

700 YEARS

Armagnac



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Maison Gélas

A love of perfection

The Maison Gélas, created in 1865 by Baptiste Gélas, a barrelmaker's son, has been a family business for 150 years, and is Gascon, heart and soul.

It provides an insight into the different crafts and trades that have given birth not only to outstanding vintage Bas Armagnacs – aged in casks in its chais, or special storehouses – but also to a range of eaux-de-vie resulting from both know-how and a love of perfection.

The Maison Gélas offers up the key to its little bit of paradise and will initiate consumers in the magic of ageing.

From the outset Maison Gélas has aged its Armagnacs variety by variety, saying: "This has helped us to offer single varietal eaux-de-vie presented

at their natural degree of ageing, for the three major varieties used for Armagnac, with at least 18 years in the cask."

The varieties are:

Bas Armagnac 18 years 100% Folle Blanche 44.8%

Bas Armagnac 18 years 100% Baco 47.4%

Bas Armagnac 18 years 100% Ugni Blanc 48.8%



In 2010, following years of research, Maison Gélas created Single White 60° – a unique eau-de-vie obtained from the distillation of fine wines made from two traditional grape varieties used in Armagnac: Baco and Folle Blanche.

To better enjoy its delicate flavours the house recommends tasting Single White 60° at room temperature.

But, it says: "Single White 60° truly comes into its own when used as the base ingredient in cocktails and represents an exciting new proposition for mixologists.

"Single White 60° is also a great match for caviar, smoked fish or with the finest slow-cooked pork meat, foie-gras and desserts such as lemon pie or Tatin aux Poires.



Maison Gelas, 32190 Vic-Fezensac, France. gelas.com; email contact@gelas.fr

Armagnac, the oldest French eau-de-vie is celebrating 7 centuries of history in 2010.

At the beginning of the 14th century, Maître Vital Dufour, prior of Eauze in Gascony, considered that this eau-de-vie had '40 virtues or uses' to 'conserve one's health and stay on top form'.

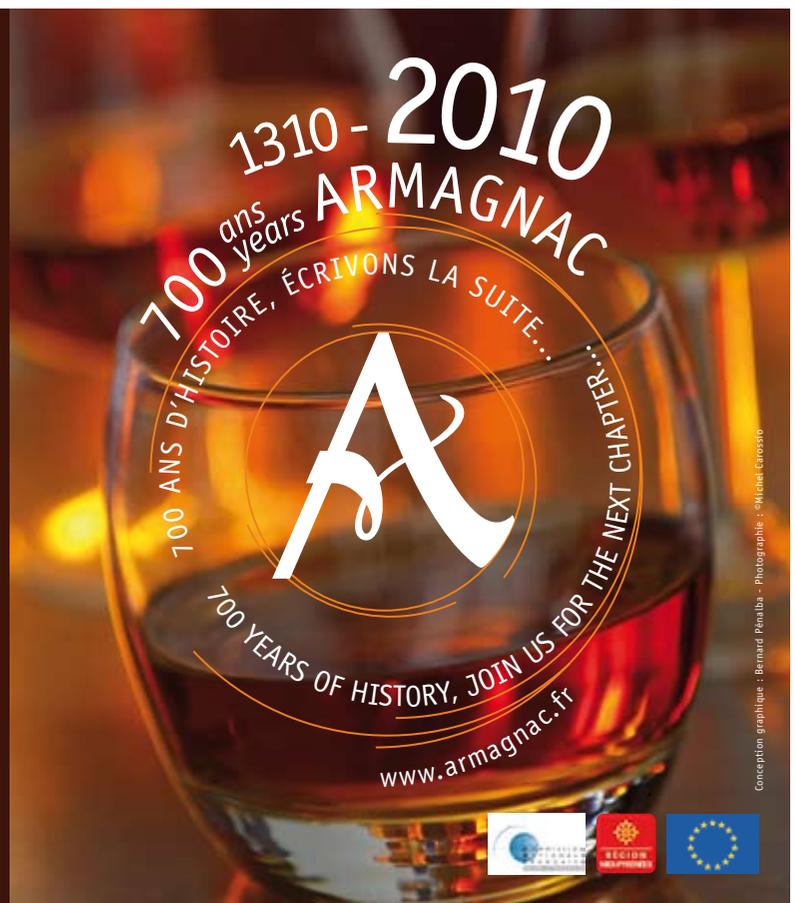
Today, Armagnac is an Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée, made essentially from 4 grape varieties : Ugni-Blanc, Folle blanche, Baco and Colombard. It covers 3 areas : Bas-Armagnac, Haut-Armagnac and Armagnac-Ténarèze.

The Armagnac eaux-de-vie belong to a 'terroir', that of Gascony in the South West of France, and their notoriety relies on the traditional production methods carefully passed down through generations that makes each one of them original an 'authors' eau-de-vie.

As an aperitif, pure or with ice, in cocktails, as an accompaniment to certain dishes, or as a digestive, Armagnac will seduce any palate.

Enjoy your tasting ... IN MODERATION

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Conception graphique : Bernard Penaba - Photographie : Michel Carasso

700 years of Armagnac



Left, Ambrogio Piazzonni, deputy head of the Vatican Library. Right, BNIA president Pierre Tabarin. In March 2010, a delegation from the BNIA was presented with facsimiles of the Vital Dufour text of 1310 by the Vatican Library



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Spirit of the soil

People who love Armagnac find fascination in its individuality; its rustic nature and the unpredictability of knowing what will be revealed in a bottle from the next, untried producer. And it's exactly these characteristics that deter other brandy lovers, who might prefer the classic lines of a Cognac.

Armagnac is full of mystery – a product no doubt of an ancient lineage that goes back at least 700 years (see page VII) and is celebrated in this supplement. Life is different in this part of France's south west: Gascony. The pace is slower; the people are warm, hospitable and close to the soil.

This is echoed in the style of the brandy that Armagnac produces. Armagnac, it is said, reflects the personality of the people who make it. This would make sense, as the aim is to reflect as closely as possible the wine used and the ground in which the grapes are grown, hence the methods of vinification and distillation are tailored to achieve just this (page VIII).

Pedants beware though: questions concerning precise quantities of this ester or that compound may well be met with an apologetic smile. Although the inner workings of the Armagnac alambic still are well understood in the region, it is not considered necessary to explain the alchemy involved.

This self-belief typifies the fiercely individualistic streak that runs through the Gascony region and its people. They combine to provide a potentially life-long voyage of discovery for any spirit drinker keen to explore the countless range of styles of Armagnac to be found.

David Longfield *Supplement Editor*

House of Delord Family passion

In 1893 in the village of Lannepax, the travelling distiller Prosper Delord founded the House of Delord, which became Armagnac Delord Brothers when his two sons, Gaston and Georges, took on the Armagnac flame and their father's passion for the eau-de-vie.

Today the family tradition carries on with Jacques and Pierre Delord,

Prosper's grandsons, and the younger generation represented by Jérôme and Sylvain.

Located in the commune of Lannepax in the Bas-Armagnac region, the Delord vineyards comprise the Ugni Blanc, Baco, Colombard and Folle Blanche grape varieties.

The family's distillery uses two antique Sier alambics that give a traditional output of fewer than 30

litres of eau-de-vie per hour.

The cellars hold more than 1,000 oak barrels which mature and protect the eaux-de-vie, dating from the 20th century to the present day. The oldest Armagnacs are kept in glass demi-johns in a part of the cellars known as Le Paradis (Paradise). The oldest was distilled in 1900. All bottles are hand-sealed using different coloured wax.

The savoir-faire and old reserves from four generations allow consumers to appreciate and discover the characteristic aromas

and diversity of Delord Armagnacs.

Labels can be personalised to order by the sure hand of Jacques Delord who, with his quill and pot of China ink, makes every bottle a rare and exceptional item.

Delord Armagnacs come in either a tall Ariane bottle or the more traditionally shaped Basquaise.



La Maison Delord, Rue Principale, 32190 Lannepax Gers, France. armagnacdelord.com; email jeromedelord@freefr

Château de Castex d'Armagnac Heart of the region

The Château de Castex d'Armagnac is a very old fortress, surrounded by ramparts, built on the top of a hill which dominated the plain all around. In the Middle Ages it was assigned the defence of the region. Since the end of the 18th century it has belonged to the Saint Pastou family.

Since then they have continually produced and marketed Armagnac. One of the oldest bottles kept is dated 1820.



These Armagnacs have been placed Hors Concours and first great vintage of Bas-Armagnac at the Paris Fair, mainly in 1855 and 1856.

The Château de Castex is in the department of Gers in the heart of the most famous area of Bas-Armagnac. On an estate of about 300ha, 15ha (37 acres) are devoted to the vineyard (Baco and Ugni Blanc). The soil is sand with clay pieces and iron-rich sand (boulbènes et sables fauves).

The white wines intended for distillation come exclusively from the family estate. After the grape harvest, distillation takes place in December in the property's own still from the 19th century.

The brandy obtained is colourless,



about 52-55° alcohol, and is stored in new oak barrels for two years then put into old barrels for ageing.

The Armagnacs of Castex are only

vintages from 1936 to 1995. They are not sold before they are 15 years old and remain in their barrels until the moment of the sale.

32240 Castex d'Argmanac, France. email g.desaintpastou@sfr.fr/armagnac.chateaudecastex@orange.fr

Winds of change

BNIA collection

Change is not the first word that necessarily springs to mind when thinking of Armagnac country in the heart of Gascony – the region in France’s far south west that runs down the Atlantic coast from Bordeaux to Bayonne, and across to the east, skirting the Pays Basque, along the Spanish border to a point roughly south of Toulouse.

Traditional, yes; rustic, yes; sleepy, maybe; fiercely independent – most certainly.

For a first-time visitor, there’s unarguably something captivating about stepping into a part of the world that takes great pride in doing the essential things in life extremely well.

Food lies at the heart of the region’s culture, led, of course, by foie gras, the famous – or infamous, depending on your point of view – pâté made from the liver of fattened duck or goose.

Eat out here and you’re likely to be enjoying locally sourced, naturally grown ingredients, the like of which it’s almost impossible to find in most urban restaurants.

And change? Well, it probably happens slowly around here, but in the case of Armagnac, you couldn’t argue that they’re strangers to innovation. With a history going back 700 years (see

page VII), distilling in this part of France has tended to be cutting edge.

The historical double pot still method was replaced in the early 1800s when the (now traditional) continuous alambic still was introduced – the early adoption of technology first developed in Arabia.

And then there’s Baco – the controversial hybrid grape that’s still the favourite of many involved in Armagnac production. It is the only hybrid variety (obtained from Folle Blanche and Noah grapes) permitted in a French appellation contrôlée region – which is enough in itself to upset many a purist.

But the grape was developed in the very late 19th century by François Baco after the phylloxera bug devastated vineyards across Europe. Widely adopted in the 1920s, Baco is particularly resistant to all sorts of vine pests and diseases, is well adapted to the sandy soils of the Bas-Armagnac part of the region, and produces full, rounded, fruity brandies well suited to ageing. All this made it the darling of the region until the 1970s, when concerns about the methanol content of the Noah part of the hybrid led to moves to replace it.

Much more recently, Armagnac has experienced a violent climatic event, which may bring change to the region whether it likes it or not.

Windstorm Klaus struck Spain and

south west France on January 24 2009, with wind gusts of at least 170km/h devastating large swathes of the Aquitaine region’s forests.

About 300,000ha of the forest were “seriously hit”, according to France’s National Centre for Private Forestry, with as much as 60-70% of trees felled in the most badly damaged areas.

Travelling through the region now, you can still see the scars: corridors of uncleared fallen trees where the winds whipped through. The event had a huge impact, emotional as well as financial, on the whole area. Sandwiched between Armagnac and the coast to the west, Europe’s largest managed maritime pine forest has always protected the Armagnac vineyards against the worst excesses of the Atlantic weather systems. But damage on the scale seen here could change things in ways as yet unknown.

José Barbe, of négociant Millésimes & Tradition (Baron de Lustrac), says: “The climate has been very much modified by the big storm last year. We notice the wind much more now, and we had the snow this year too – unlike I have ever seen before.”

Disastrous though it was, maybe windstorm Klaus will in future come to be seen as the single event that began the next 700 years of Armagnac’s illustrious history.

**THE CLIMATE
HAS BEEN
VERY MUCH
MODIFIED
BY THE BIG
STORM LAST
YEAR**

**JOSE BARBE
MILLESIMES &
TRADITION**

Château du Busca Historic vintages

Since 1649, Armagnacs have been produced at the Château du Busca Maniban, in the heart of the Ténarèze region. Located between the Bas-Armagnac and Haut Armagnac regions, Ténarèze is the central area of Armagnac production.

The siliceous clay soil of the Ténarèze imbues its Armagnacs with typical characteristics of spice and prune aromas as well as vanilla, gingerbread or woody aromas, producing a fuller bodied brandy than in the Bas-Armagnac region.

The Château du Busca Armagnacs are distilled in one of the most ancient distilleries in Gascony.

Today Armagnacs are still produced at the château

using traditional methods.

At Château du Busca the vineyards comprise Ugni Blanc and Colombarid grapes, which are single distilled (simple chauffe) to turn the wine into the spirit, which allows for greater control of the whole process through continuous distillation.

After distillation, the Armagnacs are aged in oak barrels from the region, as was always the tradition in the 300-year-old château cellars.

The same family has been producing Armagnac here for more than two centuries and it is the only privately owned wine estate in the Armagnac region to be classified as a French Historic Monument.

Armagnac Château du Busca produces two



blends – XO No1 and Hors d'Age – and 23 different vintages, which are maintained in oak barrels

until bottling. Château du Busca Armagnacs win awards in many international competitions.



Chateau du Busca Maniban, 32310 Mansencome, France. Tel: +33 (0)5 62 28 40 38. busca-maniban.com; email busca-maniban@wanadoo.fr

Château du Tariquet Estate exclusivity

Château du Tariquet, built in 1683, is owned and run by the Grassa family – several generations of winegrowers.

They control the winemaking, distillation, production, vintage selection, blending and bottling operations, thus guaranteeing the authenticity and the quality of their production.

Tariquet sales success and strengths:

All the grapes used for producing the Bas-Armagnac are exclusively harvested from the vineyards on the estate.

At Château du Tariquet, the distillation takes place in an authentic Armagnac alambic heated by wood. Known as continuous

distillation, it is distinguished by the single passage of the eau-de-vie through the alambic.

The 100-year-old cellars quietly safeguard the barrels, or “pièces”, as they are called. Each variety and each vintage is distilled and aged separately.

New barrels are always used for the first few years of ageing.

Château du Tariquet selects lightly toasted barrels exclusively from the tallest oaks in the French forests, reputed for their fine grain.

The colour of the Bas-Armagnacs



from Château du Tariquet comes uniquely from the ageing in barrels.

The naturally light tint is due to the alchemy between the delicately toasted oak and the eau-de-vie.

The blend, a true savoir-faire, develops its identity and style after a long period of ageing.

These Bas-Armagnacs represent a story of people, combined with origins of “terroir” similar to those of Cuban cigars, hence they make a wonderful combination. Château du Tariquet is very proud of its friendship and sponsorship of the famous International Habano Festival every year since February 2005.



Château du Tariquet, 32800 Saint-Armand, France. tariquet.com; email s.chomat@tariquet.com

700 years and 40 virtues

It's impossible to know what is the world's oldest distilled spirit – Russia and Poland each stakes its claim to being the oldest vodka producer – as the historical trails vanish into the mists of time.

But one thing for certain is that Armagnac is France's oldest distilled spirit.

Sitting in the Vatican archives is an ancient Latin text entitled *Very Useful Book for Conserving One's Health and Staying on Top Form*.

Though it was printed in 1531, the document is dated to the year 1310, providing official evidence that Armagnac can claim to be at least 700 years old.

The text was written by one Prior Vital Dufour, a clergyman, doctor and scientist from the Gascon town of Eauze – now the capital of the Armagnac region.

It is generally accepted that distilled spirits were first used as a form of medicine, with the production process stemming from the mystical world of alchemy.

And this is reflected in Vital Dufour's text, in which he describes the 'Forty Virtues' to be derived from the consumption and application of the 'Aygue Ardente' (burnt water), or Armagnac spirit.

These are said, rather charmingly, to include:

"If one adds herbs, it extracts their virtues,

- it makes redness disappear
- and heat in the eyes,
- it stops tears from running,

- it heals hepatitis if one drinks it soberly,
- it heals gout,
- cankers,
- and fistula by ingestion,
- it heals wounds by application.
- Frequent anointment of a paralysed member will render it to its normal state.
- It enlivens the spirit, partaken in moderation,
- recalls the past to memory,
- renders men joyous above all.
- It makes disappear pain in the ears
- and deafness,
- it makes disappear stones in the bladder
- and the kidneys.
- If one anoints the head, it removes headaches, particularly those coming from a cold.
- and when retained in the mouth, it loosens the tongue,

• emboldens the wit, if someone timid from time to time himself permits."

In March this year a delegation from Armagnac's BNIA travelled to Rome to be presented with facsimile copies of Prior Dufour's ancient text by the Vatican Library authorities.

These copies will travel with the Bureau to all the 700th anniversary events happening around the world during 2010,

before returning at the end of the year to their home in Armagnac in time to inaugurate the annual distillation period celebrations, known as the Flamme de l'Armagnac.

These events, says the Bureau, will act as the symbolic launch of the next 700 years of Armagnac's history.

Calendar of events for 2010, '700 years of Armagnac'

January

Publication of the book *L'Armagnac pour les Nuls* (Armagnac for Dummies – in French only)

February

Publication of the special edition *Terre de Vin Armagnac* focus

Condom: Banc de la Flamme de l'Armagnac 2009

New York: participation at Ariane Daguin's restaurant D'Artagnan to celebrate her 25th anniversary

March

The Vatican: a delegation from Armagnac to retrieve the historical text of Maitre Vital Dufour

April

Annual launch of the spring Blanche 'white Armagnac'

12th, London: Masterclass, Showcase and Gala Dinner, '700 years of Armagnac'

Other events: Flower market in the village of Fourcès

May

First consumer newsletter launch (armagnac.fr)

Armagnac route map launch, *Escapades en Armagnac 2010*

Villeneuve-de-Marsan celebrates François Baco

Other events: Bandas music festival, Condom; Pentacôte fêria, Vic-Fezensac

June

11th, Chicago: special '700 years of Armagnac' evening event

Departmental archives in Auch: exhibition '700 years of Armagnac' Father's Day promotion throughout the French network of spirit merchants and Nicolas stores

July-August

Summer festivities throughout Armagnac

15-24th Jul, Termes d'Armagnac: 'Les Flammes de l'Armagnac' historical enactment spectacle (tourdetermes.fr)

Other events: Country & Western Festival at Mirande; Temp Latino at Vic Fezensac (Latin American music festival with salsa concerts) August (first two weeks) Jazz Festival in Marciac

September

Condom: Grand Chapitre des Mousquetaires d'Armagnac

October

Paris: special '700 years of Armagnac' evening

Beginning of the Flamme de l'Armagnac – open house during distillation period Armagnac events during the annual wine fairs

Moscow: special '700 years of Armagnac' evening – Armagnac/Unesco ceremony 2010

November

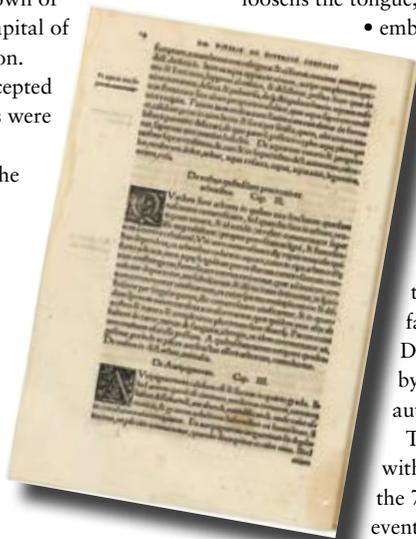
Eauze: annual eaux-de-vie competition for the Armagnac professionals Continuation of the Flamme de l'Armagnac

France: Armagnac events throughout the supermarket chains

December

Toulouse: Armagnac week – events and tastings in on-trade and retail outlets

For further details visit the armagnac.fr website.



What makes Armagnac?

Three regions – three soils

Bas-Armagnac

Accounting for about two-thirds of the region's production, Bas-Armagnac neighbours the Landes forest. "Bas", meaning "low", refers to the area's altitude. The area is known for its sandy, silty soils, sometimes having lumps of clay or high iron content. The Baco grape (see below) is very well adapted to these conditions, so it dominates the vineyards here, along with Ugni Blanc. Eaux-de-vie produced here are well liked for their generous, fruity nature, good for use in younger blends.

Armagnac-Ténarèze

The "harder", less fertile clay and limestone soils in Armagnac's central region are good for wine production, hence a significant portion of the grapes



grown here (primarily Ugni Blanc and Colombard) are used in the local Vin de Pays des Côtes de

Gascogne wines. Representing about 40% of the vineyards planted for distillation, the area produces full-bodied eaux-de-vie that usually require long ageing to fully reveal their complex, aromatic character. Aged Ténarèze Armagnacs are in good supply, because for a long period many producers were content to market the easier-selling Bas-Armagnacs.

Haut-Armagnac

With the abundance of chalky limestone in the soil, the most easterly Armagnac region is known locally as "white Armagnac". Only small pockets of vines remain among its rolling hills, and the region contributes only a very small percentage of the overall production of Armagnac.

Raw material – the grape varieties

There are 10 grape varieties permitted for use in Armagnac, but in practice four principal ones contribute the vast majority of the volumes.

Ugni Blanc is the modern-day workhorse of the region, now accounting for more than half of all the grapes used for Armagnac distillation. Its popularity with producers is not unrelated to the fact that it gives high yields of relatively low-alcohol, neutral wine – making it ideal for distilling – and is also resistant to powdery mildew and grey rot. It produces middleweight, elegant eaux-de-vie, sometimes with light floral and spice notes.



Baco 22A is a hybrid variety – the only one permitted in any French appellation contrôlée vineyard region (see page V). Producing plump, full, rounded, fruity brandies that often develop plummy characters after long ageing, Baco dominated Armagnac production until the late 1970s, having been developed by François Baco at the end of the 19th century, before much of the stock was pulled up and replaced.



Created from Folle Blanche and Noah – a grape of the *labrusca* family, as opposed to *vinifera* – Baco

has its opponents, but the grape is undergoing a resurgence in popularity, and heavy replantings are under way. With modern-day demands on grape growers to reduce their impact on the environment, Baco is finding renewed favour – its strong resistance to many common vineyard diseases and pests means that it requires much lower levels of chemical treatment than other varieties.

Folle Blanche was the dominant variety in Armagnac until the devastation of the vineyards by phylloxera in 1878, but its low yields and susceptibility to mildew mean it is now a rarity. However, its typically delicate, floral character makes Folle Blanche attractive for use in younger blends and in La Blanche (see page XIII).

Colombard is widely used in the Gascony region's dry white Vin de Pays wines. However, the herbal, spicy character of its eaux-de-vie make it a popular blending component for Armagnac.

Other varieties permitted include: Clairette de Gascogne, Plant de Graisse, White Jurançon, White Mauzac, Mauzac Rose and Meslier Saint-François.

Vinification

Generally vinified to a level of 8-10% abv, white wines for Armagnac production must be produced traditionally, except that no addition of sulphur dioxide (normally used as an anti-oxidant) or chaptalisation – the addition of sugar in the form of grape must before fermentation to raise the level of potential alcohol – are permitted.

The reasoning is that Armagnac must represent as closely as possible the grapes and terroir from which it is produced. Any impurities in the base wine can have a huge impact on the final distillate, particularly as the fine lees (residue of grape skins and yeasts left after fermentation) must be included in the wine being distilled.

Armagnac facts

- 800 winegrowers (500 independents and 300 cooperatives)
- 40 négociant houses
- annual production limited to 13,000 hectolitres of pure alcohol on average over five years (equivalent to 4.6 million bottles)
- a significant stock of 161,000 hectolitres of pure alcohol (equivalent to 57.5 million bottles)
- 40% of production is exported to more than 100 countries
- largest market by value is Russia, also representing nearly 12% of export volumes; UK, Germany and Spain combined take one-third of exports
- the range of styles includes 34% VS, 29% VSOP/Napoleon, 18% XO/Hors d'Age, 19% Vintage
- there are 93 working continuous single alambics and 11 for double distillation

Distillation - a singular art

This is the key to the very identity of Armagnac. Almost all (about 95%) Armagnac is produced in a traditional "alambic Armagnacais" copper still, which distils the wine a single time using the continuous method. By contrast, all Cognac is produced using the double pot still method, in which the spirit is distilled twice, to a higher degree of alcohol.

The single continuous Armagnac still was patent registered in 1818, and has been adapted and improved by the region's distillers ever since. In 1936, the French appellation contrôlée authority INAO officially banned double pot stills, so until 1972 only continuous alambics were used. Only three producers now use double pot stills: Samalens, Janneau and Delord.

Regulations state that distillation must occur between the end of the harvest and March 31 of the year following - the date can be and often is brought forward, by decree. In practice though most distilling is completed by the middle of the January following harvest, largely due to the fact that the wine used must be as fresh as possible (and is not preserved using SO₂), but also because many of the growers involved produce on a small scale - a single barrel or two is not unusual.

One of Armagnac's many unique characteristics is the persistence of the roving ('ambulant') distiller. During the season, mobile alambics are wheeled from producer to producer by the three remaining providers of the service: Philippe Gironi, Marc St Martin and Patrick Michalowski.

There is something more than a little magical about watching (feeling... smelling...) an Armagnac alambic in operation. Derived from ancient origins in alchemy, the continuous system is enclosed within its copper walls, and few people even among Armagnac professionals seem ready to explain in detail what's going on inside.

In contrast to its close cousin Cognac, Armagnac is all about capturing the heart and character of

each individual harvest, from each producer's properties. The single distillation method is slower and produces spirit at a lower degree of alcohol than double pot distillation. The regulations permit eau-de-vie to come off the still at between 52-72°, but generally it emerges at 54-62°. Broadly speaking, this ensures that more of the aromatic precursors and primary fruit flavours of the original wine and lees are preserved.

The Armagnac alambic

In the diagram, a basic illustration of the alambic Armagnacais, the chilled wine enters the system at the top [1]. Under its own pressure it rises up in the cooler/heater column on the right. The cold wine (yellow) surrounds the serpentine (blue), through which the hot eau-de-vie vapours are descending. This both heats the wine and cools the eau-de-vie as it runs out [11] into a container or barrel.

When the heated wine reaches the top of the heater, it runs out and across to the distillation column [5], at a temperature of about 80°C. This column consists of a number of horizontal plates bolted together, in which different apertures allow the wine to run down to the wood- or gas-fired boiler [7] and the resulting steam/vapour (blue) to rise back up.

At the head of the column the top plate is already hot enough, at about 92°, to evaporate the lightest, most volatile alcoholic substances from the hot wine out through the swan's neck [10]. Some of these comprise the undesirable "heads" and it is

these which never leave the system, made to circulate until they lose sufficient alcohol to work their way down into the "vinasse" - the spent organic matter and water in the bottom of the boiler.

Clearly the plates at the lower end of the column are the hottest, so different alcohols are evaporated at different levels. As they rise, they are forced by the design of the system to bubble back up through the wine in the plates above. This ensures

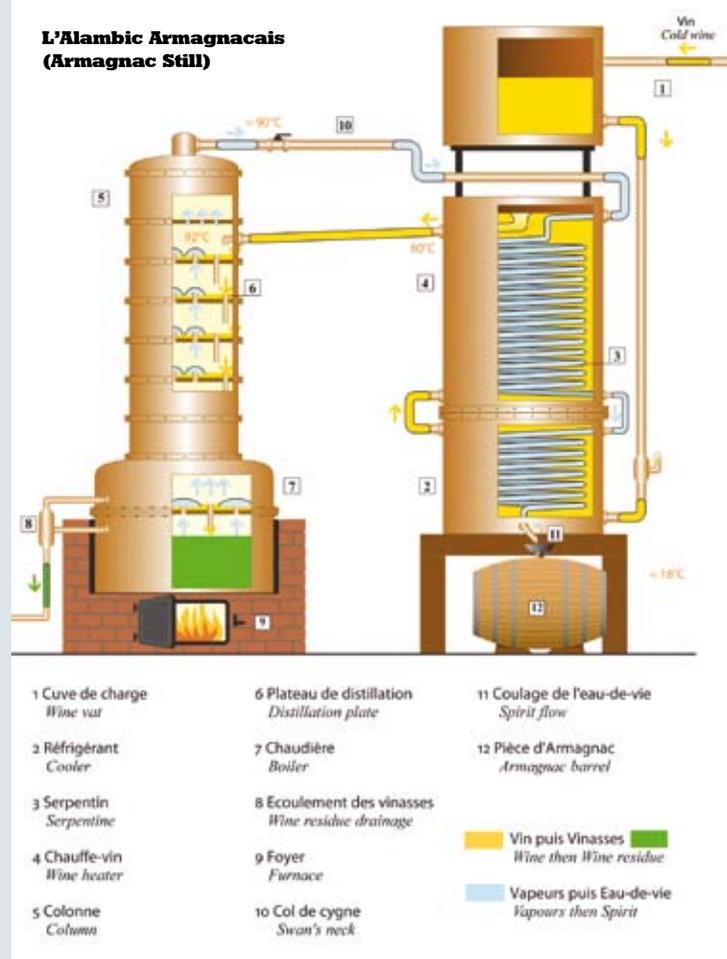
that the eau-de-vie receives as much exposure as possible to the fruit compounds in the original wine, thereby maximising its final flavour.

It is this last element that really marks the difference between Armagnac and Cognac, where double distillation produces a much purer, higher strength spirit. For some younger, commercial Armagnac blends, some double-distilled spirit is included in the blend, in order for the bottled product to be drinkable at a younger age.

When Armagnac is first put into the barrel to mature, it does contain a small proportion of heads and tails - the normally undesirable parts of the distillate - but nature deals with any potential problems. "For Cognac tails are bad," says Marquis de Montesquiou president Bruno Gazaniol, "but for us it's good. They help to give more flavour during ageing, but they evaporate during the process."

The lower strength produced in Armagnac distillation makes the end result less uniform than in the double method.

This adds to the individual character of each producer's product, and explains the reasoning behind the requirement that the wines used must be as fresh and untainted as possible, since more is preserved in the final eau-de-vie.



Ageing

The traditional Armagnac cask holds about 400 litres and is made of local Gascon oak. As demands on natural resources increase however, wood from outside the area is having to be used, generally coming from the Limousin forest.

The eau-de-vie lies in new casks for between 6 months and 2 years, until the cellar master decides it has taken on enough wood characters, at which point the spirit is transferred into older barrels. Over the years, the woody flavours are moderated as the alcohol level reduces and other elements such as vanilla, prune and 'rancio' (more developed flavours associated with oxygenation) and preserved fruits come to the fore.

There are few permitted additives, which are used only in some younger Armagnac blends: boisé (a reduction of oak chips and water); small amounts of sugar syrup, if required; caramel for minor adjustments to colour. The addition of demineralised water is also permitted to bring the alcoholic strength down to the 40% abv minimum for bottling, but in practice this is rarely required.

Janneau

Pioneering exporter

Founded in Condom in 1851, Janneau is one of the oldest of the great Armagnac Houses.

All aspects of the production process – from distilling and ageing through to blending and bottling – are carried out at Janneau.

Recognised as a pioneer in the region, it was Janneau that reintroduced the double distillation pot still method to the region in 1972 – a move which now clearly distinguishes its range of Armagnacs from all others.

As the owner of one of the largest stocks of old Armagnac, Janneau is also the region's largest exporter and lead supplier to the premium/luxury sector.

Best known within the portfolio

is the Janneau Classic Range in its iconic Gaudronne bottle.

Styles within this range include the award-winning VSOP and XO Royal, which have won no fewer than five gold medals each at the International Wine & Spirit Competition.

More recently this range was extended to include two new luxurious XO expressions: Extraordinaire 18 Year Old and Extraordinaire 30 Year Old.

However, perhaps the biggest

and most innovative change to the portfolio in recent years has been the addition of the new Single Distillery Range – a unique style of Armagnacs, which are the product of a single distillery, using the traditional pot still method.

The new range, which consists of 8, 12, 18 and 25 year olds, has been aged in Limousin oak. It combines Armagnac terroir with Cognac technique, and authenticity akin to that of malt whisky, to produce a winning combination.

Janneau's new range has already been awarded double gold in San Francisco, gold in London and platinum at the Chicago Beverage Tasting Institute, making it the most internationally awarded Armagnac in the world.



Janneau SA, 32100 Condom, France. janneau.net; email info@janneau.net

Château de Pellehaut

Quality through innovation

Château de Pellehaut is situated in the Ténarèze region; more exactly it is situated in Montréal-du-Gers, in the south west of France. The Béraut family has lived in Montréal-du-Gers for more than three centuries, and the family estate is today run by brothers Martin and Mathieu Béraut.

Covering some 530ha, Pellehaut is one of the biggest estates in the whole of the Gers. With 250ha for the vines, the remaining land is used to raise Blonde d'Aquitaine cattle and for growing cereals.

It is a true farming estate run in a traditional way – with respect for ancestral methods and for natural balance tempered by a scientific

rigour and a constant search for quality through innovation.

The Ténarèze, with its calcareous clay soils, produces eaux-de-vie with more structure and power. It is because of this variety and complexity of the soils that the wines of this vineyard are a lot more fruity and rich.

It is also because of the geographic proximity to Bas-Armagnac, the vinification process and the choice of distillation and maturation methods.



The eaux-de-vie of Château de Pellehaut are fine, soft and complex. They use just two varieties in the production of Armagnac: Ugni Blanc and Folle Blanche.

Today Armagnacs win systematic praise from the trade and press in France and throughout the world.

The favourite blend is la Réserve de Gaston, a blend of the best vintages made from Ugni Blanc and Folle Blanche grapes.

It is aged for a minimum of 10 years in local and Limousin oak for the Folle Blanche and a minimum 20 years for Ugni Blanc.

Château de Pellehaut, 32250 Montreal-du-Gers, France. pellehaut.com; email: contact@pellehaut.com

Armagnac's ancient lineage

While this year's 700th anniversary Armagnac celebrations are based on the Vital Dufour text dating from 1310, there is little doubt that the history of distilling in this area of south west France goes back far beyond that time.

In order to distil eau-de-vie, you first need to make wine. According to Onivins (the French national office for fruit, vegetables and horticulture), the first vineyards were planted in what is now Marseille (then Massalia) on the French Mediterranean coast, as long ago as the 6th century BC – brought by the ancient Greeks.

It was the Romans who then effectively spread vine growing across the whole of France in the early centuries AD, heading further too into Spain. And it's this Spanish connection that in time brought the Armagnac region to the fore in the art of distilling.

Between 711AD and 1492, southern Spain was occupied by the Moors – Arab and north African Muslims – who in this long period established cities such as Córdoba, in modern-day Andalucía, as centres of learning, with libraries far greater than any others in Europe at the time.

Being situated geographically close to the Spanish border, the Gascony region was traditionally traversed by all kinds of travellers – religious pilgrims, commercial or military personnel – who would bring with them knowledge attained on their travels.

According to the BNIA, records show that alambic stills were being used as early as the 6th century in the Middle East, for the production of rose essence. And, according to the recently published *Armagnac pour les Nuls* ['for Dummies'], in the



Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Française, under the direction of Alain Rey: “The word ‘alambic’ is attested in 1265 and described the apparatus for distilling, proof of the spread of alchemy in Europe under the influence of the Arabs.”

Given that the Moors would have brought their distilling expertise with

them as early as the 8th century, it seems clear that Gascony, as a wine-producing region, was well placed to be the first area in France to discover this knowledge and put it into practice some time thereafter.

And we have Prior Vital Dufour to thank for putting it into words exactly 700 years ago.

Vintage character

Single vintages are a key aspect of the identity of Armagnac. Traditional practices allow large producers to buy stocks in from individual growers to mature in their own cellars and, if they wish, sell at a future date as an estate-bottled Armagnac.

Many of the region's small growers can have a few casks or just one distilled every year, and many use them as a kind of “savings plan”, selling a case of rare old stock for a good price when in need of a boost in income. Clearly the benefits work both ways.

In this way, Armagnac is a good source of (relatively good value) anniversary stock, with most years from the last century and more covered. Here are just some of the oldest, rarest and most interesting vintages, which are available upon request.

1830 – Pre-phylloxera; oldest stocked by a producer (Baron de Lustrac) Louis Philippe 1er was the last king to rule France, 1830-48

1888 – Only five producers hold stock of this vintage

1890 – Only one producer (Castarède)

1893 – Relatively plentiful, with 10 producers holding stock, including Marquis de Montesquiou, Bordeneuve Châteaux et Collections, and Castarède to name a few

1900 – 11 producers can supply a 1900 vintage, including Delord

1910 – Six producers have stock

1914 – 11 producers (World War I – 3/8/14 Germany declared war on France)



1918 – Only seven producers have stock (11/11/18 – official end of the war)

1939 – Nine producers hold stock

1940 – Nine producers

1945 – 10 producers

Focus on tourism

The Armagnac Bureau BNIA has developed a new “Armagnac route” to help guide tourists around the region, with the aim of increasing sales of Armagnac directly from the estates.

The *Escapades en Armagnac* map and guide book, which gives more details about participating houses and estates, are scheduled for launch in May, in time to catch the summer tourist season.

New road signs will point the way through the Armagnac countryside to individual estates, and there is a further project under way for additional signs to identify the appellation areas.

As well as indicating the positions of the hundred or so producers taking part in the Armagnac Route, the map shows the locations of tourist destinations such as museums, castles and public gardens.

Escapades en Armagnac will be available free in all tourist offices and sites, and there is a new tourism section on the armagnac.fr website.

Castarède

From ancient cellars

Founded in 1832, the House of Castarède is the oldest trading House of Armagnac. For six generations, the Castarède family has developed this activity, which is led today by Florence Castarède.

The cellar at Pont de Bordes in Lavardac, close to the Baïse river, is one of the oldest cellars in Europe.

Castarède owns one of the most important collections of old vintages (more than 50 vintages, the oldest being 1893).

The House of Castarède is nestled in the heart of a vineyard of 16ha surrounding a castle dating from the 16th century in Mauléon d'Armagnac, situated in the Bas Armagnac region – known as the best to produce the finest eaux-de-vie.

Florence Castarède produces her Bas Armagnacs there with the following grape varieties: Folle Blanche, Colombar and Ugni Blanc.

Armagnac Castarède XO:

“The Armagnac Castarède XO has orange tints and proposes cocoa and dried fruits flavours. The mouth is simple but well balanced. It is an Armagnac to be tasted with foie gras.” *Guide des Vins Gilbert & Gaillard 2010*

Recent awards:

2010: 94/100, *Guide des Vins Gilbert & Gaillard 2010*. “Copper colour, bronze tints. Elegant nose, spices, exotic wood and tobacco notes, very fine. Spicy mouth. A typical Armagnac.”
2010: 16/20, *Gault Millau Guide 2010*

2009: Silver, International Wine & Spirit Competition – London
2009: Silver (89 pts), Beverage Testing Institute – Chicago
2009: Bronze, Concours d'Eauze
2009: 86 points, *Weinwirtschaft Magazine* (March)
2007: Gold, International Wine & Spirit Competition – London
2007: Bronze, Concours Général Agricole – Paris
2007: Silver, Grandes Eaux-de-Vie Contest – Eauze



Armagnac Castarede, 140 Boulevard Hausmann, 75008 Paris. armagnac-castarede.fr; email florence.castarede@wanadoo.fr

Baron de Sigognac

Finesse and character



It is in the Château de Bordeneuve, situated in the best tawny sandy soils of the Bas-Armagnac region, that Baron de Sigognac distills its premium wine “crus” so as to produce its Armagnacs – known for gathering finesse, elegance and character.

Immediately after the distillation of the wines, intentionally kept over their lees, the Bas-Armagnacs are transferred into new 400-litre Vosges forest oak casks, where they naturally acquire their delicate flavours, be they fruity, floral or spicy.

Every year Baron de Sigognac keeps a number of casks aside.

These are exclusively dedicated to the production of the single vintage series. So, from the range stored in its unique and exceptional ‘Paradise’, the house can offer a treasure of more than 80 different vintages.

During their first years the Armagnacs mature in a special cellar

with beaten earth floors, in humid conditions which favour the birth of the first delicate flavours.

Later on, the Baron de Sigognac Armagnacs will continue their maturation in a drier cellar, which will permit the development and perfection of the aromas.

The Baron de Sigognac Armagnacs are an authentic production completed with respect for age-old tested traditions.

Today they are sold in many countries around the world and particularly in the United Kingdom where they are available at top stores such as Harrods, Selfridges, Fortnum & Mason and Harvey Nichols.



BORDENEUVE
CHÂTEAUX & COLLECTIONS

Baron de Sigognac, 32440 Castelnau D'Auzan, France terroir-armagnac.com; email info@maison-armagnac.com

La Blanche - a clear indication of things to come

Ancient though the tradition in Armagnac is, this does not – as stated earlier in this publication – prevent the region being comfortable in the field of innovation. Proof positive of this is Blanche d’Armagnac – the non-wood matured eau-de-vie that hopes to capture the imaginations of bartenders and to carry Armagnac into the ever-expanding world of white spirits.

It was a long time coming, with the defining decree finally activated on May 27 2005. Such a concept – ‘white’ Armagnac – would be impossible in Cognac, where the spirit must be matured in the right kind of barrel for the right time before it can be described using the region’s name – all part of the strict AOC regulations.

Well, for La Blanche the rules are, if anything, even more strict. It can only be produced from existing approved vines in the Armagnac region, of course, and must be put into inert containers immediately after distillation. There it rests for a minimum of three months, after which it can be worked by the producer, aerating it to bring down the alcohol level – it is distilled to a higher degree than regular Armagnac.

The point of La Blanche is to capture the aromatic character of the wines used, hence the grapes of choice are the floral Folle Blanche, Ugni Blanc and fruity Baco.

Though it is France’s youngest AOC, La

Blanche is permitted to take the name of Armagnac as its roots lie in the region’s tradition of eau-de-vie distilling and consumption.

And, uniquely among AOC controlled eaux-de-vie in France, every batch produced will be sampled and analysed by the INAO (Institut National des Appellations d’Origine – not a body known for its relaxed attitude towards regulation) before being released to market.

In its infancy, there are currently only 20-25 companies producing La Blanche. BNIA director Sébastien Lacroix estimates production volumes to be: “About 10-15,000 bottles a year.” Check out the website, theblanche.com



Bartender snapshot: La Blanche

Durham Atkinson – Milk & Honey, London:

“I would say it is a fine expression of the wine that goes into the still. It has a more earthy and floral aroma than aged Armagnac, expressing the terroir of the grapes used in the production process. It has a lively mouth feel with rich and dry flavours of pears and apples followed by a smoky, pungent, fiery yet soothing tickle on the finish.”

Phil Duffy – The Player, London: “A fantastically versatile product, equally at home in cocktails or sipped straight. Chilled, it makes a great aperitif and it works really well with fruity flavours.”



Armagnac ambassadors

Chosen from a long list of public applicants, the BNIA has appointed ambassadors for Armagnac in three key countries: the UK, US and Russia.

It will be the job of the chosen ambassadors to spread their personal passion for Armagnac to the trade and consumers alike. They will also take charge of the new internet forum being developed as part of the generic body’s website, armagnac.fr

UK

Mark Wilkins is a designer and graphic artist with 20 years experience in the marketing of luxury brands in the UK.

Glenn McDowell is a professor of engineering at Nottingham University and is studying for the WSET Diploma.

Nicola Thomson is a freelance wine and spirit consultant with WSET qualifications up to Diploma level, and is a member of Women of Wine UK.

US

May Matta-Aliah is a graphic designer and wine educator

for the WSET in New York

Jessica Bell founded the Midwest Wine School in Chicago and is an official French Wine Society instructor

Russia

Ambassadors to be selected during 2010.



Nicola Thomson



Mark Wilkins



Glenn McDowell

Armagnac on the web

No modern drinks marketing strategy can be complete without a credible online presence, and the BNIA has relaunched its website armagnac.fr in comprehensive style.

Providing plenty to interest both trade and consumer alike, the busy homepage – in French and English – provides easy links for history, tourism and news; the region and how Armagnac is produced; a Cocktail of the Month section; easy click-throughs to Facebook and Twitter; and special members’ areas for press and producers.

Coming soon: the new interactive Armagnac discussion forum.

Samalens

Birth of a great Single

Born into a long line of winegrowers and distillers established in Laujuzan (Gers, Bas-Armagnac region) since 1882, current family head Pierre Samalens was struck by the evolution of taste and consumption modes relating to the spirit category around the world.

As a result, he decided to take on the challenge of inventing a new way to produce and enjoy Armagnac. After 15 years of research, Samalens created his Single de Samalens, a single grape Armagnac as 'dry' as a single malt whisky and containing no other sugar than the residual amount left naturally by the grape.

Basing his approach on the skilled know-how inherited from his forebears, Samalens worked with

SINGLE *de* Samalens

double distillation stills, combining this technique with distillation on the lees.

As a result of this innovative technique, coupled with a new ageing process, Samalens's eaux-de-vie have enhanced floral aromas and a bouquet of incomparable richness.

For those who love the noblest spirits

Launched in 2010, this entirely new reference is aimed at those who love

fine single malts and noble spirits made according to real tradition.

It offers them a subtly different gustatory experience: a truly refined sensation, long in the mouth, and with a unique flavour and quality which will be easily appreciated by connoisseurs.

Single de Samalens is a complete range which is available in three different versions, aged for 8, 12 and 15 years. It can be drunk as an aperitif, neat, on ice – or even in inventive cocktails.

UK distributor:

Bibendum Wine

Tel: +44 (0) 207 449 4099

Fax: +44 (0) 207 449 1077

bibendum-wine.co.uk



Armagnac Samalens, Route de Panjas, F-32110 Laujuzan (France). Tel: +33 (0)5 62 09 14 88. Fax: +33 (0)5 62 09 04 60. singledesamalens.com; email info@samalens.fr

Larressingle

A different style

Larressingle was created in 1837 by the Papelorey family, after the name of the village in the Ténarèze région of Gascony, where an ancient château is still to be seen.

Gabriel Papelorey met his wife Elise there and settled in the region, initiating the family business of bottled Armagnac.

His sons and grandsons grew their trade to an international scale in the US, French colonies and Europe.

Ténarèze is the appellation area on the eastern side of the Armagnac region, where the land is made up of limestone and clay.

This results in a different style of Armagnac – powerful and with intense aromas of dry fruits, nuts

and sometimes a hint of chocolate and musk flavour.

For 170 years, five generations of Papelorey have been producing Armagnac with the same passion, providing their clients all over the world with the best quality products, thanks to a unique knowledge of blending and ageing their prestigious eaux-de-vie.

The product range is wide and available in different classical age counts such as VS, VSOP, XO, Napoleon and Hors d'Age, but also



in a powerful Ténarèze 21 Year Old and numerous prestigious vintages.

The flexibility of the production enables Larressingle's Armagnac to be actively involved both in the retail and HoReCa segment.

UK distributor:

Bibendum Wine

Tel: +44 (0) 207 449 4099

Fax: +44 (0) 207 449 1077

bibendum-wine.co.uk

Larressingle, Etablissements Papelorey, Rue des Carmes, F-32100 Condom. Tel: +33 (0)5 62 28 15 33. Fax: +33 (0)5 62 28 36 99. email: papelorey@armagnac-larressingle.com

Marquis de Montesquiou Excellence in Armagnac

La Maison Montesquiou has been rooted in the soil of Gascony since the 11th century. The most celebrated member of the Montesquiou family was the Count d'Artagnan, musketeer of the King of France. His direct descendant is Pierre de Montesquiou, the founder of the company.

La Maison Montesquiou embodies the history and romance of France's oldest distilled spirit, Armagnac.

Marquis de Montesquiou Armagnac is made in Eauze (south west France) in the heart of the Bas-Armagnac area. This region produces the finest and most complex eaux-de-vie.

The cellar master selects wines from the best vineyard parcels in Gascony and oversees their distillation. This enables the unique character of Marquis de Montesquiou Armagnacs to be preserved.

Immediately after distillation,



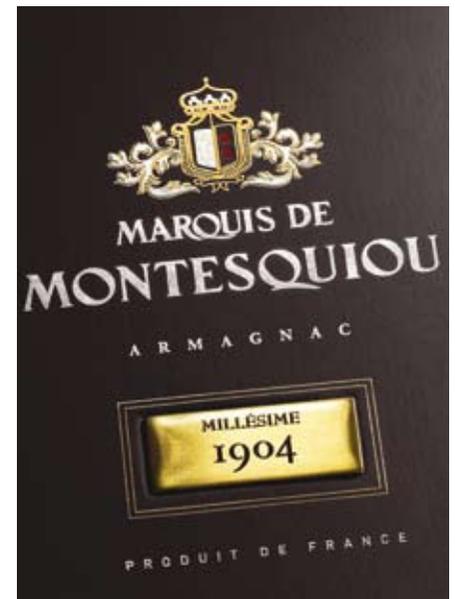
Marquis de Montesquiou Armagnac is transferred into oak casks and stored in the impressive cellars known as "the Cathedral".

Each cask is unique and worthy of special attention and the cellar master watches over every one of his vintages as they age.

Born and bred in Eauze, Jean-Claude Dallas, the cellar master, possesses unique expertise that has been passed down from one generation to the next.

He reveals the potential of each blend and gives Marquis de Montesquiou Armagnacs their true personality.

He also selects the eaux-de-vie that will become vintages, the quintessence of Armagnac.



Société des Produits d'Armagnac, Route de Cazaubon, 32 800 Eauze, France. We are still looking for new distributors in a number of countries. Please contact montesquiou@pemed.com. Exclusively represented in the UK by Emporia Brands. info@emporiabrands.com

Baron de Lustrac Gems of Gascony

Only the finest eaux-de-vie from the best terroirs form part of the Baron de Lustrac vintage

Armagnac range.

Once distilled, they are aged in oak barrels inscribed with the year of distillation.

Essentially, Armagnacs Baron de Lustrac come from small domaines with which the company works to age and care for the brandy, while also maintaining exclusive distribution rights.

The company is currently working with more than 20 producers in the heart of Bas-Armagnac.

The privileged relationship it shares with the producer allows Baron de Lustrac to age its

Armagnacs at the estate where they are produced under the supervision and benevolent gaze of the cellar master.

Then the moment arrives to place this famous spirit into its glass prison.

As these Armagnacs are only bottled to order, Baron de Lustrac



can supply customers with a large choice of bottle shapes and different styles of Armagnac.

It can supply some exceptional vintage Bas-Armagnacs, often from single grape varieties, which are presented in an old-fashioned bottle and come in strictly limited quantities.

The label is inscribed with the year of distillation, the name of the estate of production, the bottle number and, where relevant, the grape variety.

With the prunes and fruit of the Folle Blanche, the violet nose and complex character of the Baco, Baron de Lustrac attempts to unearth rare and special gems of the Gascony region.



Baron de Lustrac, 32110 Maignan, France. armagnac-baron-de-lustrac.com; email aodbornemann@orange.fr