

Warm Up to Cognac

**Swirl It, Sip It or Mix It:
Rich Textures and Flavors
Perfect for Any Setting**

There's a chill in the air and a fire in the hearth, which can mean only one thing: It's cognac season.

As the snow falls and the sun dips below the horizon, there may be no better way to relax at the end of the day than settling into an overstuffed chair with a glass of cognac — which is the enduring image of the spirit. However, there's much more to this classic than the staid image of sipping it in wood paneled rooms lined with leather bound books. The spirit has dusted off its previously stodgy image in recent years, popping up in hip-hop lyrics and starring in music videos. Leave the monocle behind and get to know cognac.

All cognacs are brandies, but not all brandies are cognacs. The primary difference between the two is that in order to be classified as such, it must be produced in the Cognac region of France — located a few hours' drive southwest of Paris and just north of Bordeaux. Cognac is created by double distilling white wines and then aging it in French oak casks, where it develops tannins, color and complexity. The resulting spirit, eau de vie (literally, "the water of life,") is stored, and that's where it begins to take on the characteristics that make it unique. The grading of the cognac — which often decides how it ultimately will be consumed — depends entirely on how long it's allowed to age.

The youngest eau de vie in the blend dictates the age of a cognac. If a 10-year-old cognac is blended with a cask of 20-year-old spirit, it is aged at 10 years.

There are three primary grades of cognac:

The Very Special (VS) grade has been stored for at least two years in oak casks. A straw/yellow color will tell you that it's a fairly young cognac. Blend this grade of cognac with a mixer or water. This grade of cognac will be your bartender's best friend. Good examples of VS grade cognac are Hennessy VS, which features flavors of citrus, apple, fresh grapes and French oak, and Courvoisier VS, with strong notes of fresh fruit and a fresh, oaky taste.

The Very Special Old Pale (VSOP) has been stored and allowed to age for at least four years. As you choose cognac of higher quality, you'll want to take it neat – though a drop of water at this grade wouldn't turn heads, either. Remy Martin VSOP balances flavors of ripe fruit and subtle notes of licorice, and Hennessy VSOP Privilege offers light aromas of clove and cinnamon with flavors of honey and a lingering finish.

The Extra Old (XO) grade of cognac has been stored for a minimum of six years, and some premium blends of XO have been known to spend at least 20 years in storage. Older cognacs tend to take on an amber or auburn/red hue.

There are rituals associated with sipping cognac

that can enhance the experience. Choose a tulip-shaped wine glass or a low, spherical glass or snifter; pour a two ounce serving. Hold the glass for a while – allowing the cognac to hand-warm to room temperature releases aromas. Swirling it in the glass can enhance it even further. Inhaling the aroma can ignite sensations ranging from fruity to floral. Younger cognacs may present fruity aromas, while floral notes will be present in slightly older grades. In XO cognacs, especially those older than 20 years, spicy notes should appear. After swirling it in the glass, notice the beads that slide down the sides of the glass. Thicker legs indicate a higher sugar presence and thinner legs leads to more alcohol or heat on the palate. Sipping the cognac allows it to pass over the palate slowly, allowing the complex flavors to emerge, and the lingering finish to present itself.

While cognac is produced in France, by definition, the French don't consume a great deal of it. Only 1-2 percent of the cognac produced in France actually remains there. The rest is exported. The U.S. remains the top market for cognac by volume, according to the Bureau National Interprofessional du cognac. The Bureau also announced that, once again, shipments of cognac have risen during their 2016-2017 campaign to reach their highest levels to date, both in volume and in value. Cognac exports have continued to grow for the third consecutive year, with an increase of 10.2 percent in volume and 15.2 percent in value. ☮

Try it: Cognac Cocktails

The flexibility and character of cognac lends itself well to cocktails. From complicated, multi-part concoctions to simple mixers, cognac stars in a number of different drinks – from classics like the Sidecar to more modern creations.



Sidecar

Courtesy townandcountrymag.com

- 2 ounces cognac
- 1 ounce Cointreau
- 1 ounce freshly squeezed lemon juice
- Sugar for rim — optional

Combine ingredients into a mixing tin. Add ice and shake. Strain into chilled martini glass — with or without sugared rim.

Bastille Day

Courtesy GQ.com

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| 1½ ounces Pierre Ferrand 1840 cognac | French sparkling cider |
| ½ ounce fresh lemon juice | Angostura bitters |
| ½ ounce simple syrup | Lime wedge, for garnish |
| Ginger beer | |

Shake ingredients with ice in a cocktail tin. Strain into a Collins glass filled with ice and top with chilled ginger beer and dry French sparkling cider. Top with three dashes of Angostura bitters and serve with a lime wedge.

ON OUR COVER

Cafe Amore

Courtesy thespruce.com

- 1 ounce cognac
- 1 ounce amaretto
- 8 ounces black coffee (more or less to fill glass)
- Whipped cream

Pour the cognac and amaretto into an Irish coffee glass or mug. Fill with hot coffee. Top with whipped cream. Get fancy and garnish with shaved almonds, flaked chocolate, mini marshmallows or caramel.



The VIP

Courtesy remymartin.com

- 1 ounce Remy Martin V
- Pineapple juice
- Pineapple (leaf for garnish)
- Ice

Pour one ounce of Remy Martin V over cubed ice, topping with fresh pineapple juice and garnishing with a pineapple leaf.