

Martell Cognac **Practices and Philosophy**

Martell is one of the leading producers of Cognac, founded by Jean Martell in 1715. It was sold in 1988 by the Firino-Martell family to Seagram and again in 2002 to the Pernod Ricard Group. The founder of Martell cognac was born in 1694 in Jersey, Channel Islands. In 1715 he founded his cognac company and by 1721 he was already exporting 200,000 litres of cognac to the UK. He died in 1753 leaving his company to his sons, Jean and Frédéric.

In 1848 Martell started exporting its cognac in bottles instead of barrels. Over the next 100 or so years Martell continued to grow and by 1868 Martell went international exporting as far as China, Hong Kong and Japan. In 1912 Edouard Martell created a first class Cognac with a unique taste: Cordon Bleu. It was launched at the Hotel de Paris. The company went from strength to strength as its reputation for quality earned it wide spread recognition. In 1936 Martell was served on the inaugural journey of the Queen Mary and gained a royal seal as the drink of choice for the ambassadors on board. In 1965 Martell was awarded the Grand Prix de l'Exportation. In 1992 Martell became the main sponsor of the steeplechase at the Grand National.

Martells strength has been powerful branding, drawing on its unique selling points. As one of the oldest Cognac houses the company has successfully marketed its 300-year history. The unique style of their cognac renowned for being light and elegant with a keen focus on the Borderies region in its blending sets the company apart from its rivals. The company has effectively marketed the Martell brand internationally with far reaching campaigns including high profile arts. Andrée Putman, the celebrated interior designer brought her famous skill to the legendary Martell house, creating a limited edition balloon glass. In 2005, they partnered with Swarovski, the world leader in crystal manufacture to produce a bottling featuring the crystals. Serge Mansau is widely recognised as one of the most renowned and creative bottle designers within the luxury industry. He was the creative force behind the triple-arch shaped bottle design to Martells Creation Grand Extra. 2006 saw the third edition of "Martell Artists of the Year" recognition in China. Co-organised with the Central Academy of Fine Arts, a grand ceremony was held in the National Art Museum of China, where Martell awarded five prominent artists, each extraordinary in their field through distinctive art philosophy and creativity.

Martell are also members of the the Comité Colbert (French association founded in 1954) which has a membership of 70 houses of luxury whose object is mutual enrichment and to collectively promote their shared values in France and internationally. Their quest is to combine tradition and modernity, craftsmanship and innovation. The purpose of the Comité is to showcase the creativity of its members and attract attention to their key role on the artistic scene. The 70 houses represent a diversity of "métiers": haute couture and accessories, perfumes, jewellery, designer homeware, hotels, gastronomy and also great wines, Champagne and Cognac. The Comité Colbert was founded by creative men with vision, pioneers in their sector attuned to contemporary tastes.

Martell's philosophy is reflected in their style of pure, soft Cognac renowned for being mellow, light and fragrant. Martell uses only white grape varieties (about 99% of which are Ugni Blanc), which are quickly harvested every October. Using only grapes from the 4 finest growth areas with a dominant influence from the Borderies area they contrast to other companies, which mainly sell fine Champagne Cognac. Borderies Cognac has a more rounded, nutty taste, Martell produce a Cognac solely from this region and also their Cordon Bleu Cognac has a very high

proportion of this region in its blend. After pressing, natural yeasts dictate fermentation taking about a week, the resultant wine is around 7%. Distillation then takes place from November until March. Martell has a unique double distillation method for the wine using the Charentais pot still, this method does not involve distilling the lees in the wine culminating in their hallmark style of mellow and light Cognacs.

The eaux de vies then spend a period of maturation in oak casks, to which a percentage is lost through evaporation - "the angels share". Maturation in wooden cask maybe extended up to 60 years after which time the oak imparts no further qualities into the wine. Martell then transfer their long term aged eaux de vies for use in their top blends into demijohns, their Paradis room houses eaux de vies dating back to last century.

The cellar master judiciously selects these different vintages and growth areas to recreate time after time the same Cognac quality and grade for each style produced, the Cordon Bleu Cognac for example is made from up to 150 eaux de vies. After blending the Cognac returns to casks for six months where the flavours will marry and integrate before being bottled. Martell uses tronçais oak only, which makes mellower, lighter and more fragrant Cognacs. Tronçais oak, is darker, has narrower pores, less tannin and more lignin than Limousin-oak, resulting in less "wooden" aromas in the Cognac.

During the Martell Cordon Bleu scholarship we enjoyed the generous hospitality of Martell at Chateau Chanteloup. The trip involved a briefing on their marketing and branding, educational talks on production and a visit to their distilleries, storage facilities and visitors centre. One of the highlights of the trip was a tasting in the Paradis room, where we sampled, compared and blended 19th century cognacs dating back to 1848.

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