

## Armagnac Blanche The Next New Cocktail Trend



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Armagnac, that wonderful amber, fiery spirit, that other French brandy, might seem a trifle obscure compared to its flashier cousin, Cognac, but not so obscure that last March, 2016 that is, it drew 42 folks, a full house of industry professionals and curious consumers, to the one day Armagnac Academy in New York City.

Sponsored by the [Bureau National Interprofessionnel de L'Armagnac](#), Armagnac's trade association, it was expertly presided over by Amanda Garnham of the BNIA and May Matta-Aliah, Armagnac's American ambassador.

And they'll be back in New York again on May 18<sup>th</sup>, full details of how to sign up [here](#).

I have been a fan of Armagnac for years, especially following a visit to Gascony, this most rural, most remote and most gastronomically indulgent corner of France. Located in the south-west – on clear days you can see the Pyrenees – it's famous for three things: rugby, ducks (especially foie gras) and its miraculous amber spirit, Armagnac.

Tariquet, one of the better known Armagnac houses, has a lovely video that evocatively portrays the appeal of the region and it's special spirit.

It was to further my acquaintance with Armagnac that I signed up for the Academy, and was rewarded with insight, knowledge and a most pleasurable time. But I also made an eye-popping discovery: Armagnac Blanche.

Blanche is a new-made spirit that is aged in neutral containers for just a few months before being bottled and, because it sees no oak, it's clear. Blanche.

It's a new category, being awarded its AOC only in 2005, but in practical terms it's a drink that has been around for centuries. According to the BNIA website "It is a traditional *eau-de-vie* from the land of Armagnac that was born in 2005 from a desire driven by the producers that were used to keeping back a part of their freshly distilled eau-de-vie for their personal needs, normally related to the pleasures of the table."

But while it's interesting to sip as an aperitif, or a digestive – there are tasting notes on the different brand's very distinctive flavors below – it is beginning to attract the attention of bartenders as a versatile and different base for cocktails.

Garnham tells me "In Armagnac we drink it neat often as a palette cleanser in between the grand Gascon feasts. It is excellent with oysters and smoked salmon, caviar and charcuterie. It is also good chilled with foie gras. Good with Roquefort. And now they are making cocktails too."

It is this cocktail angle that is beginning to attract the attention of America's more adventurous bartenders, and is the reason I am sitting at the bar of New York's [The Modern](#) with bar manager Sean Kelly as he mixes up his Armagnac Blanche Cocktail. "I'm terrible at inventing names for cocktails" is his excuse for this less than imaginative handle, but it soon becomes clear that his cocktail skills are more well developed.

"We wanted to introduce a cocktail with a Blanche Armagnac" he explains "but we didn't have a lot of direction because it's a category that hasn't been explored that much. One of the things we liked about Blanche Armagnac is that it's like a vodka but with a lot more character."

"When we started we asked ourselves 'How can we enhance the classic cocktail that normally calls for vodka, where the Armagnac Blanche can elevate that with its enhanced aromatics.' "

They begun with a Vesper, the 007 concoction, mixing equal parts gin, Armagnac Blanche and vermouth. The early attempts weren't a success. However, when they got to Tanqueray, things begun to look up - it was pretty good. "But we wanted it to be a bit fresher, more vibrant and that led us to Tanqueray 10, which is Tanqueray with incorporated fresh citrus."

"This is the drink that requires the most conversation with our guests. Since we've always had a great presence of vintage Armagnacs it makes sense to introduce the "new" Armagnac category, because our clientele might be more receptive than most to the idea of a Blanche Armagnac cocktail."

"The number one question we get about this cocktail is 'What's Armagnac Blanche?' and that facilitates the dialogue," and a productive engagement with the customer.

Jillian Vose, Beverage Director of New York's downtown cocktail haven [The Dead Rabbit](#), is also a convert. "Yes I am a big fan of all Armagnac and our team and I at Dead Rabbit have been using Blanche Armagnac in drinks for the past few years."