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10 best armagnacs to replace your favourite cognac

Rich in flavour and history, discover one of these superior French brandies

Claire Dodd | Wednesday 15 April 2020 17:30 |



As a rule, the longer the ageing, the higher the price and the more complex the flavour (iStock/The Independent)

Traditional, small-scale, and truly “craft”, armagnac may not have the bling factor of cognac, but this characterful and French brandy is as rich in flavour as it is in history.

With its status as the beloved tippie of hip-hop stars and rap moguls, cognac has long since stolen the spotlight and claimed a place as perhaps one of the most well-known types of brandy.

However – dating back at least 700 years and known for being France’s first brandy – armagnac can rightly claim to be one of the most flavoursome.

Depending on the age and quality, profiles range from the fruity – with prunes, pears and quince – to the decedent. For older liquids, expect to find a buttery softness, alongside chocolates and caramels.

What makes armagnac unique? It's made in the Gascony region of France typically by small producers. There are ten different grape varieties that can be used in armagnac production, though four – ugni blanc, baco, folle blanche, and colombard – are most common. And distinctly, the vast majority of producers remain independent or family-owned.

And while both cognac and armagnac are French brandies, distilled from white wine grapes and aged in oak, armagnac is crucially distilled just once, keeping the idiosyncrasies of the wines rather than smoothing them out. Cognac on the other hand, must be distilled twice.

Armagnac’s unique combinations of different grape varieties and terroirs mean that there’s already an incredibly diverse array of flavour profiles to be found. A new generation of producers are now taking the spirit in a rather different direction.

Experimentation with different barrel finishes is now beginning. However, as they stray from the strict definition of the spirit, they're not included in our roundup. Chateau de Laubade, for example, is one house pushing boundaries, with both rum and whisky cask finished products set for launch (in the UK) under its *les curiosites* range in September.

What should you be looking for when you buy? And why is there such a vast difference in price? As a general rule, the longer the ageing, the higher the price and the more complex the flavour. Classifications include VS – a mix of several armagnacs aged for a minimum of one year, VSOP – aged at least four years, and XO – aged for at least ten years.

In short, a flavoursome armagnac needn't break the bank; we've focused on the best value options as well as the best tasting in our roundup of some of the best.

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Domaine Tariquet armagnac XO, 40 per cent, 70cl



Made only from the grapes grown on its own estate, this offering from Tariquet is distilled from 60 per cent ugni blanc and 40 per cent baco that is aged for a minimum of 15 years before bottling. One of the younger entries on our list, this one is a little pushy at first. There's citrus, apple and marzipan on the nose and plenty of toasted bread, with a hint of wood, a touch of allspice and a satisfyingly long finish.