFS Florida.

But there is a significant other ocean-bound side to the business in the form of ferries and cruise liners – and the former is rather more gritty than the glamorous “up, up and away” side.

Neil Towns is the 38-year-old head of the buying team for P&O Ferries, which operates between the UK and France, Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain.

Based in Dover, England, above an 80,000sq m warehouse on the world-famous white cliffs, Towns’ team of six buyers in a department of 30 purchase everything from beer, wines and spirits (BWS) and tobacco to catering and cutlery for the fleet of 27 ships. He estimates his department is responsible for a £150 million annual spend.

The ferries, “short sea” in particular, used to be belt-and-braces affairs with holidaymakers and day-trippers stocking up mainly on spirits, beer and cigarettes. That changed with the ending of duty free in 1999 and the opening of Eurotunnel, which provided major opposition on the all-important Dover-Calais route.

Generating footfall

BWS is still crucial to generating footfall but now, with duty paid and no tax on wine in France, margins are painful. So Towns and his team have had to look elsewhere to add to the offering and boost profit.

“Alcohol is still 43% of volume but 23% of value,” says Towns. “The challenge is to grow the more profitable areas. BWS and tobacco have declined as there are fewer day-trippers and supermarkets have been loss-leading, but beauty and fashion accessories yield a better margin.

“Ideally, a customer will buy two bottles of Bells or gin, 800g of tobacco, some Chanel (perfume) and maybe a handbag on top. Even if the margins are not great from BWS and tobacco, it is still cash flowing through the business.”



As well as operating the warehouse and regularly checking on the on-board operations, Towns also spends time keeping up to speed with the likes of Tesco, the UK’s leading multiple retailer, and going to retail parks and shopping malls such as Bluewater to the east of London. Just in case he is missing something.

“We have clearance products from Christmas, ‘40% off high street prices’, a St Valentine’s range (in February) and of course Easter – 1kg chocolate Easter eggs. That is not going to get massive footfall. It echoes the high street but we can’t just echo it, we have to consider French pricing (on the Dover-Calais route) and have a travel retail mentality,” Towns adds.

“We have been looking at gifting for BWS with an emphasis away from basic bottles and prices. We look at the way beauty does it,” says Towns

On board the Dover-Calais boat there was a Johnnie Walker Club pack at £39.95, Veuve Clicquot in its hard-to-miss bright yellow chiller sleeve, Johnnie Walker Blue Label at £129, Johnnie Walker Gold Label 18 Year Old at £99.9

and two Chivas Regal for £30, saving £29.98.

While whisky calls most of the shots in the ferry shops, Towns and his team are looking at brandy, specifically Cognac – it has two Courvoisier VS for £35 (saving £20.66) and top-of-the-range Rémy at £99.99 – and premium white spirits. Apparently Blavod and Vladivar do well and there are Smirnoff Black at £20.99 and Absolut 100 and Grey Goose at £29.99.

“We are not going to sell hundreds of bottles but people may try a bottle as a gift,” says Towns.

The ships do a good, steady trade in beer – two cases of 24 Stella Artois premium lager for £20 (“We have a good relationship with InBev,” says Towns) and Old Speckled Hen at a very competitive £11.99 for 24x500ml.

The wine offering is basic. Most major brands – Gallo, Blossom Hill, Kumala and recently Jacob’s Creek – sell at six bottles for £23.94, but there is not much for the serious wine buff. “Volume follows the promotions, so 70% is sold on promotion,” says Towns.

With an operation that is practically 24/7 (the

ferryman?

Far left: the Pride of Dover sails away from the world-famous white cliffs
Left: The spirits offering looks more towards premium and gift boxes
Right: The off-licence on board the Pride of Hull



Neil Towns answers some frequently asked questions

What does a buyer look for? Quality product; communication with the customer; funds for promotions; gift packs; product for tasting in the passenger bars

What is the P&O manifest?

Buying department: Six buyers in a total team of 30
Total purchasing power, including catering and provisions: £150 million
BWS: 30% of the £100m retail sales
Ferries: 27 with five on Dover-Calais – two pairs plus the one-off Pride of Burgundy.
Dover/Calais: 8 million passengers a year, 28% of whom buy from the shops
Ferry shops: 450sq m to 550sq m
Warehouse: 80,000sq m, five years old
Alcohol: 23% of value, 43% volume of goods sold
BWS: 70% is spirits with 1.5m bottles sold and 2.7m bottles of wine
Malt whiskies: 35 listed, between five and 10 lines change in a year
Premium vodkas: four

The future

New ships will arrive in Dover in December 2010 and September 2011. They will be larger than any ship on the short sea by a wide margin and will take up to approximately 2,000 passengers and a considerably larger number of lorries than any current ship. The new shops will be 550sq m.

warehouse only closes for Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning), Towns sums up his *modus operandi* as: “My personal work ethic is to get the job done as quickly and efficiently as possible, then move on so we maybe get home nearer to 5.30 than 8.30.”

Basically, the ships refuel a couple of times a week and the loading and unloading of cars, freight and foot passengers takes 20 minutes each during the day and about five minutes each at night.

Stock for all of the ferries is delivered to the warehouse where it is broken down into consignments for the individual ferries. After picking and packing the lorries are loaded during the day and taken on board at night when they are quietest. Provisions are stored and shelves stacked through the night.

Complicated operation

The warehouse has chilled and frozen stores as it is also Towns’ responsibility to buy and supply the likes of sausages and bacon for the ferries’ famed British breakfasts, beer kegs for the bars as well as toilet rolls, fashion accessories and beauty products. With multi-temperatures and not everything going on a palette, it is a complicated operation. Towns is proud of the warehouse operation and one of his projects is to try to attract third party wholesaling.

In the main, Towns and his team are dealing with the big players – Diageo, Pernod Ricard, InBev, E&J Gallo, Constellation, as they are looking in the main for major brands. He has

obviously had issues with some of the suppliers when P&O is regarded as a UK retailer. Choosing his words carefully, he reflects that when the company’s buying operation is switched to travel retail, their voices are heard.

“In the UK market we are small fish, but treat us as travel retail and we have a big part to play,” expounds Towns. “With Diageo in the local market, we were struggling to get attention but now we’re with travel retail and we get exclusive products as we need things to differentiate. We are a large customer for that part of Diageo and we get that level of attention. It is the same with Pernod Ricard and Beam Global/Maxxium – they all have desire to grow volume,” he says.

“So what are he and his team looking for? “The product and category have to work for themselves. We have to concentrate on the big names because that is where the volume and value are. We cannot have too many SKUs, we are more limited. We have to follow successes in the high street and demand will follow,” says Towns
“Tesco has the space, the gondola ends. We can only add to the range if the product is able to develop in our environment. We have to go for tried and tested. It is difficult to persuade P&O to try niche product,” he says.

And what does he do when he is not buying and loading? Towns is married with two young daughters, aged two and four, and lives in Sandwich just north of Dover. One of his passions is cycling – a complete gear change from boats and buying.

A shot in the arm

Premium tequilas have been inspiring mixologists the world over, and the efforts of producers to raise the spirit's profile are starting to pay off. Jaq Bayles reports

After years of being considered a binge shot drink or the basis of the ubiquitous margarita, tequila is getting a major image overhaul. Depending on who you talk to, it's either the new whisky, the new wine – or the new rock 'n' roll.

Major producers are falling over themselves to reposition Mexico's national tittle as an ultra-premium cocktail ingredient, enlisting the aid of top-end bartenders in their quest to educate the consumer about the provenance and differing flavour profiles of 100% agave tequila – the version that scoops the minimum classification for a tequila which must be made from no less than 51% Weber blue agave.

At the same time, they are busy opening up new markets for a spirit that has previously been confined mainly to the US and Mexico. Marina Borsini, global brand director for Diageo's Jose Cuervo brand, estimates overall tequila case sales at 20m worldwide, with 75% of those going into the US, Mexico and the UK

And despite the global credit crunch, things are looking up at the luxury end, particularly in Russia and Asia.

Tequila has a long history, having been produced since the early 1500s, mainly within a 100-mile radius of the town of Tequila in Jalisco State. According to the Tequila Source information website, as of November 2008 there were 129 registered tequila distilleries producing 898 certified brands.

Only a handful of names really stand out among these brands in terms of global recognition, and Patrón is one currently creating

a buzz as a brand which is intent on taking the ultra-premium category worldwide.

Chris Spake, Patrón global brand manager, says there is a definite trend for people migrating to 100% agave products from the 'mixto' (51% agave) they have been drinking all their lives.

He says: "A lot of brands in duty free channels are not 100% agave. Those people who get introduced to 100% go 'Wow. I never knew tequila could taste like that.' That's the evaluation of consumers in the US and our company mission is to take that to the rest of the world."

Patrón retains a distributor partner in each country and Spake says this year it will be concentrating on educating consumers, particularly in the markets with the most potential – the UK, Canada, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia and the Caribbean. "We

are targeting the luxury lifestyle consumer more than the tequila drinker," he says. "All the time this credit crisis has evolved, affluent or aspiring people have been most reluctant to give up liquor."

Challenging year

But he admits if the economy continues to worsen in the US, "it could certainly be a challenging year", adding: "I don't know how the global luxury consumer will change their behaviour. Asia is the last and least to be affected by the global credit crisis so I'm a little more optimistic about Asia and a little more realistic about Europe and Americas."

Promotion of Patrón as far as the States is concerned has been about drinking Patrón Silver on the rocks, targeting consumers who already





A jimador at work in an agave field

drink expensive gin, vodka and rums. “ We also promote Patrón in mixed long drinks. For example, a Cosmopolitan made with Grey Goose can also be made with Patrón,” says Spake.

Russia is the country the tequila producers are getting most excited about. Spake says it “went from zero in 2007 to the number five country after the US”. He adds: “Russia has a robust luxury consumer and real growing interest in expensive spirit brands. They are trying Patrón and loving the affiliation they get from it being luxury brand. Our forecast for Russia is for double-digit growth.”

Bacardi-owned Cazadores global brand ambassador Magally Franco agrees that Russia is looking good for tequila culture, pointing out that the cocktail industry has been growing rapidly there in the past two years and only two or three

Bartenders and consumers are starting to understand the beauty of tequila. Now bartenders have more knowledge it’s like buying a bottle of wine

Magally Franco

Tequila cocktails

Golden Cazadores

50ml Cazadores Reposado
5ml honey
15ml orgeat syrup
5ml lime juice
175ml apple juice
Method: Shaken
Glass: Highball
Garnish: Apple fan



Amanecer en los Altos

50ml Cazadores Reposado
1 kiwi wheel
6 mint leaves
20ml Martini Bianco
Method: Shaken
Glass: Martini cocktail
Garnish: Kiwi wheel



Pomegranate Cazadores Margarita

50ml Cazadores Reposado
25ml pomegranate juice
20ml lime juice
15ml triple sec
10ml gomme syrup
Method: Blended
Glass: Margarita
Garnish: Pomegranate, salt rim and lime wedge



Recipes by Cazadores brand ambassador Magally Franco

Tequila

tequila brands are currently recognised there. But the real focus for Cazadores has been on Japan, where it was launched last October.

Franco is particularly keen to educate consumers about the provenance of tequila. As global brand ambassador and a mixologist she travels the world, meeting with bartenders and talking up the process involved in making tequila.

“Perceptions are changing – in the past three years tequila has been growing the most in spirits,” she says. “Bartenders and consumers are starting to understand the beauty of tequila. Now bartenders have more knowledge it’s like buying a bottle of wine.” Or, indeed, a whisky.

Highs and lows

Agave plants are grown on both highlands and lowlands, and Franco makes the comparison: “It’s like having whisky from the highlands or the lowlands. Tequila from the highlands is going to be floral and fruity because it’s a rich mineral soil. In the lowlands it’s volcanic soil so that tequila is peppery and punchy. Cazadores is from the highlands.”

She is backed up here by Diageo’s Borsini, who says there’s still “a fair amount of education we need to do with bartenders and consumers, raising awareness that we have different types of tequilas”.

She points out that it takes five to 10 years to grow an agave plant and that tequila has its own denomination of origin.

“Knowing about the distillation process and ageing is still very new for consumers. If you want to go deeper there’s the whole provenance of highland and lowland. Tequila is very dynamic – it’s not your father’s spirit. There’s a wonderful level of dynamism, fun and socialisation. Even at the high end it’s energetic. It brings people together.”

Skyy Spirits would certainly agree. The



company is celebrating its first year as distributor and marketer of the ultra-premium Cabo Wabo – a portfolio of tequilas created by US rocker Sammy Hagar.

Brand manager Alexis Pagis refers to Cabo Wabo as an “ultra-premium, high energy drink associated with good times and fun”. He says consumption of the brand is mostly shot-driven but there’s a new trend for consumers to upgrade their shots. He says: “A traditional shot would be whatever’s cheapest but we have seen premiumisation everywhere and consumers want

a better type of shot and will pay \$8-10 to ensure they have a good time.”

Rock ‘n’ roll tequila

Much promotion of the brand is on the back of “the rock and roll music platform”, supporting Hagar’s annual tour. “We like to think we are the rock and roll tequila, so we are looking at event sponsorship in that arena and to expand the digital and online platform.”

Cocktail culture is also important to Cabo Wabo, says Pagis. “Tequila has a lot of character so it’s easy for bartenders to create different flavours. In the US we have a big margarita dependence and that drives everything associated with tequila.”

Currently the brand is poised for an international roll-out, having previously been held back by only being available in 75cl bottles rather than the European standard of 70cl. Says Pagis: “The category opportunities are high end, top bars and top European restaurants.”

In the UK, too, it’s the cocktail culture that’s driving tequila consumption with style bars starting to upgrade to the premium end.

“We’re noticing a lot more



Tequila



100% agave tequilas coming out,” says Daniel Deephouse, Sauza brand manager at Beam Global Spirits & Wine. “When you get better quality you can move out of traditional shots and into cocktails.” Deephouse is particularly excited about the provenance of tequila and how that can attract new consumers

“You can trace the roots of tequila back to the Aztecs and beyond. Agave has so many amazing benefits to people’s lives. It’s used in a lot of different aspects. Agave syrup is being heralded as a replacement for sugar – health stores are taking it on. The Mexicans make a non-alcoholic juice by cutting the heart of the plant out and using the juice to feed to children in the morning. The plant’s needles are used for clothing, and it makes paper and soap. With an amazing history and heritage like that it’s what people are looking for in terms of provenance. This is for people who like to stand out in a crowd, are bored of drinking a flavourless white spirit and want something to say something about them.”



He adds that in the economic downturn people take more time to think about what makes them “happy and feel good”.

Beam’s approach in the UK is to make people more aware of the Hornitos range it launched last year. “We’re going to be talking to consumers about mixability and long drinks and extending the premium range at top end,” says Deephouse.

“Everything we do we reinvest in the industry and here in UK

we’re trying to let people know there’s more to tequila than they may think. Bartenders are fantastic and are picking it up and making it their own.”

Diageo’s Borsini is equally enthusiastic about the role bartenders are playing in putting tequila to the fore: “Bartenders like it a lot. The bartender profile has increased to the point where they are at the same level as chefs and they are exerting a lot of influence, particularly at the high end. They want to experiment with new spirits and tequila is not the same old thing. There’s a real industry push to educate bartenders on tequila. It’s something to discover.”

And she sees this as a global trend: “What we see is worldwide. We see tequila picking up in areas we’ve not seen before – Asia, for example where there’s growth of luxury and non-local western spirits. There’s that turned-on experience and something new is going on all over the world. Also in Europe we see areas of opportunity – Greece, London, Russia. I am extremely excited about the future of tequila. I really see consumers and batenders starting to recognise what the spirit is. Complexity and fun.”

There’s a real industry push to educate bartenders on tequila. It’s something to discover
Marina Borsini
Diageo



There are two categories of tequila – 100% de Agave, which is made with only the sugars of the Weber blue agave; and Tequila, commonly called Mixto which is made using 51% agave sugars and 49% other sugars. Within these categories there are five types of tequila – Blanco (Silver), Joven (Gold), Reposado (Aged), Añejo (Extra aged) and Extra Añejo (Ultra-aged).

Tequila Blanco/White/Silver

Clear, unaged tequila normally bottled immediately after being distilled. When tequila drips from the cooling coils of the alambique, its correct name is silver or plata, but it is more commonly called white or Blanco.

Tequila Joven/Gold

This is not Blanco which has been left to mature, but to which colourants and flavourings, such as caramel colouring, oak tree extracts, glycerine or sugar syrup, have been added prior to bottling. These tequilas are often called suave, joven, gold, or abocado, implying youth and smoothness. They can be made from 100% agave but are normally made with the 51% mixto tequila.

Tequila Reposado – Rested or Aged

To be termed a reposado or rested tequila, the spirit must remain in wood for at least two months and no longer than 12 months. This is required by the Mexican government. French oak, or white oak, barrels are among the most commonly used in the ageing process.

Tequila Añejo – Extra Aged or Vintage

The next level of ageing is Añejo, which means “vintage”, and can only appear on bottles of tequila aged in oak barrels with a maximum capacity of 600 litres for at least a year. American whiskey barrels, French oak casks or Cognac barrels are commonly used and Añejos are typically aged between one and three years. They are smoother than reposado tequilas. The commercial alcohol by volume must be adjusted by the addition of distilled water for each type of tequila.

Tequila Extra Añejo – Ultra-Aged

This is the newest classification of tequila defined in a report from the 2005 meeting of the National Committee on Standardisation. Ultra-aged or Extra Añejo tequila has been aged for at least three years, in direct contact with the wood of oak or Encino oak containers with a maximum capacity of 600 litres. Again, its commercial alcohol content must be cut to strength.

Patrón bossing tequila

The name Patrón is apt – Spanish for “the boss”, Patrón is without question the Bruce Springsteen of tequila. Its success is little short of phenomenal – from around 340,000 cases in 2005 to 1.72 million now. And that is for a tequila that commands prices skywards of US\$40.

The history is interesting in that the brand was created by John Paul DeJoria, arguably best known for creating Paul Mitchell hair care products, along with his business partner, Martin Crowley. DeJoria started off penniless, the son of an Italian immigrant father and Greek immigrant mother, in Los Angeles. He is now a billionaire. Crowley is dead and, in a complex deal, his executors sold his share in Patrón to Bacardi.

But since January 2005, the driving force behind this ultra-premium 100% agave tequila has been John McDonnell. In researching both Patrón and McDonnell, the adjective “bullish” seems to crop up time and again. McDonnell spoke to Drinks International and bullish seems about right, although not too much when it comes to predicting for the next 12 months.

Asked how the brand is doing, he has the figures at his fingertips. Worldwide the main brand is up 11%. The orange and coffee variants are up 22% and 80% respectively. According to Nielsen, in the year to Feb 7, Patrón is up 16% in the US while the total tequila category trails at just 3% up. Volumes grew by 11% last year to 1.72m cases.

The 47-year-old was in international sales and marketing with Seagram before it got taken over and split up by Pernod Ricard and Diageo. So, when it comes to building a brand and maintaining momentum, he knows the form – and it is endlessly surprising how many brand owners fail to follow the basics.

The secret to Patrón’s success in one succinct word is: consistency. In a sector where quality can be at best variable, Patrón sets its stall out as handmade from the best ingredients. If there had been any doubt about that, the brand and the company would have been found out by now. Bartenders, who aren’t without scepticism and cynicism, positively crow about Patrón.

But quality is not everything. McDonnell has unrelentingly pursued consistent support of the brand through advertising, educational initiatives for the trade – particularly bartenders and bar operators – the best possible distribution partners and a clear, consistent message to consumers.

“We have a global campaign that works well locally,” says McDonnell. “We look at two groups:



John McDonnell, Patrón chief operating officer

the 35 to 55-year-olds and the 21 to 34-year-olds. The latter look at the former and aspire to have a BMW – they are the wannabes. We advertise in Fortune and Forbes magazines but also in Esquire and Playboy.”

McDonnell lives in Florida – he is married with two grown up children – but Patrón is headquartered in glitzy Las Vegas. Describing his hobbies as jogging and skiing, he says he spends 250 days of the year “on the road”.

He is candid about not being able to afford to advertise in 200 countries (the brand is in more than 100) so he uses travel retail and airports in particular strategically and shrewdly as a shop window.

He recently announced Patrón had been listed in four Russian airports, three around Moscow and St Petersburg. He exclusively revealed to DI that, as of April, travellers passing through Berlin, Budapest, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Istanbul, Oslo and Vienna, will be able to buy “the boss”.

According to McDonnell, Patrón holds 82% of the US\$40-plus, ultra category. In the US it retails for around \$50. At London Heathrow T5, it is £40. Overall, its duty free business is up 50%, he says.

Not surprisingly, McDonnell has his focus markets – Canada, Caribbean, Russia, UK, Hong Kong and global travel retail. Why them? “Proximity to the US and (they have people who are pursuing or aspire to) luxury lifestyle,” he states. “We are targeting luxury lifestyle, not just tequila drinkers.”

In the immortal lyrics Bruce Springsteen, it looks like Patrón is born to run.

Breaking new ground

Producers of Italian wine are calling for an urgent simplification of the country's marketing message. David Williams reports

If you were given a blank sheet of paper and asked to develop an international wine business from scratch, the chances are you would probably not look to Italy for inspiration. Well, not if you wanted an easy life, anyway.

As the British-based Canadian wine importer David Gleave MW puts it: "For the average consumer, Italy is just so fiendishly complicated." And how. There are, according to most estimates (and part of the trouble with Italian wine is that exact figures are generally elusive), some 35,000 wine producers or bottlers in the country, with tens of thousands more growers selling grapes for production.

These vary enormously in size and commitment to quality: from the guy with a couple of rows of vines mingling unchecked among the olive groves in his backyard who hopes to supplement his income by flogging off a few hundred kilograms to the local co-op, to the likes of Antinori, which has 1,400ha of carefully tended vineyard in Tuscany and Umbria alone.

Then there is the profusion of grape varieties and styles. "We have about 600, at the minimum, grape varieties," says Claudio Gambarotto, export manager for Cavit, the large Trentino co-op and one of Italy's leading Pinot Grigio producers.

"No other country has this many. And we have about 483 different denominations within the IGT, DOC and DOCG systems, which is a huge number. Sardinia, for example, has 35 denominations by itself. For every denomination, such as my own in Trentino, there are five different varieties for red and white. So if you take that and multiply it by the number of denominations, then you have thousands of different styles."

In a modern wine world, then, where varietal

marketing and brands are generally king, Italy would seem to be at a fatal disadvantage. And yet, recent figures suggest it must be doing something right. According to the Italian Statistical Institute (ISTAT), 2008 was an epochal year for Italian wine, a year in which both sales and production broke new ground. Total exports eclipsed €3.5 billion for the first time, as Italy consolidated its position as the biggest wine exporter to the US where it now accounts for one in every three bottles consumed. It also grew strongly in Germany, where it is also the most important exporter, and the UK, where it is number three. At the same time, according to the farmers' union Coldiretti, Italian wine production has also been growing, up 5% in the 2008 vintage against 2007, to 45 million hectolitres. With French production shrinking by the same amount to 44 million hectolitres in the same period, that makes Italy the world's biggest wine producer for the first time since records began.

Regional differences

This being Italy, however, the picture is very different from region to region, with some doing superbly, and others struggling. At the top of the tree, Italy's two largest exporting regions are both performing strongly, with the Veneto (the home of Pinot Grigio, Prosecco and Valpolicella and responsible for 26.8% of total exports) growing by 9% between January and September last year, and Piedmont (the land of Barolo, Barbaresco, Dolcetto and Barbera d'Alba, responsible for 21.6% of exports) adding 14.2%. Other regions showing good growth, but from much smaller bases, include the Marche (up 10.6%), Campania (up 14.8%), Sardinia (up 16.5%) and the fastest growing, Calabria (up 21.6%).



In the debit column, however, is Italy's third-largest exporter, Tuscany. The home of Chianti, which accounts for 15.8% of total exports, saw its sales slip by almost 2% for the first nine months of 2008. Other regions on the slide include Trentino Alto-Adige (the fourth biggest exporter, down 2.4%), Sicily (down 4.9%), Lazio (down 8.5%), Umbria (down 7.6%) and Liguria (down 32.2%).

Trouble ahead

For many in the Italian wine industry, however, the generally positive picture from its export markets is decidedly more nuanced than it may first appear. They believe Italy has some serious problems to face in the coming years, and that any gains Italy may have made in recent years have been achieved in spite of, rather than because of, the way the Italians do business.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, they also say the



Italian wine's myriad labels and denominations is on one hand valuable in terms of offering such a wide range, but on the other it's a handicap

Silvia Fiorentini
Chianti Classico Consorzio

problems can be traced back to the fragmented nature of the industry, and the inability of its different constituents to work together with a single voice, or even something resembling a single voice. In short, they believe Italy has to resolve a paradox: to simplify or clarify its marketing message, without doing away with the great diversity that sets it apart from its rivals.

Or, as Silvia Fiorentini, marketing manager of the Chianti Classico Consorzio puts it: "Italian wine's myriad labels and denominations (41 DOCG and 317 DOC) is on the one hand valuable in terms of offering such a wide range, but on the other it's a handicap. In fact, the consumer is often disoriented as he or she searches through Italian labels on the shelves, and often attracted solely by internationally known brands or wines in vogue at the moment."

Among the producers calling for urgent change is perhaps the country's most celebrated

producer, and certainly the one credited with doing the most to change international perceptions of Italian wine during the past half a century, Angelo Gaja. In a recent statement, Gaja said that Italy faced a perfect storm of problems drawing on the global economic meltdown, falling domestic consumption in Italy, overproduction in the EU and a lack of coherent generic marketing in export markets, and that it must act immediately to confront it.

"It is generally believed that the current financial crisis will have negative effects on the economy, creating unemployment, cash-flow problems, plunging consumption; all of which, together, mean that Italy will drink less wine," Gaja says. "Instead, stocks of unsold wine will increase as a result of greater production of wine in 2008 compared with 2007 and unfortunately predictable lower exports." He goes on to warn: "Time is of the essence – within a few years Italy

could find itself literally up to its neck in wine."

At the heart of Gaja's proposals for how Italy should face down the storm is a complete rethink of the way it spends the funds allocated by both the national government and the EU for generic marketing.

"A large part of the subsidies for the promotion of Italian wine must be transferred from the domestic to foreign markets, but the distribution of European Community funds to Italian regions, as it has operated until now, goes in the exact opposite direction," Gaja says. "It is highly advisable that new political initiatives orient public funds towards effective programmes aimed at creating real demand for Italian wine in foreign markets."

Gaja also calls for the creation of a national programme, funded by the industry, to help train small producers currently funnelling their efforts into the shrinking domestic market to re-focus ►

their production for export, with a view to creating “between 1,500 and 2,000 new exporters”.

Finally, he calls on the industry and the government to help fund education in Italian culinary culture in export markets. “The existing network of schools of Italian cooking must be supported and, equally important, new schools to teach Italian cuisine must be established in Russia, India, and China, where Italian emigrants have yet to arrive: in these countries there is an important and unsatisfied demand for trained chefs of Italian cooking. By filling this gap, it will be possible to establish new Italian restaurants, which, in their turn, will notably expand demand for Italian wine and food.”

Collective action

When Gaja speaks, the wine world tends to listen, but even he will have his work cut out in persuading the notoriously parochial Italian scene to change its ways. As Maurizio Fava, a wine consultant and author of the Espresso Italian Wine Guide, says, the problem is that too many wine producers simply cannot see the benefit of collective action:.

“Do you know how many airplanes we fill up with people sending them to Russia, or the US, or Japan to promote wine? And all of them are saying exactly the same thing about their wines. But they’re only working for themselves,” Fava says. “When I was the boss of a consorzio in Piedmont, I was always fighting with my producers who were saying they wanted to promote their label. They just didn’t understand that the whole idea was to promote Italy first, then Piedmont and then themselves.”

Of course, not all producers are rampant individualists. For example, Alessandro Camattari, marketing manager at Gruppo La Vis, which produces around 30 million bottles a year from vineyards all over the country, agrees with Gaja’s thesis. “Our strength in Italy lies in the wide diversity of our production. We are therefore very well placed to satisfy the individual demands of different markets and consumers,” Camattari



Castello di Gabbiano vineyards in Chianti Classico

says. “[But] our country should intensify its promotional activities abroad to communicate the fundamental message: Italy is not only Chianti, Tuscany or Sicily, but a collection of micro regions, rich in diverse styles of wine.”

The problem, says Fava, is that it would be “very difficult” to get even those producers who do see the benefits of a more coherent, simple generic strategy to agree on what that message should be. It’s a point taken up by Gambarotto. “The denomination as brand is the key for Italy. Every denomination has to act as a brand. Chianti has to be a brand, for example,” Gambarotto says. “But if you are talking about a generic campaign, you can’t focus on all of Italy’s denominations. So how do you choose which denomination to focus on in the first year, and which ones after that? It’s a very political decision.”

Political indeed. But then nobody said anything in Italy was easy. And if the country is to maintain and boost its position on world markets, then it’s a decision that needs to be taken soon. □

The world goes Prosecco crazy

Not everyone suffers when the economy struggles. As one entrepreneur put it in the US recently. “Some people call it a recession, I just call it an opportunity.”

That entrepreneur could easily have been talking about Prosecco.

According to Simon Farr, director of Bibendum, the UK importer of the Bisol Prosecco brand, the Italian fizz has been going great guns as cash-strapped consumers switch from Champagne, with Bisol growing by an amazing 85% in the past three years.

“It’s OK to be seen drinking Champagne when it feels as if everyone’s on the brink of being a millionaire, but when your neighbour’s just lost his job, you don’t want to be seen drinking it conspicuously,” Farr says. But with consumers having got the bug for sparkling, they’re looking for cheaper alternatives instead of giving up the habit entirely.

Small wonder then that Prosecco producers are looking to up capacity. The region currently produces 150 million bottles per year but is looking to up production to 250 million bottles (it produced just 5 million in the 1960s).

The local Consorzio is also lobbying to raise Prosecco di Conegliano-Valdobbiadene from DOC to DOCG status, and to give the Prosecco grown on the surrounding plains and currently sold as IGT the status of DOC.



(Far left) Alessandro Camattari: “Strength in diversity”

(Left) David Gleave: “Italy is fiendishly complicated”

(Right) Claudio Gambarotto: “Thousands of different styles”



Quietly confident

Rooted firmly in French tradition, can the Cognac category keep pace with the fast-moving world of modern spirits marketing – and does it need to? David Longfield visited the famous region

Few spirits-drinking experiences can match the nuanced subtlety of a slowly sipped glass of fine Cognac. The category has had to fight against the decline of the brown spirits and after dinner drinks sectors in its mature markets, but the past 10 years has seen a huge rise in Cognac shipments to new frontiers, especially the US and Asia and, more recently, Russia.

The good news is that many of these markets were, and still are, interested more in the superior quality, older styles – the VSOPs, XOs and above – which is to say, the higher value and higher profit end of the Cognac offering.

The VS-driven US market climbed from 35.8 million bottles equivalent in 1999 to 55.9 million in 2007, although shipments dropped back in 2008 to 47.7 million bottles. Jérôme Durand, marketing and communications director of the BNIC generic body, explains that this reflects the fact that 2007 was a record year for Cognac overall. Indeed, supplies were so stretched that “some markets had to be shut down”. Supply lines barely had time to pick up again last year before the economic crisis started to hit, so overall Cognac volumes for 2008 ended up slipping back by 6.2% to 148.2 million bottles equivalent.

At the same time, however, Cognac’s second biggest market, Singapore – a distribution hub for China and Asia – exploded from 6.6 million bottles in 2003 to 11.3 million the following year, climbing steadily since to 21 million. China itself, third biggest, accelerated from 2.3 million in 2003 to 12.3 million bottles.



It’s these rapid advances in developing markets that have balanced Cognac’s value sales – holding steady at +0.3% overall in 2008 – while VS-based mature markets have ground to a halt (UK, fourth biggest, down 9.2% to 10.5 million bottles; Germany down 3.3% to 7.2 million; France down a chunky 16.6% to 5.6 million).

Developing markets, says Durand, bring a better return on: “Every euro invested in a new, dynamic market produces quicker results.”

Presenting a modern face

Cognac’s ability to keep on innovating lies in the brands using the strictly-applied AOC regulations as a framework (see box), building a product portfolio around them. “The worldwide success of Cognac is the success of the brands of Cognac,” says Durand.

The scotch whisky sector is constantly buzzing with the latest special cask finishes, single vintage and bespoke bottlings, all sought-after by collectors and enthusiasts. But Cognac is limited in being able to pursue these kind of tactics.

As all Cognac must be aged in French oak, it is impossible to produce “cask finish” styles in the way scotch producers do. However, the traditional Cognac ways have led to its producers maintaining large stocks of old eaux-de-vie,

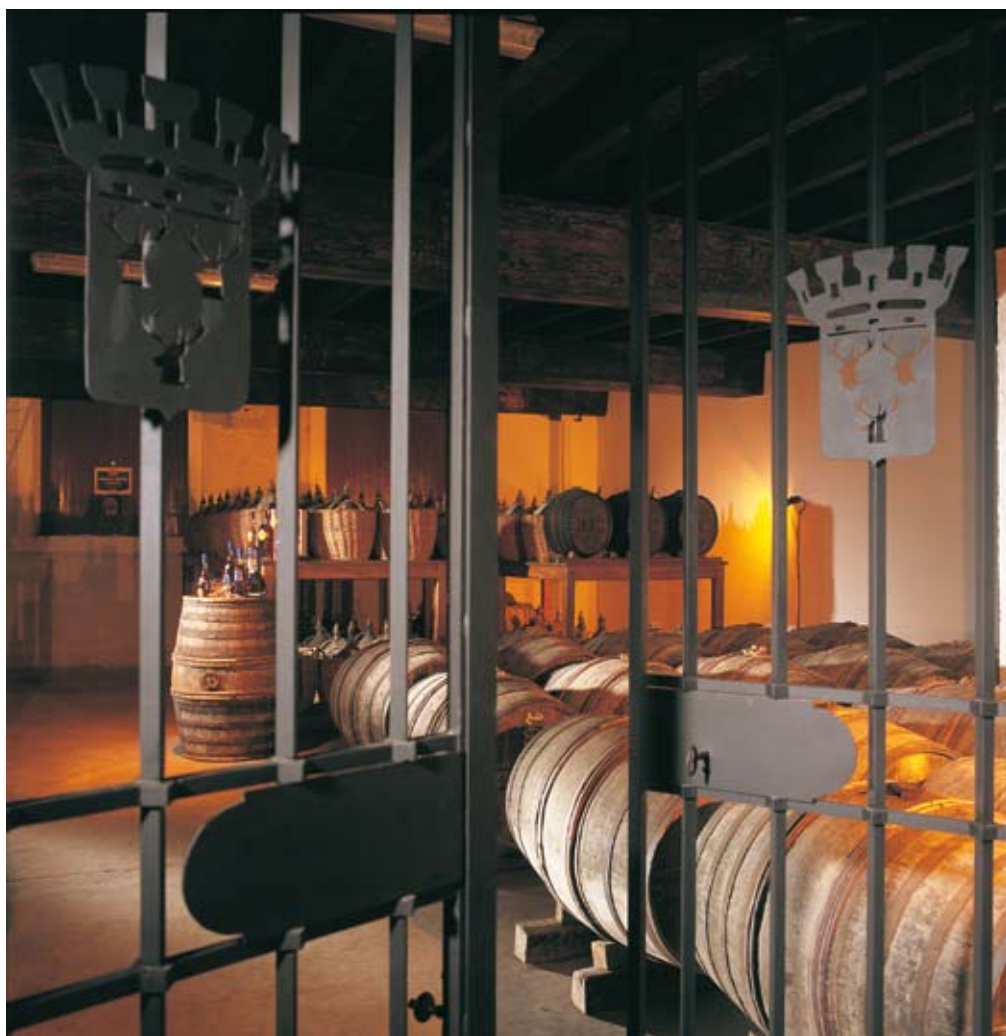
going back well into the 1800s. It is this depth of inventory that permits Cognac to devise blends positioned at levels in between and well above the set designations of VS/VSOP/XO.

“We have always led the way with the appellations,” says a marketing department spokesperson at market leader Hennessy. “Hennessy was a forerunner of the XO and VS designations in particular, and we therefore don’t feel especially restricted by the appellation system. Indeed, we have created a number of products which fall outside these appellations.”

Hennessy Paradis is a blend of more than 100 eaux-de-vies, positioned above XO in the Hennessy ladder, while Richard Hennessy tops the quality tree – an assemblage of eaux-de-vie from the greatest vintages dating back to the early 19th century.

In between VSOP and XO, Hennessy has positioned its Fine de Cognac extension, in 2008 released in a limited edition with a diamond-styled glass stopper containing a drop of amber, conceived by French designer Thomas Bastide.

Targeting the travel retail sector, Hennessy has also developed Diptyque. Presented in stylised flasks which emulate the small bottles used in the Hennessy tasting room, Diptyque is sold as two individual “coupes” – the initial blends destined



Camus pushes the boundaries

Family-owned Cognac Camus prides itself on a history of innovation, both in products such as the Elegance range, introduced in 2006, and in packaging design such as the perfume bottle-inspired Camus Extra Elegance.

The company took on the Ile de Ré Cognac produced on the “mono-cru” island of that name off the coast at La Rochelle. Historically, the Cognac produced here was regarded as too pungent and salty to succeed as a brand but, says the company’s external relations manager Danièle Laïné: “Camus took this weakness and turned it into a strength.” Using Ile de Ré, the company targeted the French market for malt whisky.

Indeed, the bottle bears a resemblance to Diageo’s Lowland malt Glenkinchie.

Camus has pushed Ile de Ré as close as it must be possible to go in Cognac to producing a Cognac “cask finish”. The most recent range extension, Fine Island Double Matured, is aged in two phases: first in traditional Cognac barrels in the cellars on the Ile de Ré; then a second period in ‘red’ barrels of five to six-year-old oak, which have lost most of their tannin and are toasted under the guidance of cellar master Patrick Leger.

The most recent addition to the Camus range, launched at the Cannes TFWA show last October, is Cuvée 3.128. The three components that make it up are 41, 43 and 44 years old, totalling 128, and all from one family distiller and property.

The limited edition 3,068 bottles are presented in striking Baccarat crystal decanters, fashioned after the pattern left by hand-cutting stone or rock crystal.

to provide the structure for later, completed Cognacs. One is named Subtle Strength, its partner Robust Character – together providing an insight into the Cognac blender’s art.

Michel Perreux, director of Cognac Gautier, part of the Marie Brizard group, would like to explain the make-up of his older ranges on the Cognac packaging, but it is not permitted. “We have a range of very good XO’s, and our marketing people would love to be able to communicate more about them.”

The company is currently using stocks as old as the smoky and powerful 1943 vintage in its XO Gold & Blue, Extra 1755 and Pinar del Rio XO Exclusive Cigar Blend. Any scotch producer would boast of this fact. “We are very restricted in the words we can use,” says Perreux – and it’s not, he adds, something that is likely to change soon.

Conversely, Louis Royer commercial director Jean-Pierre Dematteo doesn’t feel constrained at all. “I think the appellation system is very restrictive for wine producers,” he says, “but it never occurred to me that it would be a problem for Cognac.

The ‘paradise’ cellar at Cognac Gautier’s Aigre headquarters

Louis Royer’s Jean-Pierre Dematteo seeks to avoid “marketing tricks”



“In a way we have restricted ourselves more by using only, or mostly Ugni Blanc grapes. Folle Blanche and the others have mostly disappeared.”

As far back as 1997 the company released its Distilleries range: five individual bottlings from its top distilleries, each in a different, delimited region of Cognac. “This took people back to what was in the bottle,” says Dematteo.

Indeed the regulations allowed Louis Royer to release another extension, Force 53, in 2001/2. Bottled at its natural strength of 53% abv, Force 53 retains the designation VSOP Fine Champagne on the label, “so consumers would know what it was.” This was made necessary by

Force 53’s outer packaging – a departure from the norm in its distinctive perforated metal tube. “The idea was to grab the eye with the packaging,” says Dematteo. “We like to offer real alternatives to the category. It means we can have less competition and be a brand by ourselves.”

The core of the Louis Royer range though, he adds, is presented in keeping with the standard VS/VSOP/XO range. “We believe in the value of the quality of the liquid, and don’t want people to feel they are caught in a marketing trick.”

Cognac Hine managing director François Le Grelle prefers to avoid comparisons with other sectors. “We have to be careful when comparing to a model that’s successful for scotch whisky,” he says. “We cannot increase production [to suit demand] because Cognac is produced from a limited surface area of grapes. In the case of ▶



An aerial view of Hine's Grande Champagne domaines

vodka, everything is pre-sold and they don't have to invest in storage or ageing."

While Hine does bottle within the VS/VSOP/XO structure, it has found its niche with its single vintage releases. "In the product itself, Cognac is a blend of different eaux-de-vie and vintages, so Hine's vintages were an innovation some decades ago," says Le Grelle.

The company's most recent release was last August with two 1978 bottlings, one from stocks matured in Jarnac, the other from early-landed stocks shipped within two years of distillation to be held in cellars near Bristol, England. The two produce Cognacs of quite different character, the early-landed being lighter and more floral.

Rémy Martin director of Cognacs and estates Vincent Gere agrees Cognac is about blends. "There is a fair amount of creativity, and these blends are a good measuring stick for the public." In Asia Rémy markets a quality level called Club, while the US has 1738. "We are the leader in superior qualities and our strategy is to develop VSOP and above," says Gere.

Recent additions to the range in 2008 included 1898 Création Fine Champagne – a new blend for China – and two single vintages. The Rémy Martin 1988 was launched in duty free globally while the US market saw the new 1989 late in the year. "We are the first major house to do a vintage," says Gere. "Both have come from

Innovation nose no bounds

The concept of linking Cognac with music is not new in itself, but Courvoisier's new communication campaign – Le Nez de Courvoisier – takes things a step further. The company has selected three aromas to represent each of its range of seven marques, from VS (new oak, fresh fruit, spring flowers) up to Initiale Extra (old port wine, truffle, hot fruitcake).

At the same time, the company has commissioned Laurent Assoulen, a French composer renowned for his musical interpretations of fragrance, to match three short pieces to each of the seven styles.

In combination, the two elements are to be used as an education tool for the company's sales teams and distributors.

In January, Courvoisier hosted groups of sommeliers from around the world who were all treated to the Le Nez experience. They sat, blindfolded, at the company's headquarters in Jarnac, as a specially designed diffuser dispersed the three aromas chosen for the XO Imperial (crème brûlée, candied orange, iris flowers) into the room while the three appropriate 30-second pieces of music were played.

"For me it's the first time we have found a project in which our marketing and technical sides have come together," says Courvoisier global brand ambassador and spirit quality manager, Pierre Szernovicz.



The Hine duty free vintage collection

Rémy Martin's own vineyards, but we will not launch one every year. Why, when you are the expert in multi-vintage blends?"

Marketing-minded

Privately owned Cognac Frapin does produce VS Cognac, but it's more about the upper levels, targeting small, specific markets – only 10% of its exports go to the US, for instance, but in total Frapin is in about 60 markets. "Marketing is to help the product, not the other way round," says cellar master Olivier Paultes.

Director and winemaker Patrice Piveteau adds: "We don't do much advertising, but we promote the company. We have 216ha of Cognac Grand Champagne vineyards, and a large part of our marketing is to talk about this."

Nothing succeeds like success, and following Frapin's Trophy winning success in the 2008 International Spirits Challenge, it sold out of its Multimillésime bottling in nine months. This was a new concept, for the first time blending three vintages – 1982, 83 and 85 – from the Grande Champagne region, each bringing the character of its year to the final blend.

Hennessy dominates the Cognac category, so exerts a great deal of influence on how the category as a whole is perceived. In the 2008 Drinks International Millionaires listing, Hennessy recorded sales of 4.62 million 9-litre cases – getting on for 60 million bottles, or about 40% of the region's total 148 million.

The company has evolved beyond merely selling distilled grape juice: "We don't sell ▶

Cognac – we sell a brand experience. In this sense, presentation and rituals of consumption are vital. For the oldest Cognacs, the consumer is buying a true work of art. The packaging must be a reflection of our expertise. In the same way, we have created new rituals based around the product, such as the XO Mathusalem.”

This is an extraordinary limited edition bottling of Hennessy XO in a 6-litre version of its traditional glass decanter. Only 300 were made and, for serving, it comes with a specially designed ‘fusil’ plunger – like the ones used in the Hennessy cellars – designed in 2007 by Marie-Virginie Berbet as a reference to the brand’s 240-year history. “Our brand is open to all the world’s complexity, and similarly expresses itself with diversity.”

Echoing the words of BNIC’s Jérôme Durand, Hine’s Le Grelle adds: “We have to talk more about the brand, less about the product. It’s not enough just to say, ‘My product is beautiful’. We must also therefore know where the markets stand – we are obliged to follow the new train of consumption and adapt our communication to these people.”

To this end Hine launched Patchwork in January this year, an advertising campaign inspired by the company’s ‘patchwork’ of vineyards in the Grande and Petite Champagne areas. Based on a series of photographs taken during the 2008 Charente Cognac harvest season, Patchwork is destined to meet the needs of individual markets and distributors, and even to be tailored for each retailer, restaurant, bar or nightclub.

Securing the future

In a world that seems obsessed with grabbing the attention of Generation X, does Cognac need to address younger consumers more in order to bring in the high spenders of the future?

“You have to talk about the [three] different types to different audiences – for example, about VS to bartenders for mixing,” says Durand. “But sometimes people want an ‘oen’ experience, and Cognac provides an aromatic lens that you won’t find anywhere else.” Cocktails are a good way to reach younger people he says, adding: “The mode of consumption is a kind of innovation.”

Hennessy links up with live music events via its Hennessy Artistry platform. “This concept brings together several strands,” the company says. “Hennessy Artistry is a unique live blend of musical performances from various cultures and musical genres, and reveals the creativity with which our Cognacs are being enjoyed in cocktails and long drinks all around the world.”

Citing China’s MOT sector (modern on-trade, meaning big night clubs) Hennessy’s



Hennessy’s Chai du Fondateur contains some revered and rare eaux-de-vie

Rémy Martin’s Vincent Gere believes Cognac is all about blends

spokesperson adds: “We do not deliberately target a younger audience. Rather, we are interested in contemporary methods of consumption (eg cocktails, long drinks), and in new venues for consumption (eg nightclubs), which in themselves are developing very quickly.”

For Le Grelle at Hine, it’s not so much the age of the consumers as the kind of products they are buying. “It’s obvious that the luxury world is moving very fast,” he says. “It has gone from traditional countries to Russia and Asia. We have to rethink what luxury is in the 21st century – it is moving from west to east. We must take care not to jeopardise the brand.

Despite the restrained, almost sleepy air of the town of Cognac and the Charente region, delve a little deeper and you find that Cognac producers at all levels are themselves buzzing with new ideas and innovative twists.

The important thing, says Le Grelle, is to keep Cognac’s traditions alive in a dynamic way. “If we stay where we are we will become very old very quickly, and disappear. We need to speak clearly with the modern tools we have today.”

Cognac rules

Some key terms and AOC regulations:

- Eau-de-vie – the colourless, unaged spirit produced by the distillation of fermented fruit juice
- Crus – the delimited growing areas of Grande Champagne; Petite Champagne; Borderies; Fins Bois; Bons Bois; Bois ordinaires/Bois à terroirs
- Fine Champagne – a controlled appellation blend of eaux-de-vie, minimum 50% Grande Champagne with Petite Champagne
- Grapes – most now use Ugni Blanc, but others permitted are Colombar, Folle Blanche, Jurançon Blanc, Meslier Saint-François, Montils, Semillon, as well as Folignan and Sélect
- Minimum alcohol content 40% abv
- Traditional Charentais stills with total capacity not exceeding 30hl and a maximum load of 25hl for the second distillation
- Distilled by Charentaise method – first distillation “brouillis” followed by second distillation “repassé”; last distillation date March 31 after previous year’s harvest
- A Cognac may not be sold to the public unless it has been aged in oak casks for at least two years counting from the end of the distillation period
- Ageing must be in French oak casks, of Limousin or Tronçais-type
- Age designations:
 - VS (Very Special). Youngest eau-de-vie is at least two years old
 - VSOP (Very Superior Old Pale) or Reserve. Youngest eau-de-vie is at least four years old
 - XO (Extra Old), Napoléon or Hors d’âge. Youngest eau-de-vie is at least six years old. From 2016 the youngest eau-de-vie in the XO category will have to be 10 years old
 - Vintage Cognacs are not common practice, must be the product of eaux-de-vie from a single harvest

Two rather mysterious ingredients are starting to shake things up in style bars. Larry Walker investigates the charms of cachaça and shochu

In some circles, bartenders have gained a status equal to rock star, so when they start buzzing about a new cocktail trend, it pays to check it out. And when the buzz goes beyond the latest in shaken or stirred, it's time to start taking notes.

In this case, I kept hearing about cachaça, a white spirit from Brazil, and shochu, a rather mysterious white spirit from Japan, Korea and a few other Far Eastern points. But the colour, or lack of it, is not all the two spirits have in common, according to bartenders, importers and producers. They are chameleons: they are very flexible as a base for cocktails, yet start from very different flavour profiles.

Junior Merino, a New York City bartender, aka The Liquid Chef, designed the cocktail menu and is the head bartender for two Latin-themed New York restaurants, Macondo and Rayuela. He agrees both spirits are hot right now. "Cachaça is an amazing spirit to work with. You can make a great Caipirinha with it, but it is also a canvas for great art," he says.

"However, shochu is a very accessible spirit that has diverse mixing possibilities because the base ingredient for shochu ranges from nutty to floral, spicy to mineral. It is one of the most complex spirits you can work with."

Tim Cooper, a New York bartender and a member of a consulting team called Contemporary Cocktails, says the surge in popularity of both spirits was bartender driven. "When they get something new, bartenders like to compete. They challenge one another. Cachaça is also driven by the image of Brazil. Shochu is a more delicate spirit, more subtle."

Cooper, and others, agree both spirits are embraced equally by men and women, usually in the 25-35 age group. "They are more adventurous drinkers," he adds.

The two spirits clearly have different appeal to consumers. According to Anthony Dias Blue, who heads up the San Francisco International Spirits Competition, cachaça truly reflects its Brazilian origins. "It's a spirit with a jazzy, tropical image," Blue says. "It's very easy to like and there is the lure of Brazil; the lure of something new and, of course, sex. Try to think about cachaça without

Spirit of the chameleon



Rene Martins

Think vodka, only more dynamic, more flavourful. Kind of a Scotch drinker's clear spirit.

Steve Boone
SakeOne

envisioning girls in or out of their bikinis – I don't think so."

Shochu, however, seems to attract consumers who are also interested in wine culture. They are looking for variety and are more likely to drink shochu straight up or flavoured with tea or light juices.

Foodie links

Like wine, shochu is often drunk with food. Ami Nakanishi, assistant manager of business planning & development with New York Mutual Trading, sees a direct link between sake and shochu through food. "Because people started to eat sushi, they started to drink sake," she says.

In the past few years Izakaya bars have begun popping up, especially on the east and west coasts. These are Japanese-themed bars, sometimes called "tapanese", serving "fusion tapas" as well as more traditional sushi. "That [kind of] food goes very well with shochu," says Nakanishi.

Shochu has another positive food link: in many parts of the US, including the key markets of New York and California, it can be sold in restaurants that do not have a liquor licence because of its relatively low alcohol content, normally 25%.

"Now restaurants without a liquor licence can

get into cocktails,” says Jim Sculace, sales manager for Tombo, a barley-based shochu made in Vietnam and imported into the US by SakeOne, a US sake producer.

Steve Boone, president and chief executive of SakeOne, says the taste profile of shochu and its affinity with food made it the ideal choice for his company to enter the spirits market. “It has a wonderfully distinct aroma that is akin to sake with hints of mango, kiwi and spice. And while it is eminently mixable, its layered flavours of rice, tropical fruits, steel and green olive are incredible on their own. Think vodka, only more dynamic, more flavourful. Kind of a Scotch drinker’s clear spirit.”

At this point, shochu is just beginning to break out of the Japanese and Korean restaurant ghetto. A good example of that is Infusion Lounge, a San Francisco restaurant and dance club, where shochu is rapidly gaining on vodka as the cocktail base of choice. Abash, drinks buyer at Infusion, put it this way, with a twist of California ’tude: “We sell what we want to sell and I want to sell shochu.”

Premium moves

While shochu is often drunk straight, cachaça is more likely to be consumed in a cocktail. The best known is the classic Caipirinha – as closely associated with cachaça as the Margarita is with tequila. Could this prove to be a limitation on potential growth in the market for cachaça?

Not at all, according to Alex Metzroth, a former bartender and northern California regional manager for Cabana cachaça, a wood-aged upmarket brand. “The caipirinha is a great



stepping stone, but cachaça has much more to offer,” he says. “Industrial grade cachaça is still a one-trick pony, because sweet and sour are necessary to mask the inferior production processes and noticeably lower quality, but there are great strides made each day towards elevating the category and creating a place for premium cachaça.”

Premium cachaça hardly existed a decade ago but the demand for brands such as Cabana is now driving the market, according to Matti Anttila who created the brand and began importing it in 2006. He believes that more than any other spirits category, quality is easily seen in cachaça. “You really do get what you pay for. You can taste the difference.”

Anttila, who tasted hundreds of cachaças in Brazil while assembling the Cabana blend, says the cachaça category is taking off because the image of Latin America is appealing right now. “I also think people have become bored with vodka,” he says. “They want more taste, more character and more interesting cocktails.”

Like others, he thinks the core cachaça drinkers are in the age range of 25-35 and evenly split between men and women, with the strongest markets in the major metro areas such as New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles and south Florida.

Boca Loca is another of the new wave premium cachaças. Rhonda Follrath, chief operating officer for the brand, believes the cachaça trend is due, in part, to “the world getting smaller”. She says: “As people travel more and have easier access to world trends they become curious to try new things. This is happening both in the kitchen and in cocktails.” ▶

The lowdown

Cachaça

- The national drink of Brazil, made from fresh sugar cane juice, unlike rum which is made from cane molasses
- First made centuries ago by early Portuguese settlers. Its move into the international spirits market has, to this point, been largely driven by the caipirinha cocktail in Brazil, almost always made with unaged cachaça, which is cheap and plentiful

Shochu

- Often called Japanese vodka, shochu is much lower in alcohol than vodka. By Japanese law, shochu can be no more than 25% abv
- The Korean version is called soju
- Can be made from a wide variety of grains, including rice and barley; some shochu is made from sweet potatoes as well
- There are more than 3,000 varieties available in Japan
- In the US, still often confused with sake, which is fermented, not distilled. In Japan sales of shochu now exceed that of sake.
- A complex spirit with two basic divisions. Koshu is distilled several times, resulting in a clear spirit with little aroma or flavour, generally favoured for cocktails or diluted with water and served with a lemon wedge. Otsushu is only distilled once, so it keeps some of the flavour and aroma of the base distillate. It is commonly drunk straight on the rocks.
- Shochu is low in calories compared with other spirits. A 20z serve of shochu contains about 35 calories while two ounces of vodka contains about 120 calories. Some shochu fans call it diet vodka or vodka-lite



Matti Anttila attributes the rising success of cachaça to the popularity of the Latin American image

Cocktail hour

The classic Caipirinha, Cabana-style

2oz Cabana cachaça
1 splash club soda
1 lime, quartered
1 tbsp sugar

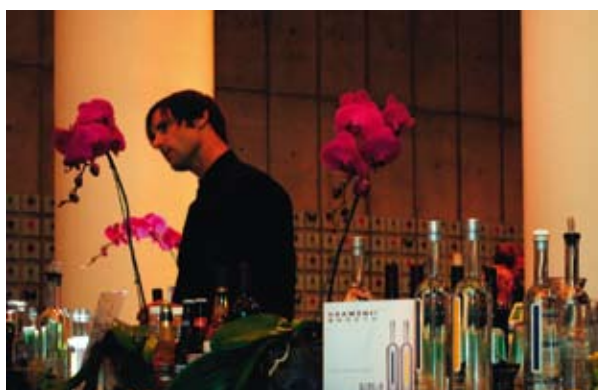
Method: In a rocks glass, muddle 1 lime, quartered, and 1 tbsp granulated sugar. Add 2 oz Cabana Cachaca and ice. Shake and top with a splash of club soda.



Tombojito

2 oz Tombo shochu
1 tsp powdered sugar
2 oz fresh lime juice
4 mint leaves
2 ounces club soda

Method: Muddle powdered sugar, lime juice and mint leaves with ice in shaker. Add shochu, shake vigorously. Pour into a rocks glass and add club soda.



She also points out the use of fresh ingredients in cocktails.

“Boca Loca is a spirit that blends particularly well with fresh herbs, fruits and other natural products. Once people become familiar with cachaça, the incredible versatility of the spirit keeps them wanting to use it in more and more cocktails.”

Flash in the pan?

How deep is the trend for cachaça? Will it continue to grow or is it a flash in the pan, something that will be all but forgotten in a few years? Olie Berlic, creator and importer of Belaza Pura cachaça, has a simple answer that cuts straight through the marketing chatter: “It all depends on the quality in the bottle.”

Shochu consumption has not grown as spectacularly as cachaça, but has shown steady growth over the past decade (see box).

Last year James Key Lim released his American-made triple distilled shochu, Haamonii Smooth. He also has a Haamonii Smooth Lemon. He is optimistic about the future of shochu as the number of Asian fusion bars and restaurants grows. The typical fusion restaurant of the 1980s and 90s combined Asian and European flavour and techniques. The new Asian fusion highlights pan-Asian flavours.

San Francisco-based Lim started blending



Haamonii displayed at the California Academy of Sciences art premiere



his own brand simply because he was passionate about shochu. “What is important about shochu is that it’s a spirit to be shared,” he says. “Traditionally, one must remember to pour for others and not oneself to ensure that they never drink alone.”

He believes the category is growing because of a trend toward moderation in the US. “I think the alcohol percentage plays into our current culture for moderation in life,” he explains. “Excesses have proven to be detrimental in the long run and that goes for drinking as well. We created Haamonii to meet the consumer’s need for a pure, smooth spirit that doesn’t put you over the edge.”

No doubt there will be those who question the role of moderation in US culture. In some ways, the rapid growth of cachaça would seem to indicate the opposite as it is often marketed as Latin excess in a bottle. But there is no doubt that both cachaça and shochu are buzzing in US cocktail circles. Perhaps they represent the yin and the yang of the current spirits scene. ☐

The numbers

US imports of both cachaça and shochu are miniscule compared with mainline spirits such as vodka or tequila, and numbers are hard to come by. Also, cachaça is included in the rum category in US import statistics and shochu is sometimes confused with sake. Here are some trade estimates.

US shochu imports (litres)

1999 – 155,702

2000 – 187,521

2001 – 188,063

2002 – 280,403

2003 – 268,887

2004 – 411,469

2005 – 493,763

US cachaça imports (litres)

2006 – 450 million

2007 – 700 million

Show zone

IAADFS Fort Lauderdale, March 23-25

The International Association of Airport Duty Free Stores (IAADFS) says its 41st duty free show of the Americas is 85% full, with a number of exhibitors increasing the size of their stands.

New and returning exhibitors include: Destilerias, the Spanish spirits producer, Campari, French spirits producer Bardinet, and Latin American Wines & Spirits Marketing, the distribution and marketing specialist.

Last year more than 3,000 people visited the show, which takes place at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

The exhibition starts on March 23 and finishes at 5pm on Wednesday the 25th. IAADFS says its five official hotels are filling fast.

The welcome picnic has been replaced by an exhibitor appreciation lunch, which takes place on the Sunday from 1pm to 3pm. Following on from that, at 6.30pm, there is the opening reception.

The aim of the show organisers is to bring its supplier members into contact with buyers from duty free stores worldwide and to help them in any business dealings. It is strictly trade, open only to IAADFS supplier members, duty free store operators and members of the duty free press.

IAADFS' goals and objectives are to:

- Promote the airport duty free industry
- Provide activities whereby operators of airport duty free stores and their suppliers can exchange information on products and market potential
- Serve as a collective voice in representing the airport duty free industry on common issues affecting the membership.

Alcoholic beverage companies attending include:

Angus Dundee Distillers
Barcardi USA
Beam Global Spirits & Wine
Belvedere Duty Free
Brown-Forman Beverages
Worldwide
Camus Wines & Spirits
Casa Vinicola Zonin
DeKuyper Royal Distillers
Demerara Distillers
Diageo
Giowine
Heineken
International Liquor & Tobacco
Inver House Distillers
Moët & Chandon
Oposit Wines & Spirits
Pernod Ricard Americas Travel Retail
Rémy Cointreau Travel Retail Americas
Speciality Brands Spirits & Wines
Tequila Supremo
Tequila Corralejo/Fraternity Spirits World
The Other Wine & Spirits
The Patrón Spirits Company
Wente Family Estates
William Grant & Sons



Prowein Düsseldorf, March 29-31

Prowein, which is held in Düsseldorf, Germany over three days, is one of the world's leading wine and spirits exhibitions

Where? Messe Düsseldorf, Germany

When? March 29-31

Why? One of the leading trade fairs in the world for the international wine and spirits industry

For more information info@messe-dusseldorf; www.prowein.de

Wine

There are more than 700 exhibitors with Germany the frontrunner, followed by Italy, France, Spain and Austria.

German producers – estates, co-operatives and wineries – from all 13 vine-growing regions will be showcasing the 2008 vintage. The emphasis is on Riesling and Pinot Noir. The following regions will each have their own stand: Baden (hall 4, F26), Württemberg (4, D33), Rheinhessen (4, G66), Palatinate (5, H142), Franconia (4, F28), Mosel (4, D68), Saxony (4, H06), Rheingau (4, G21) and Saale-Unstrut (4, A06).

More than 200 suppliers are from the so-called New World and include Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, New Zealand, South Africa, the US and Uruguay. They are all in hall 6.

Central and eastern Europe is represented by Bulgaria, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Hungary and Russia.

Newcomers to Prowein include Algeria and Belarus.

Spirits

Approximately 300 exhibitors from 25 countries, including Belarus and Martinique, will be showing spirits in the spirits hall, 7A.

On view will be vodka made from organically-grown grain, organic Cognac and elderberry liqueur. A highlight will be a Cognac in a golden cage with Swarovski crystals.

There will also be a grappa tasting and chocolate and brandy matching.



Tasting Zone

There will be some 1,000 wines to evaluate.

Red wine The focus is on wines from cool climate regions, such as those at higher altitude or with pronounced coastal influences, which produce grapes with less sugar and lower levels of alcohol – no more than 13%.

White wine Burgundian varieties are the feature with wines made from Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc grapes.

FIZZ Lounge Bartender Bill Deck and his son David, from Pusser's in Munich, will mix classic cocktails and modern interpretations. Deck opened Pusser's in Germany 30 years ago and Andy Warhol was a visitor.

Fascination Riesling On March 29 at 2pm Jancis Robinson MW, one of the world's best known wine writers and a fan of Rieslings, will conduct a tasting and discussion about Riesling wines and their ageing potential.

German Wine Institute briefing On March 30 at 11.30am Institute director Monika Reule will look at the latest trends in the industry. These include a move to wines with less alcohol and increasing interest in wines made organically, biodynamically and using sustainable farming. The institute will have a display-only copy of the new German Wine Atlas, which has only just been published.

Did you know ...

- There were 3,160 exhibitors and 33,386 visitors in 2008 from 40 countries
- Germany is the largest wine and spirits importer in the world, accounting for 12 million hectolitres.
- About 30 producers and importers will participate in a culinary mini exhibition at this year's show, with specialised retailers presenting everything from olive oils, balsamic vinegars and patés to gourmet sauces and jams. There will be daily training sessions in olive oil tasting, spice seminars and wine and chocolate. Hall 6

Wine zone

Castel St Emilion move



Castel has added to its already substantial wine portfolio with the purchase of Château Montlabert, its first property in St Emilion.

It acquired the 18th century estate months after acquiring Bordeaux negociant Oenoalliance.

Montlabert borders famous Grands Crus Classés, including Cheval Blanc, Figeac and Clos des Jacobins.

The 12.5ha property produces 75,000 bottles of

AOC Saint-Emilion Grand Cru a year, 80% of which is exported. Eighty per cent of the vines in the vineyard are Merlot and the remaining 20% are Cabernet Franc.

Castel's Frédéric Verborg said the company was "looking forward to expressing the full potential of Château Montlabert over the coming years".

Castel now has 18 family-owned properties with more than 1,000ha of vines across France, including 14 in the Bordeaux region.

EU extends wine labelling deadline

Wine producers have been given more time to comply with new European regulations which require them to indicate the level of egg and milk products in their wines.

The European Commission has agreed to extend the deadline for mandatory labelling of allergens in wines until the end of 2010.

The move follows strong representations by the UK's Wine & Spirit Association and other wine bodies.

The WSTA said: "Late last year regulators agreed to adopt a flexible approach to the existing deadline to give some latitude to Southern Hemisphere wine producers facing the cost of re-labelling during the middle of the bottling process.

"Now all wine producers will have an exemption from the requirement."

Exports pass \$1 bn

Last year American wine exports passed the \$1 billion milestone for the first time. Winery export revenues were up 6% on 2007 figures, according to the Wine Institute of California. Volumes rose by 8% to 55 million cases. President Bobby Koch said: "Wine exports have increased more than five-fold from \$196 million in 1994."

Oz wine producers await bush fire news

Wine producers in Australia's Yarra Valley are waiting to see how much damage has been caused by bush fire smoke.

The fires have wiped out two families from the wine community and destroyed 154ha of vineyards – about 5% of the total.

Three wineries have been destroyed.

Some producers said they had already harvested grapes without any sign of smoke taint, but others warned that the scale of smoke damage had been underestimated and would affect a big percentage of Yarra growers.

The Yarra Valley Winegrowers Association admitted early crops had been "much smaller than expected".

It added: "Many are 30% to 50% below estimates. In some parts of the valley this is due to the effect of the late January hot spell which caused vine stress and sunburn and there are also impacts from poor fruit set and even spring frosts in some pockets."

But it added that "quality of wines is still expected to be good".

Secret wine stash to go under hammer

Wine that was hidden from the Nazis during the German occupation of the Channel Islands is to go on sale in London this month.



Bonhams is auctioning 1,500 bottles which were secreted away in a hidden chamber by Guernsey merchant Bucktrout & Co.

The company said it is selling the wines because it is moving to smaller premises.

The auction takes place on March 17, and includes Harveys 1897 Special Quality Port valued between £100 and £200.

Other lots include Château Ausone 1928, Latour 1926, Cheval Blanc 1947, Margaux 1929 and Mouton Rothschild 1928.

Tasting

Burgundy No beef with Bourgogne

Burgundy 2007 is all about the whites. That appears to be the general consensus among the pundits, and the wines on show at the London annual Terroirs et Signatures de Bourgogne tasting in January served only to confirm this assertion.

Generic body BIVB called 2007 a “surprising year”, the late appearance of the sun and north wind in late August/early September rescuing a previously cool and rainy growing season.

The resulting Pinot Noir reds in the region may be what’s termed

an “early to mid-term vintage” (nothing wrong with that) but the Chardonnays – particularly the better quality village wines – have emerged as approachable, fruity whites with a good dose of minerals.

“The 2007 suited the wines we like to make, with plenty of minerals and fruit without being very full-bodied,” said Maison Joseph Drouhin vice-president for sales & marketing, Jean-François Curie.

“In the first nine months of 2008, shipments of Burgundy wines to the UK dropped by 17% in volume and by 11% in value compared with

the same period in 2007”, said the BIVB in its report on 2008 trends.

This followed a record year globally in 2007, and is significant because the UK is Burgundy’s single biggest export market, taking nearly a third of all the region’s exports.

Announcing the launch of a three-year communication campaign in 15 of Burgundy’s biggest markets focusing on the “with food” aspect, BIVB communications president Anne Parent said: “We need to consolidate our position in our strong markets. Exchange rates are a problem

everywhere, but this can change quickly. Up to now we have focused on the trade and distribution, but now we have an opportunity to talk directly to our consumers.”

Report: David Longfield



Wine highlights

White Burgundy 2007 vintage (Prices: € ex-cave)

19, Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru 2007 Clos du Cailleret Monopole, Dom. Jean Chartron (€27.50)

Very fragrant, bewitching aromas. Weighty with huge mineral depth. Highly characterful, fruit-focused and rich without being oily or overwhelming

17.5, Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru 2007 Les Champs-Gains, Dom. Roger Belland (€26.60)

Full, oaky aromas. Richer, fatter than the Chassagne with more citrus fruit. Good length and mineral balance

17, Puligny-Montrachet 2007, Joseph Drouhin (€21)

A mellow, calm wine. Good, even mineral weight across the palate and a nice, pure, lemony, approachable style

18.5, Chassagne-Montrachet 1er Cru 2007 Clos Pitois, Dom. Roger Belland (€22.05)

Light and fresh on the nose. Mineral-packed, searingly dry style but balanced by classy fruit mid-palate through to finish. Pear, apple, peach dominate – very long

18, Chassagne-Montrachet 1er Cru 2007 Les Embezées, Moillard (€24)

A mouthful of stone and soil with this one. Plenty of heady, fresh melon/lemon curd richness comes through on a lengthy finish. Impressively elegant

15, Chassagne-Montrachet 1er Cru 2007 Morgeot, Dom. Chapelle (Organic; €23.40)

Young, a little shy on nose. Light, fresh, mineral palate with delicate vegetal notes to finish

18, Meursault 1er Cru 2007 Clos des Poruzots, Dom. Roux Père at Fils (€26)

High-toned, leafy citrus and baked apple aromas. Classy and elegant, smooth and beautifully balanced with a gentle suggestion of turmeric and cinnamon on the finish

17.5, Meursault 1er Cru 2007 Les Bouchères, Dom. Déserteaux-Ferrand (€22.57)

Bags of juicy, green apple/pear with scented oak and touches of fresh-cut grass, nicely backed by minerals. This is the producer’s second vinification

16.5, Meursault 2007 Domaine du Pavillon, Maison Albert Bichot (£20 trade)

Bright and open, laden with minerals. Nice, middle-weight style, restrained oak and toasty, baked apple finish

16.5, Meursault 2007, Closerie des Alisiers (€13)

Toasty, fresh citrus nose. Full, juicy citrus fruit, mineral kick mid-palate. Toasty and fattish but lively

16, Pernand-Vergelesses 2007, Dom. Coste-Caumartin (€14.30)

A cracking little number. Manages to be buttery, toasty and fresh and zingy all at the same time

16, Santenay Blanc 2007, Dom. Vincent Sauvestre (€6.74)

Fresh and clean, very approachable with apple/white peach fruit and a decent finish. Not complex, but bright and pleasing – great value

15, Santenay 2007 Comme Dessus, Dom. Roger Belland (€8.73)

Has a whiff of fresh spearmint. Lean and mineral. Stone fruit, light melon and minerals emerge on finish

15, Rully Blanc 2007 Cuvée la Chaume, Chartron & Trébuchet (€5.69)

Full, bright and cheery. Nice lemony/toasty edge to the finish with a dash of minerals – great value

15, Bourgogne Chardonnay 2007, Closerie des Alisiers (€4)

Cheerful easy-drinker, very peachy – great value

Reds of note

19, Vosne Romanée 2007 Clos de la Fontaine Monopole, Dom. A-F Gros (€25)

Simply packed with juicy plum, blackcurrant, strawberry and cherry fruit. Ripe and persistent, elegant tannins

18.5, Nuits Saint Georges 2007, Dom. Jean-Jacques Girard (€14.80)

Expressive. Cherry-choc aromas, fruit-packed palate with fine acid-tannin balance. Keep at least 6 years

17, Gevrey Chambertin 2007, Closerie des Alisiers (€13)

Bags of open cherry/plum fruit with a persistent layer of soft tannin and creamy marzipan notes to finish

17, Beaune 1er Cru 2007 Les Tuvilains, Dom. Jean-Jacques Girard (€12.50)

Sweet and scented, compote of raspberry/loganberry/plum. Young and sinewy but gutsy, too

Scores out of 20: 12-13 = acceptably decent; 14-15 = good; 16-17 = very good; 18-19 = excellent; 20 = superb, definitive

Bar zone

Movie Magic



Diageo's Reserve Brands Group has created an online film to promote its bartender training programme, World Class.

The global drinks giant teamed up with digital agency 20:20 London to create themagnificentsevenblog.com.

The four-minute movie is entitled The Magnificent Seven and is aimed at high-end bartenders in 26 countries, including the UK, Japan and the US.

The film features seven top names in bartending working as a team to pour drinks, pass shakers and craft an ice diamond.

The twist is, they are not actually in the same bar.

Feel the love

What would you call a 60-proof "distilled spirits speciality"? CMSC Spirits has opted for the name Love Potion #9.

The no-grain alcohol is 30% pure sugar cane and comes in 20 flavours. They include mango, peach, chocolate, vanilla and almond.

The drink has been popular in South America for 15 years and now US bartenders have access to Love Potion.

The brand is described as "sweet, very complex, delightfully aromatic, and infinitely mixable".

Love Potion #9 will be formally introduced to the marketplace in 5cl, 37.5cl and 75cl bottles at the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America Expo (wswa.org) in Orlando, Florida, from April 25-28 2009, and begin shipping to distributors in May 2009.



White is the new black

Britain is a nation of white wine drinkers, according to new research which asked 12,370 to identify their favourite drink. Eight out of 10 Brits said white wine. This was followed by red wine and then lager.

Vodka tops the spirits rank, while whisky comes second. Scots came fourth in the whisky-loving league, behind Londoners, those from the north and those from the Midlands.

The Opinium Research poll revealed that gin is Britain's least favourite tittle and that 18 to 34-year-olds prefer sparkling white wine and vodka. Over-55s opt for red wine.

Hop to it – a beer drinker's guide

By Tim Hampson

For most mixologists the stocking of the beer shelf takes the least time, when compared with the care and attention given to choosing wines, spirits and other alcoholic drinks.

And the more cosmopolitan the bar, the blander the beers seem to be – with brands such as Stella, Heineken, Carlsberg and Peroni being the beer of choice for millions of drinkers.

There is nothing wrong with these beers, but beer fans, broadly speaking, are people who drink a wide variety of beer styles – not just lager – and are interested in quality beer and new drinks with a story to tell.

Drinkers in search of taste and provenance have not gone unnoticed by the international brewers – Anheuser Busch InBev continues to push Hoegaarden – once a cultish Belgian oddity, with its cloudy, wheaty demeanour – as a world brand.

And Carlsberg says its Jacobsen range is an expression of ambitious plans for the development

and marketing of uncompromising speciality beers.

But taste, style and developing new beers is certainly not the sole province of the large brewers.

Indeed the multi-nationals could be accused of trying to cash in on the work of a new breed of adventurous, creative brewers.



American brewers Goose Island, with its flavoursome India Pale Ale, and Rogue's with its idiosyncratic packaging, have through the use of the internet



and viral marketing created beers with a worldwide following.

And there is a new breed of British brewers too, who are putting taste into a bottle. One such is Thornbridge, its complex Jaipur IPA winning accolades far beyond its home in Bakewell, Derbyshire.

From Australia comes Little Creatures. Its flagship Pale Ale, with its grapefruit hop aromatics, is now being sold worldwide.

With a little help from the distributors, style bar managers can stock their beer shelves with an endlessly diverse range of flavours from all over the world.

Tim Hampson is author and managing editor of The Book of Beer, published by Dorling Kindersley.

Finding the best

Czech beer Pilsner Urquell has launched a competition to find the “world’s master bartender”.

Last year 16 countries competed and Danny Walker, a bar manager from Bristol, UK, was crowned Pilsner Urquell International Master Bartender of the Year at the finals held in the Czech Republic.

The training programme is free and available for all draught stockists of Pilsner Urquell.

Bartenders will be tested on their knowledge of the beer category and receive mystery visits.

Darren Tendler, sales director for Miller Brands, said: “We know there are a number of bartenders working across the industry who have real passion and spirit and are keen to know as much as possible about the products they serve.”

If you are a Pilsner Urquell stockist and would like to know more about the Master Bartender Programme, call the Programme Support Line on +44 (0) 7890 735 488.

Any Pilsner Urquell stockist can enter the competition



Thailand in a glass

New York’s got the Manhattan and Singapore’s got the Sling, now Thailand’s got its own cocktail.

In a move to give the Thai tourism and hospitality industries a boost, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the Thai Hotel Association (THA) have jointly unveiled Thailand’s new signature cocktail – Siam Sunray.

The cocktail is based on ingredients that have made Tom Yam soup world renowned: freshly-picked lemon grass, Kaffir lime leaves, Thai lime and Thai bird eye chilli. The recipe was created by Surasakdi Pantaisong, the winner of the 2008 Bartender Championship hosted by the TAT and THA at Siam Paragon in September 2008.

Siam Sunray

30-40ml vodka
30 ml coconut liqueur
15ml syrup
¼cm of Thai chilli pepper
3 slices young ginger
1 Kaffir lime leaf
3 slivers lemon grass
3 drops lime juice
Soda water

Method: Crush the small Thai chilli pepper, young ginger, Kaffir lime leaf, and lemon grass together in a shaker to bring out the aroma and flavour of the Thai herbs. Add syrup, lime juice and vodka and shake well. Strain into a glass with ice; top up with soda water; garnish with chilli, lemon grass and a slice of lime.

Cachaça – a gift



Cia Müller de Bebidas, owner of Cachaca 51, has developed a gift pack for its Reserva 51 premium cachaca, which is made from “noble sugar cane varieties” and aged in oak. The limited production cachaca boasts a soft taste and distinct aroma.

A real tonic

Q is a new premium tonic said to be made from real quinine and “gently sweetened” with organic agave. It boasts 60% fewer calories and an 85% lower glycemic index than rivals.



Beyond the twilight zone

The mixologists behind London’s Lab Bar and Town House have created a cocktail menu for new London bar Aquum.

The list is split into Sunset and Moonlight and the selection of cocktails and prices adjust as the evening progresses – light and long cocktails for after work and heady martinis for later into the night.

The menu includes: Lazy Berries – Havana Especial rum with apple and strawberry and a hint of mint over crushed ice; Clover Club – fresh raspberries and gin with lemon juice, raspberry syrup and egg white served in a chilled hi-ghball glass; and Lychee & Peach martini – fresh lychee and peach vodka give layered flavours of delicate fruit.

Departure zone

The Vintners' Club Tuscany

Vineyard heaven

Castello di Casole is a new five-star resort on a 4,200 acre estate in Tuscany close to Florence and Sienna.

It boasts extensive vineyards and olive groves and there is a Vintners' Club where, for the cost of €25,000 and an annual fee of €1,000, the 24 founding members get the benefits of owning a vineyard without the niggling costs and problems.

The 13 plots spread over 100 acres comprise a mix of Sangiovese, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot. The operation is headed by famous Italian producer Piero Incisa della Rocchetta, his family best known for iconic Italian wine, Sassicaia.

Among other benefits the members will receive two cases of the premier members' private label wine, four bottles of the estate's extra virgin olive oil and the opportunity to buy more at special members' prices.

The resort comprises traditional farmhouse villas with modern amenities and there are pools, a fitness centre and wellness spa.

The old castello (castle) itself, which sits on a hilltop commanding views over Tuscany, is being restored as a boutique hotel with 41 suites, fine dining restaurant and spa. It is scheduled to open in spring 2010.

For more information: castellodicasole.com



BOOK SHELF



● **Tatler Restaurant Guide 2009**

Tatler magazine's 2009 Restaurant guide – mainly for London but also the rest of the UK – is sponsored by Louis Roederer Champagne. The 122-page guide editor, Jeremy Wayne, says the book contains details of more than 300 restaurants with 52 newcomers.

He says: "Recession doesn't have to mean depression. The city (of London) might be burning but the UK restaurant scene is sizzling."

Published by Tatler magazine.

Contact info@pikepr.co.uk.



Things to do airside



Website for whisky lovers

● The Balvenie, William Grant & Sons' single malt, has created a website for whisky enthusiasts with what it claims is a "world's first" – the facility to create an online "whisky shelf", replicating the consumer's home whisky collection with tasting notes. Go to: thebalvenie.com

Wine on TV

The wine trade has come under the spotlight in a three-part TV series that has been running on BBC 4.

The first episode of Wine featured the famous London wine merchant, Berry Bros & Rudd, with Simon Berry, Bordeaux buyer Simon Staples and Berry's Burgundy buyer, Jasper Morris.

Episode two showed Greek supermarket tycoon Corinne Mentzelopoulos – her family has owned Château Margaux for 30 years – and Margaux's well known director Paul Pontallier.

The final episode went to South Africa and featured producers Oupa Rangaka and Mark Solms (a retired professor who did not drink wine six years ago), with a neuroscientist and Freudian analyst. It charts their attempts to convince buyers from UK retailer Marks & Spencer and the judges at the International Wine Challenge, that their wines are good enough.

Burgundy producer David Clark with Berrys' Burgundy buyer, Jasper Morris MW

