

James The Sommelier Wine's Relations –Armagnac

'Wine honors the soul, so honor it with yours.'

Armagnac

Now we come into the realm of true mastery of grape based, alcoholic beverages. Located 70 miles south-east of Bordeaux, the region of Armagnac- like the region of Cognac- shares its border with Bordeaux and enjoys the same climate. As it nestles in the center of Gascony, it could adequately be called the 'heart' of France, Gascony being home to the most notable French wines and liqueurs. Apt, then, in a geographical sense, but it also exudes the soul of the region; the organ which pumps the stereotypical character of French brandies.

It does have to contend with its closest alcoholic peer, Cognac, don't forget. As Armagnac is made from the same grape varieties as cognac (Folle Blanche, Ugni Blanc and Colombard) it would seem that it has all the work to do in declaring itself as a separate drink regarded as great unto itself. The method of making Armagnac creating a unique brand stems from its single distillation, opposed to cognac's double distillation. Does this mean it's not as good? Lacking in technical manipulation may reduce a brandy's capability of brilliance. On the contrary... the single distillation retains a higher proportion of flavouring elements in the distilled spirit, resulting in a brandy with more flavours, aroma and character than cognac. Also, the lack of a second distillation gives Armagnac more time to age in the local Monlezun black oak barrels. It is here where the magic happens.



But what is Armagnac the brandy? Armagnac has a very concentrated, complex aroma and tremendous length. In reality you will find it really comes first in the hearts of true connoisseurs of brandy. When judging, balance is very important. It must not be judged by its body alone. The most important thing is the balance or relationship between the fruit, alcohol and tannin of the spirit. You should always regard these three parts as comprising the whole.

The French actually do not have a separate word for the flavours that you smell and the ones that you taste. In fact they use the word aroma. The three aromas that form the flavor of Armagnac are the primary aroma of fruit and young oak, then the secondary aroma related to maturing fruit and the third aroma which comes from the slow oxidation. The primary aroma you will notice on your nose can be even more intense on the palate. When combined with wood secretions like vanilla it can give Armagnac its natural sweetness, which is fantastic. The secondary aroma materialises around the 10th birthday. The aromas become nutty, beginning with almond and moving through walnut and hazelnut. Finally, the third aroma is the time when the esters of fatty acids slowly oxidize while gradually breathing through the barrel.

Even though the nose and the mouth are important it is actually the length by which one assesses a great Armagnac. The finish often gives the impression that the Armagnac is still on the palate. This long fade is the ultimate impression of an Armagnac which is a great one.

Enjoy your Armagnac but guard the secret well so that it will always remain special for you.

Tips: Armagnac is usually served as a digestif after your meal. But try other Armagnac-based drinks such as Floc De Gascogne with melon, foie gras or cheese or a dessert and Trou Gascon with smoked salmon, foie gras or charcuterie.

For more information about wine join our wine classes at That Little Wine Bar, 54 Chow Thye Road, George Town, Penang

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