

SPIRITS News

Our intrepid buyers hit the road in search of unique spirits from Scotland and France



AUGUST 19, 2013 FEATURES

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The Long and Peaty Road to Great Single Malt

By David Othenin-Girard

The theme of last year's visit to Scotland was **outrageous prices**. Big names were trading at an incredible premium. We felt lucky to secure a cask of the legendary **Port Ellen Distillery**, which we released at a hefty \$600 price tag. While some internet forums accused us of taking advantage of the shortage of this particular whisky, we knew that we were selling this product at a fair price and all subsequent releases would make our cask look like a steal. In fact, we worked hard to keep the price down and ended up selling it below our normal markup. It's true that we may never again find a super-rare cask as affordable as that Port Ellen, because what we've seen this year in Scotland are price increases nearly triple the levels from previous years on some blue chip whiskies. A cask of the legendary Bowmore from the '74 vintage that could have sold at a respectable £250 per bottle 2 years ago was now commanding closer to £700. That's the cost per bottle before it's even left the warehouse in Scotland, so it's just not going to fly back home. I'll never, however, blame my suppliers for wanting to get the most out of their stocks. Last year, the Bowmore Distillery's own limited release '64 vintage fino cask sold out instantly at \$10,000 a bottle. Someone will certainly buy that cask of '74 for a reasonably inflated price, but I'll still feel bad that we didn't get to sell it. Do I really have to accept that we were not going to find a legend without paying legendary pricing?

The loch less traveled

While we expected incredible increases on these super special malts, what we weren't expecting were the incredibly competitive prices on a stupendous array of lesser-known distilleries. It seems that market forces work in both directions. As the popularity of whisky increases, the most saleable names have skyrocketed, but we're seeing some downward pressure on other distilleries, as everyone out there wants the big old names.

What the whisky marketers don't tell you is that almost every distillery in Scotland is capable of producing good whisky, and a healthy majority regularly make excellent whisky despite their lack of name recognition. So we've returned with a treasure trove of affordable whisky of the most impeccable quality, many of which are from lesser-known distilleries. Of course, we've also managed to snag a few special casks from Scotland's undisputedly top-tier distilleries. It's striking how many wonderful rare casks of Scotch we ultimately did find.

Backroads French Brandy

By David Driscoll

There's a growing demand in the United States for "farm to table" and "nose to tail" consumables, especially in California. Farmers markets allow consumers to purchase fruits and vegetables directly from the producers. Local cafes are making more of an attempt to buy coffee beans directly from Central American farmers. For the last couple of decades, K&L Wine Merchants has been buying wine directly from vintners all over Europe, helping to develop the reputation of smaller producers who might otherwise go unnoticed in a competitive market. The advantages of working directly with the producer are tremendous to everyone involved in the process. The grower



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Cutting the peat

Single Malt (Continued from Page 1)

Into the Highlands

Our adventure began in Edinburgh with temperatures hovering just above freezing; we clearly wouldn't be blessed with perfect weather conditions three years in a row. Next a quick drive to Pitlochry, switching the radio between bad English pop, 80s music, and garbled weather warnings. We arrived at the **Edradour Distillery**, home of the Signatory bottlers and great friends of the store. We were greeted warmly as always by the resident whisky master, Des, who took us straight up to the warehouse after some discussion of what we were looking for. He knows the warehouse like a tentative gardener, selecting his favorite casks from within lots of similar whisky. As expected David and I were very pleased with the offerings. Based on the quality alone, we were certain that we'd have to do the usual back and forth on the price. While Signatory has excellent stocks, they are also quite savvy on the business side. To our utter shock, all pricing came back well below expected levels. The pricing was so good that we've **already sold through** several of our pre-arrivals from Signatory including excellent whiskies from Jura, Laphroaig, and the closed Imperial distillery. Look for these on the shelf by end of summer. What remains available are three screaming values, all completely different from one another. Still available

at the discounted pre-arrival price, we are offering a stupendous sherried **Glenlivet 16 year old (\$66.99)**, a powerful and unusual **Miltonduff 18 year old (\$69.99)** and a very idiosyncratic 21 year old Single Grain from the closed **Cambus Distillery (\$99.99)**. Typically, Signatory provides some serious sleeper hits each season and we haven't had a poor cask yet from them, so I highly recommend you consider the merits of each of the above before the casks arrive and the prices go up!

Happy with our success, David and I strolled through the parks around Pitlochry in the frigid cold before stopping at the wonderful Port Na Craig restaurant. We awoke the following morning and headed down to settle up and have breakfast, when the hotel manager asked us where we were headed. We explained that we planned to head north on the A9, through Speyside and eventually to Glenmorangie House on the northeastern-most coast of Scotland. "**You should leave, immediately,**" He exclaimed. He wasn't kidding. The next three hours were a grueling slog through the heart of the Scottish Highlands in blizzard conditions.

The endless snow and howling wind did not subside until we reached the northern coast. In fact, had we left 20 minutes later we would have been stuck behind a massive accident on the pass through the western side of the

Cairngorms. It took them nearly three days to clear that road. Luckily, we made it through just in time and stopped at the historic BenRiach distillery. There we collected nearly 30 samples and selected a wonderful 19 year old smoky bourbon cask from **BenRiach 19 Year Peated (\$139.99)** and another fabulous PX matured cask of **Glendronach 18 year (\$134.99)**, which has become the most consistently high-quality sherry-matured single malt on the market.

Several younger off-the-wall whiskies will be available at very reasonable prices.

Glasgow and the south

After our harrowing journey north, we settled in **Tain** for the weekend, which was surprisingly spared by the storm. The **gorgeous scenery and incredible hospitality** of our hosts made for a well-needed respite from the storm. After checking out the **Brora** based distilleries, we headed back south. Scotland was now covered in a blanket of dense snow and roads across the country were closed indefinitely. We were forced to cancel our trip to the distillery of Arran, thanks to a few

pounding snow drifts of approximately 15-20 feet. We were nonetheless able to secure a wonderful cask, **Arran 14 year (PA \$89.99)** from samples sent to us on our return. There is no doubt that this is a special distillery despite being in operation since only 1994. With a whole day of the trip cancelled we enjoyed an extra night in Glasgow, where we secured another spectacular cask of Glen Garioch from our dear friend **Rachel Barrie**.

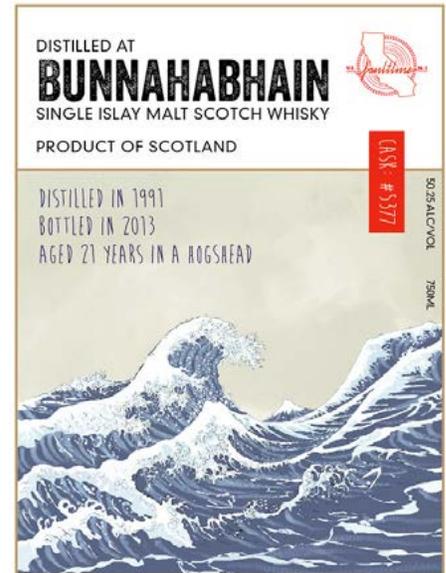
We also met with the Laing brothers, Stewart and Fred, who have been true friends and great supporters of our program. There we found some spectacular whisky, and we've worked extremely hard to get the prices down. While we can't release those whiskies yet, we've negotiated outstanding pricing on some very rares including: a young Talisker, an incredible Laphroaig 20 year, and the return of Caol Ila 30 year! Several younger off-the-wall whiskies will be available at very reasonable prices. Ardbeg 21 year will likely be the crown jewel of the 2013 campaign, and if all goes to plan, prices will be well within reach for most single malt enthusiasts. Glasgow is always the most productive place on our journey and this year was no different.

From there, we travelled south to meet with bottlers up and down the western coast of Scotland. Of course we saw our old friend **David Stirk**, who has provided us with some of our most successful casks. This year's batch include a fresh and feisty **Aberlour 12 year**

(**PA \$59.99**), a gorgeous young **Bowmore 10 year (PA \$69.99)**, a rustic and wonderful **Fettercain 17 year (PA \$84.99)** and an oily, smoky little whisky from the **Isle of Mull (\$54.99)**. He also hooked us up with his second official Faultline cask, a wacky old blend that's like nothing we've ever seen before. Next, we visited the **Bladnoch Distillery** and somehow caused some sort of international incident. **Don't ask!** In spite the internet chatter, we hit it off with the distillery and they've committed to selling us at least 3 casks: a young peater, a middle aged whisky, and a mature malt of 21 years old. This would be the first time that we've introduced a new distillery direct bottling, albeit in extremely limited quantities, and a great honor.

More on that soon, check the **Spirits Journal** for updates.

Our Scottish adventure concluded with a few surprises on the way back to Edinburgh. We met with several more bottlers, sometimes in their homes or even just at the local pub. We secured two wonderful cask from our old friends A.D. Rattray, a **Glen Elgin 17 year old (\$109.99)** and a splendid **Clynelish 16 year old (\$99.99)**. Those two in hogshead and refill sherry respectively, contrasting our third exclusive cask to arrive, a **Mortlach 22 year old from Chieftain's (\$169.99)** that's nearly black, with big sherry flavors. These casks are already in stock and nearly sold out, as they arrived so much earlier than the rest of our



selections, so don't hesitate to click through and lock them up before it's too late!

Fantastic new Faultline

Thanks to our unrelenting search across Scotland we've also managed to secure more Faultline Whisky than ever before. I won't be overly effusive here about how great these whiskies are, but we couldn't be prouder. The people who've had a Faultline bottling know exactly what to expect—really solid whisky at prices that fly in the face of the general consensus that whisky prices are soaring.

Here they are in no particular order:

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Left: The Scottish Highlands Right: David Stirk from Creative Whisky's Exclusive Malts preparing a K&L barrel

Backroads French Brandy *From Farm to Glass*

By David Driscoll

(Continued from Page 1)

gets more money from a retailer than he would from a local broker, the retailer gets a better price from the grower than he would from an importer or distributor, and the customer gets a better sticker price when fewer parties are involved in the transaction. In the case of alcohol, not only are consumers getting the product directly from the source, they're also getting a homogeneous one.

Since the beginning of the booze trade, alcohol has rarely been marketed by the people who actually made it. Whisky distilleries in Scotland have long sold their spirits to blenders. Champagne growers continue to sell their wines to the big houses. The small farmers in France who distill in the Cognac region are more likely to be found in a bottle of Hennessy or Courvoisier than under their own label. This is the way it has always been done. The big houses purchase brandy from small farmers and blend it into a globally-recognized product which they market to the drinking public. Many farmers are not interested in the sales side of the booze business. They're happy to tend to the soil, grow their grapes, and collect their annual salary from these large companies. There's no time

to travel the world and taste consumers on your Cognac when there's work to be done in the vineyard.

Backroads gold

Unlike with single malt in Scotland, most distillers in France are not corporate-owned institutions. We can't drive around Scotland and find artisanal whiskies because there are few distilleries left that are not the property of Diageo, Pernod-Ricard, or Jim Beam Global. Much like with Champagne, the larger brandy companies in France work on annual contracts with growers and distillers, rather than purchasing them outright—meaning the product is for sale to anyone who's interested in buying it. Small distillers in France sell to the big houses because it's easy, but they're open to other business if it's just as convenient. They're not going to personally come out to K&L, but they're happy to have K&L come to them, which is exactly what we began doing last year. There are hundreds of small Cognac, Armagnac, and Calvados brandies being sold exclusively within their respective regions. We just needed to taste them.

For the second year in a row, we spent a week driving through the French countryside, beginning in the southern Armagnac region,

working our way north through Cognac, and finishing in Normandy, the home of Calvados. A typical day would begin around nine in the morning in the barn (which doubles as the tasting bar) and finish around ten at night around a small dinner table. We would meet with four to five producers each day, driving through winding hills, vast vineyards, and dodging the occasional animal in the road. There were no glitzy chateaux, no diamond-studded goblets, and no luxury lifestyles involved with these brandies. We met with people wearing overalls and work boots who might offer us a small plate of rabbit terrine on white bread, while we tasted and they stood by quietly, looking down at the ground, hoping that we were enjoying ourselves.

The result of our hard work is going to please every fan of French brandy, from those who just enjoy a sip every now and again, to those who collect the rarest of the rare. We've discovered some incredible bargains. We've found some outstanding deals. We've tasted through brandies ranging from five to one hundred years age, from \$30 a bottle to more than \$3,000. We've got brandy to mix a cocktail with, as well as pour into a snifter. Most importantly, however, we're going to be



Jacques Esteve's Petit Champagne vineyards

offering our customers the chance to taste real brandy from a real place made by real people. All of the selections we're offering are made from 100% estate fruit and were purchased directly from the producer. They have not been married together with other spirits, nor were they contracted via a negotiant. These are farm-to-glass brandies, so to speak—from the farm, to K&L, to the consumer.

Each of these spirits has its own story and its own personality—much like the people who created them. We've done our best to explain what makes each of them unique and special, reiterating our experiences in tasting with each producer and the adventures that happened along the way. Hopefully this information will allow our readers to find a brandy that piques their interest or catches their fancy. We think this year's crop offers some of the strongest dollar-for-dollar values for distilled spirits in general. As the whiskey market continues to rage, finding deals in the brown goods department has been difficult, but we think we've done it. We've got a healthy selection to tell you about right now, but there are still more coming later this fall.

Cognac

This year's trip began in Cognac. One of the most impressive new producers we visited was Ragnaud-Sabourin. I know what you might be thinking. Ragnaud? That sounds familiar. True. Last year's trip resulted in some amazing products from Raymond Ragnaud. This chateau is indeed related. The original owner of the estate, Gaston Briand, had a daughter who married a man named Marcel Ragnaud—brother of Raymond. Marcel passed away unfortunately in 1996 and left the estate to his daughter Annie. She married Mr. Sabourin and, voilà, the Ragnaud-Sabourin Cognac house was born. The vineyards of Ragnaud-Sabourin stretch far over the hills in Grand Champagne: 33 hectares of Ugni Blanc with a bit of Folle Blanche as far as the eye can see. This estate is known throughout France as having the goods. We brought in two expressions from Sabourin (putting age statements on your Cognac is a slippery slope when it comes to getting label approval—I know that some people do it, but I don't really think it's legal—so Ragnaud Sabourin decided to call these two No. 35 and No. 20. I'll leave it to you to figure out what those numbers represent):



In the unassuming cellar of Ragnaud-Sabourin, the luxury is in the barrel

Ragnaud Sabourin K&L Exclusive Reserve Speciale #20 Cognac (\$89.99) Soft, round, with a seamless transition between vanilla and fruit, and a long, lasting finish. This is legit Cognac. It's the real deal. Nuanced enough to please the most seasoned aficionado, but polished enough to excite newcomers to the genre.

Each of these spirits has its own story and its own personality – much like the people who created them.

Ragnaud Sabourin K&L Exclusive Reserve Speciale #35 Cognac (\$169.99) We bought a lot of this Cognac, despite the fact that it's \$170. Normally, we're a bit more cautious with expensive booze (because with Cognac we're not obligated to take full casks, we can buy as little or as much as we want), but this Yak is just too good. We know that one sip is all it's going to take to create a number of return buyers. A 35 year old masterpiece of dried apricots, rich toffee, barrel spice and resinous oils that finishes like velvet. Lord help me, I might drown myself in this stuff.

Of course, once Annie Ragnaud brought out the pre-phylloxera juice—the Cognac made from brandies more than 100 years old—we knew we were really in trouble.

Ragnaud Sabourin K&L Exclusive Paradis Cognac (\$1,299.99) Yep, we did it. We

bought some of Ragnaud Sabourin's pre-phylloxera age Cognac and bottled it just for K&L. Can you say decadent? Wonderfully seamless in flavor, rich and round, brimming with toffee, cocoa, vanilla and brandied fruit. This is the smoothest, most supple and haunting Cognac we've yet found in France. It's also one of the oldest. If you're looking for luxury—heck, if you're looking for history!—then this is the bottle for you. The oldest, most mature Cognac from one of the Grande Champagnes top producers.

We visited with our old friends over at Esteve Cognac as well, located in Petit Champagne. We've just brought in our second batch of Coup de Coeur, the single most successful Cognac we've ever sold at K&L. Esteve's property is unassuming. It blends into the rest of the small village where both his home and distillery reside. Sitting on the border of Petit Champagne and Grand Champagne, divided by only a small river, his grapes grow in a very mineral, limestone-rich soil, making his base wine very similar to the GC profile: high acid, low alcohol, full flavor. We'll be bringing in two new expressions from Esteve later this fall, but the Coup de Coeur is the gem.

Jacques Esteve K&L Exclusive Selection Coup de Coeur Cognac (\$89.99) The Coup de Coeur is a blend of 1979 and 1981 vintages that begins with soft citrus on the nose before blossoming into a warming and supple palate. Barrel spice and nutty flavors balance out the sweetness and the flavors are in perfect harmony on the finish. If there's a better deal in Cognac for less than \$100, we've yet to find

Armagnac Facts

Facts I didn't know until visiting:

- *Armagnac is almost always initially aged in new charred oak, or second fill oak for the first year or two.*
- *Armagnac is usually transferred to a new barrel every two years, or at least racked to oxidize the spirit and tame the fiery alcohol inside of it. Oxygen helps to accelerate the aging process.*
- *Unlike Cognac, Armagnac is almost never watered down. Therefore, it is important for the spirit to be distilled at a drinkable proof. In order for this to happen the Armagnac base wines must be lower in alcohol so that the spirit runs at a lower proof. Therefore, viticulture is a very important part of this process. Unless you want to water down your precious Armagnac, that is!*
- *Vintages are important in Armagnac because the wine determines the flavor and the flavor determines how long the spirit needs to be aged for. Just like wine, the vintage determines how long you need to age it. It's just that in this case you have to age it in a barrel instead of a bottle. Great vintages can drink young, or last decades.*
- *Distilling wine that is 11% or higher doesn't work well in an Armagnac column still. The vapors don't flow upward as easily and the result is less concentrated. Armagnac isn't doubled distilled because the second distillation wouldn't be in contact with the wine itself as it boils.*
- *Almost no Armagnac properties have stills. They usually hire a stillman to bring one after the harvest is over and contract out the work. Armagnac producers are farmers first.*

Crazy, right? There's so much to know!

one. For those looking for more intense flavor and character, rather than the lighter, more delicate style, this Cognac is for you.

Armagnac

After spending a few days in Cognac, it was time to head down to Gascony, the home of Armagnac. There are so many things about Armagnac that I didn't know until today that it makes me embarrassed I didn't know them! If spirits geeks ever wanted the ultimate challenge, Armagnac is it. Simply put, there are so many factors that go into making a quality spirit that it makes your head hurt just thinking about them. All of the viticultural factors like weather, soil, and winemaking come into play, as do all of the components of distillation. In Armagnac, you have to be able to master both, unlike in Scotland or Kentucky.

The first stop of the day was Chateau Pellehaut, an Armagnac whose blend we have been carrying for years. Located in the Tenereze, the location was a mere five minutes from our hotel, so we had no problem stuffing down a croissant and coffee before hitting the road. Laurant met us at the entrance and immediately brought us in the chai for some barrel sampling. The brandies at Pellehaut are amazingly powerful and rich, almost like bourbons. In fact, were we to have tasted these casks blindly, I could have easily been fooled into thinking they were from Four Roses. We snagged two new vintages:

1996 Chateau de Pellehaut K&L Exclusive Vintage Tenereze Armagnac (\$59.99) Big, spicy, woody flavor explodes right off the bat from this 17 year old, 50.4% brandy. This is another crossover Armagnac, the one you'll want to buy if you like Bourbon and think Armagnac might be something you want to try. The raisiny fruit aspect of the Folle Blanche comes in on the finish, but this is all about the concentration of the wood and the spice. \$60 for all this punch. And someone actually emailed me last week to say that most Armagnac was a rip-off! Come on, man!

1983 Chateau de Pellehaut K&L Exclusive Vintage Tenereze Armagnac (\$84.99) Rich, dark-fruited flavors and barrel spices come fast, but the texture is soft and round on the palate. This 30 year old brandy was distilled from Ugni Blanc, but still clocks in at 47.8% despite three decades in wood. I can't imagine this guy hanging around for too long. It's just so far beyond any other mature spirit option

we have right now in terms of quality and price.

However, we were perhaps most excited by a young Armagnac known as L'Age de Glace. I've already gotten myself into some serious trouble with this brandy since its arrival. It's simply too easy to drink.

Chateau Pellehaut L'Age de Glace (\$27.99)

This is the one I've been most excited about receiving, not only because it's inexpensive, but because it's a young Armagnac meant for mixing and drinking with ice (hence the name, "Ice Age"). The fruit of the brandy takes center stage here, melding wonderfully with the hint of vanilla from the wood. It's all Folle Blanche and it's soft, round, and fruity, but it still has that little bit of rustic brandy flavor that I associate with Armagnac. At 41%, it's light and easygoing, but there's still a lot of character. I have a feeling I'll personally be going through bottles of this. Bottles.

Our next stop after Pellehaut was another new face for K&L: an estate called Domaine du Miquier that is run by Jacques Lasserre. Jacques is a veteran of the business and for years was the distiller for many other producers in the region (remember that many Armagnac producers have no stills and hire other people to distill their wine). He knows the production from the vineyard to the bottle and you can tell it right away when you taste his brandy. They are polished and exquisite in quality. His crazy old still was made in 1900 and continues to create one masterpiece after another.

Both David and I expect Miquier to be a big player for K&L in 2013. There were a number of selections that interested us. Even though Jacques only has six hectares of fruit, with only four dedicated to distillation, he had tons of great booze. A 1986 Folle Blanche sample was incredibly refined and polished. We were hooked right off the bat. A 1993 showed beautiful aromas and wonderful hints of Blackjack and Big Red gum on the finish.



It's been pretty well documented over the last few decades that many of the most complex and interesting Armagnacs have been distilled from Folle Blanche wine. Besides this rather stubborn varietal, Armagnac can also be stilled from Ugni Blanc, Baco, or Colombard, but Folle Blanche seems to be a very special grape for distillation. The problem, however, is that Folle Blanche is a much more difficult grape to grow, plus it's not as valuable for wine production as Ugni Blanc and Colombard are. So if you're into making wine as well as brandy, you're more likely to grow Ugni Blanc or Colombard. If you're into making durable, long-lived Armagnac, you're probably growing Baco. If you're interested in making tasty, esoteric, miniscule amounts of Armagnac that will only be appreciated by a handful of super-geeky, anal-retentive spirits nerds around the globe, then you're probably making Armagnac from Folle Blanche. Unfortunately, there are not many producers who cater to us geeky types, so these selections are quite special for that reason:

1993 Domaine du Miquer K&L Exclusive Bas Armagnac (\$115.99) The 1993 is absolutely stunning with a beautiful bouquet of warm baking spices and woody barrel notes. The finish has a vibrant Big Red cinnamon note and hint of anise that really gives it pep. This is a very special brandy that matches some of the best we have ever carried from producers like Darroze, Baraillon, and Ravignan.

1986 Domaine du Miquer K&L Exclusive Bas Armagnac (\$129.99) The 1986 is rich, spicy, full of woody notes, but also the softer side of the grape. The Folle Blanche gives this brandy finesse and an elegance that is rarely seen with Armagnac these days.

We ended up spending about six days total in France this year, including a trip north to Normandy (yes, we will be getting a second batch of the incredible Camut 15 year old Calvados). We're hoping for another young apple brandy producer to come through with a new K&L exclusive selection for a more everyday mixer. All in all, there's a lot to be excited about. We're expecting new Armagnacs from our friends at Baraillon, some exciting new value-priced Cognac from a producer named Bouju, and a few more ancient surprises. Make sure you keep up with us to find out what's just arrived. There's bound to be something that speaks to you in this year's crop.



Jacques Lasserre's antique, but fully operational, 1900 still at Domaine du Miquer

Drink More Armagnac!

By Kyle Kurani

If you drink Bourbon, you should decidedly be drinking more Armagnac. There are at least 13 reasons why you should be drinking more of this delicious draught, but here are just a few of the more pertinent arguments why I think Armagnac deserves more attention. To put this in perspective, we'll talk about some of the fine spirits that Chateau Pellehaut make, one of my favorite producers, and explore the parallels that exist between Armagnac and its American counterpart, bourbon. Both spirits have similar roots: they are family affairs, made by people of the land, rooted with a sense of place. But where high-end bourbon has become quite commercialized and scarce, Armagnac is rather undiscovered.

Armagnac is where artisanal bourbon was 10 years ago. For one, you can still find it on the shelf, for goodness sake! In a world where such staples like Weller 12 and Elijah Craig 18 cannot be found on the shelf, simply because there is no more to be had, and prices for many others have increased dramatically, these brandies offer amazing quality and price. Whatever the Pappy Van Winkle (and I selfishly pray we will never get to this point) of Armagnac is, it is sitting on the shelf somewhere, being affordable, attainable, and darn delicious. I used to look at bourbon as a great value compared to single malt, but that value has been drunk up to the last drop. Bourbon drinkers now have to scour the internet for ever more elusive bottles and pay prices that are not what I'd call "affordable." Bourbon, the backwoods drink of a young America, is now firmly mainstream. The value has scooted on down the perceived chain of luxury and now rests in the old French countryside.

There is romance still left in Armagnac. This is a family drink, passed around the fireplace at sundown when nothing tastes better than that first drink to clear the dust from your throat. You can feel a connection to place with Armagnac—no frilly labels, no marketing schemes, just a resonance with a time that the booze industry has lost here in the States. The Pellehaut Domain produces not only grapes but grows wheat and sunflowers, as well as raises cattle, certainly an echo of the American homestead we are familiar with. The farm is run by the Patriarch Gaston Béraut, while his sons Mathieu and Martin manage the brandy. They make some of the most complex, well-crafted, and simply delicious spirits we have on the shelf, spirits that work for everything from a weeknight cocktail, to special occasion sippers.

These Brandies have steadily nosed their way into all aspects of my drinking habit. From a high ball to a snifter, Armagnac can fill many of the roles that are traditionally meant for bourbon and the generically termed "brandy." Sidecars, Vieux Carres, Metropolitans

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Left: The mighty mountain Benrinnes, covered with snow behind Glenfarclas



Right: View from Chateau Pellehaut, makers of rich, bourbon-like Armagnac

New Faultline Single Malt (Continued from Page 3)

Miltonduff 30 year Year Old Faultline Single Barrel Cask Strength Single Malt Whisky 750ml (PA \$139.99)

Mortlach 25 year Year Old Faultline Single Barrel Cask Strength Single Malt Whisky 750ml (PA \$124.99)



Royal Lochnagar 10 Year Old Faultline Single Barrel Cask Strength Single Malt Whisky 750ml (PA \$54.99)

Longmorn 21 Year Old Faultline Single Barrel Cask Strength Single Malt Whisky 750ml (PA \$104.99)

Cragganmore 23 Year Old Faultline Single Barrel Cask Strength

Single Malt Whisky 750ml (PA \$99.99)

Bunnahabhain 21 Year Old Faultline Single Barrel Cask Strength Single Malt Whisky (PA \$79.99)

Bowmore 16 Year Old Faultline Single Barrel Cask Strength Single Malt Whisky 750ml (PA \$94.99)



Bowmore 15 Year Old Faultline “Palm Tree” Single Barrel Cask Strength Single Malt Whisky (PA \$89.99)

Faultline 32 Year Old Single Cask Single Vintage Blended Scotch Whisky 750ml (PA \$99.99)

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K&L SAN FRANCISCO

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Drink More Armagnac (Continued from Page 7)

(my favorite, a Manhattan made with brandy). They also work so well in many Bourbon-based cocktails—Old Fashioneds with Armagnac are dark and spicy, with a touch more soul. **Chateau de Pellehaut K&L Exclusive L’Age de Glace (\$27.99)** is everything I want for mixing. It is one of the most accessible brandies we have had in the store. Made specifically to be served on the rocks, it is full of fresh fruit, spiced pears, golden apples, and just a hint of vanilla in the background, yet it’s sturdy enough to stand up in a cocktail. With its lively freshness and quaint rusticity, I look forward to this with a few ice cubes on a summer night, or mixed in a cocktail. For you purists out there, perhaps the most intriguing brown spirit on our shelves this year is the **1996 Chateau de Pellehaut K&L Exclusive Vintage Tenareze Armagnac (\$59.99)**—it is not only stunning, it is one of the best price-to-quality bottles on the shelf. Please tell me the last bottle of 17-year-old bourbon you saw on the shelf, let alone for just sixty bones. This brandy is full of dark fruit, brooding and rich, with a backbone of spice and old leather. This has the vanilla and baking spice that is similar to well-aged bourbon, but has so much more nuance and none of the heat. It is supple with notes of toasted nuts, rich toffee, and a luscious texture that just blows me away.

I look upon Armagnac with thirsty eyes. There is so much to explore, and each new one that we find is a small discovery in a world that there is so much to learn about. I hope we have shed a little bit of light on a new region and spirit, and I sincerely hope that you will come and talk to us and put our grand ideas of Armagnac as “the new bourbon” to the test. Here’s to many raised glasses in the future.