

Title:

Liquor Distillation From Wine

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Summary:

Distillation is the centuries-old process used to produce alcohol. Heat is used to separate the components of a liquid, or mash, and as vaporization takes place the vapors are cooled so they condense into neutral spirits with little color, aroma, or flavor.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

Distillation is the centuries-old process used to produce alcohol. Heat is used to separate the components of a liquid, or mash, and as vaporization takes place the vapors are cooled so they condense into neutral spirits with little color, aroma, or flavor.

The distiller then blends this neutral spirit with other alcohol or flavorings and may or may not leave it to mature, or age, until the desired flavor and aroma is achieved before bottling. Brandy and clear, colorless grappa are two examples of spirits distilled from wine, which you will find in most standard bar stocks. The following are the best-known distillations from wine produced in countries around the world.

Armagnac

Armagnac is a pale golden, fiery, dry-tasting French brandy. Under French law, only white grapes from the Haut-Armagnac, Tenareze, and Bas-Armagnac regions of Gascony, in southwest France, may be distilled for Armagnac. The distillation takes place after the grape harvest, which occurs between October and April. Unlike cognac, its younger cousin, Armagnac has traditionally been made with only one distillation, but a recent change in legislation means double distillation is now allowed, speeding up the maturation process, which takes place in oak barrels.

Three stars on the label mean it has had at least two years' maturation; V.S.O.R, at least five years; Napoleon and X.O., at least six years; and Hors d'Age at least 10 years in the barrel. A vintage year on the label indicates the

year of the harvest. A vintage Armagnac is never blended.

Brandy

First discovered in the middle of the thirteenth century in France as an attempt to produce a medicinal drink, brandy is now made around the world wherever grapes are grown. After two distillations, the clear, colorless alcohol is given its distinctive nutty brown color and flavor by aging in wood, often oak, barrels. The longer a brandy ages, the more refined its flavor is judged to be. In the United States.

Cognac

Perhaps the best-known brandy in the world, cognac comes from a specific area in western France centered around the town of Cognac in the Charente region. To be labeled as "cognac," French legislation specifies the brandy can only be made from specific white grapes which are grown and later distilled within a strictly defined geographical area.

Cognac production is governed by old traditions as well as the laws, so all the brandy is distilled at least twice and then matured in oak barrels for at least two years, during which time it develops its rich, brown color. The end result is 80 proof. Information on the label, also governed by law, explains the maturity of the cognac.

Three stars or VS. means the cognac has been matured in the barrel for at least two years; V.S.O.R, Vieux, V.O, and Reserve Indicate at least four years; V.V.S.O.P and Grande Reserve are (cognacs matured for at least five years; Extra, Napoleon, X.O., Tres vieux, and Vieille Reserve are stored for six to 10 years in oak barrels.

Grappa

This clear, Italian spirit, about 80 proof, is distilled from the remains of the grapes used in wine production, the stems, skins, and pits. Grappa made from white wine is dry and fiery, while that from red wine has a powerful flavor. Although grappa is best known as an Italian spirit, versions of it are made in other countries, such as marc in France.

Marc

This French pomace spirit is distilled from the press residue resulting from wine production. Depending on the variety, it either tastes powerful and full flavored (marc de bourgogne) or light, dry, and very soft (marc de champagne). The alcohol content is between 80 and 90 proof. There is a flavor difference between marc made from red-wine and white-wine residues. A small glass of marc, served neat, is a perfect digestive.

Metaxa

The best-known Creek spirit, metaxa is distilled from black grapes. The alcohol content is about 80 proof. Stars on the label tell you how long the liquor was aged. Three stars means three years; five stars, five years; and seven stars, seven years. Bottles labeled as Private Reserve have been matured for at least 20 years, and have the smoothest flavor.

Pisco

This very tangy, colorless brandy is the national drink of Chile, and is the main ingredient in the refreshing cocktail Pisco Sour. Produced from black grapes with a high proportion of muscatel grapes, it is matured in clay casks.

Weinbrand

This German grape brandy, whose name translates as "burned wine," is distilled using some wines from neighboring countries, but legislation requires up to 85 percent of the final product to be German. It must then be matured for six months in oak casks holding a maximum of 1,000 liters (about 2,600 gallons) each. Old weinbrand must be cellared for a minimum of 12 months.

If it is then at least 76 proof, it will receive an official reference number and can be sold. Like cognac, weinbrand is double distilled. Weinbrand should be served no warmer than room temperature, and is best served in a brandy snifter. If it is a little on the cool side, however, it does not matter because it will quickly attain the correct temperature through heat transferred from the hands.