

Cognac and Imported Brandy

While local Brandy sales are in decline, their French counterpart is doing well.

This is mainly due to concerted marketing efforts to attract the young adult market.

While some argue this is against the Cognac tradition, producers seem happy to go with the flow and embrace this new market.

How is Cognac different from Brandy?

Technically, Cognac is a Brandy. Like Brandy it is a wine spirit distilled from wine or fermented juice and aged for at least six months in oak casks. While all Cognacs are Brandies, not all Brandies are Cognacs. The difference is that Brandy can be made anywhere in the world, whereas Cognac can only be produced in the Cognac region in France and is produced under stringent rules and guidelines.

Brandies are imported into Australia mostly from France, but also from Italy, Cyprus, Spain and Greece. There are several different types of Brandy: VS - Very Superior; VSOP - Very Superior Old Pale; XO - Extra and Reserve (the oldest Cognac from a particular producer). Imported Brandy is divided into the three different groups of Calvados, Armagnac and Cognac.

Cognac became synonymous with fine Brandy and in 1909, the French declared only Brandy made in the immediate surrounding area of the town of Cognac could be called Cognac. Just 250,000 acres of vineyards surrounding the ancient towns of Cognac and Jarnac

produce the white wine that will be distilled into Cognac. French law allows only nine varieties of grapevines for use in Cognac and, of these, the Ugne Blanc, the Folle Blanche and the Colombar must comprise at least 90%. Each Cognac house has a unique mixing process.

Armagnac comes from western France. While Cognac is distilled twice, Armagnac is single-distilled and aged in a local black oak for between four and 20 years. It can now only be produced from one of 11 specified strains of grape. It is smooth but also drier than Cognac because no sugar is added.

Calvados is the most obscure member of the Brandy family. It is an apple-based product that has the potential to attract more interest as consumers grow adventurous. The word Calvados applies to the geographical area in Normandy, Northern France, and its producers include Budnel, Pere Magloire, and Boulard. By law, Pays d'Auge Calvados must be double-distilled in pot stills and aged in oak for at least six years. Calvados should be warmed gently by hand, not by flame, in a Brandy balloon before being nosed. It is often used in poultry and veal dishes.

Cognac keeps up with the trends

Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, courtesy of the LMA, show that whilst the Australian consumer is drinking less local Brandy they are actually consuming more imported Brandy. Imports rose 14.5% and surprisingly exports of our locally produced Brandy grew by 26.3%. The current trend towards RTDs has failed to steal market share from Cognac sales which is also indicative of the demographic of both consumer groups.

Cognac consumption is on the increase, rising from 2,848 9-litre cases in January 2002 to 2,746 in January this year – a 3.7% increase.

Rémy Martin International Ambassador Jason Bowden said their brand was going

