

MAY 29, 2015

## Versailles, You Look Good in Black Tie

The Martell Cognac house hosted its Tricentenaire Fête at the Palace of Versailles.



This year marks the 300th anniversary of Martell Cognac, the iconic brand that was founded the last year of Louis XIV's reign, 1715. Let's just stop and think about that for a second. The House of Martell is older than America, by more than 50 years.

Martell is a company that thrived despite the French Revolution, two World Wars, Prohibition in the United States, the global impacts of the Great Depression, the Great Recession, and Phylloxera, the near-fatal disease that wiped out 80% of the vineyards in France in the 1800s. All the while, Martell was the cognac served by the French Republic to visiting foreign dignitaries and politicians.

It was the official cognac for Louis XV when he lived in the Palace of Versailles and was known to grace the tables of Napoleon, Alexander III of Russia, Franz Joseph I the Emperor of Austria, Emperor Hirohito, Winston Churchill, and Queen Elizabeth II. It was served at the coronation of King George V in 1911, the maiden voyage of the RMS Queen Mary in 1936, the first flight of the Concorde in 1977, and at the wedding of Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier III in 1956.

Last week, on May 20, the House of Martell celebrated its momentous anniversary with great fanfare at the Palace of Versailles, which the House supports as a patron for its restoration and preservation



The fête began with a private tour of the historical palace where international guests clad in tuxedos and formal gowns wandered the gilded hallways and imagined the day-to-day lives of kings and queens. Versailles, you look good in black tie.



Cocktails were served in the legendary gardens and a surprise fly-over by the Patrouille de France painted the sky in bleu, blanc, et rouge. Guests were escorted to the lower level of the Château where canapés and cocktails continued, and celebrities including Solange Knowles, Naomie Harris, Olivia Palermo, and Martell's ambassador Diane Kruger (below) arrived on a carpet the hue of the house's signature cobalt blue.



Dinner can only be described as an act of gastronomic theater: long tables seating 300 lucky guests were surrounded by screens with changing projections that soared to the underside of the magnificent vaults. The dinner was created by Chef Paul Pairet, who paired each dish with a cinematic scene and a cognac libation



The first dish, "A Picnic in Versailles" (above), paired a bottled "Independent" cocktail made with Martell VSOP, Lillet Blanc, cane sugar, a mix of strawberry and raspberry juices, and topped with Perrier Jouet Grand Brut with a build-your-own lobster roll. Projected on the walls were images of rolling grassy hills and the sounds of tweeting birds.



The gastronomic journey took guests to the Sea for Scallops and Oysters (above), then to the Dark Forest for Truffle Burnt Soup Bread (it was amazing), to the Vineyard for Chicken in a Jar, and to the Atelier for Teriyaki Lacquered Beef.



The finale of the evening was a visit to Martell's Library for a pour of the Premier Voyage, the highly coveted Cognac created for the 300th Anniversary that was aged in the wood from a 300-year-old tree, paired with lemon sorbet hidden inside a candied lemon peel.



Outside, fireworks illuminated the gardens, a grand finale that Louis the XV himself would certainly have enjoyed, likely with a glass of cognac in hand.

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by EMILY ARDEN WELLS.