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*Cognac de Collection*

## **A look at La Gabare's Cognac de Collection**

La Gabare's Cognac de Collection began with very modest means but with sincere aspirations. The collection emerged from the ruins of the cognac industry as it switched from the hands of family trading houses to the iron rule of wine and spirits multinationals. The entire region and many different professions were forced to adapt to survive. The first to be affected were the winegrowers who, in order to live and do business with the industry's new masters, had to accept very strict specifications that were often inversely proportionate to the payment they received.

Those winegrowers or intermediaries that were refused access to this new economic order, either because their properties were too small or because there was no place for them in this new structure, were forced to change the way they worked before it was too late. They were in danger of losing all their assets and disappearing altogether. The idea of La Gabare's Cognac de Collection range was born as a result of this pressing need for change.

Jean Groperrin is the founder of La Gabare. Today his son Guilhem continues his work. In the many years Jean spent developing his clientele, firstly with winegrowers as a local broker and then as a wholesaler working as an intermediary between merchants and winegrowers, he realized that exceptional resources were sleeping in the cellars of Charentes.

Apart from the more recent harvests, a winegrower and home distiller's cellar often contains a few barrels from older harvests, sometimes several decades old. Some estate owners feel it is their duty to transmit a few barrels – produced by an ancestor or inherited over time – from one generation to the next.

Jean Groperrin : *"I had always been shocked by the casual manner in which this precious liquid was treated, often drowned through massive blending, becoming nothing more than an extra in a play where it should have held the star role!"*

*As I decided to embark upon this adventure, I was somehow convinced that I was not the only one who would appreciate the sincerity of this cognac, straight from the grower and that had escaped the jaws of the large trading houses. I also hoped to overturn the preconceived idea that cognac is necessarily a blend of great vintages and secondary vintages.*

*Working in the field, I had also learned that the quality of a cognac is directly related to the quality of the individual producing and maturing it. Where one hears a winegrower tell you how he takes care of his vineyard , when he talks about his distillery and his ageing techniques, one already has some precious indications about the product before even tasting it.*

*Last but not least, I felt a true sense of urgency in the need to save just a few drops of this individual know-how, dating back 40 or 50 years to a time when the winegrower made all the decisions, without the knowledge and sophisticated techniques we have today. There were many aspects to this approach, set in a totally different environment where horses were still used to work the vineyards and properties and stills were five to 10 times smaller than they are today.*

*Notice also the improved grape varieties and plant protection which provide today's winegrowers with regular and abundant harvests, a guarantee that past generations never had. Such welcome improvements do of course make work easier and more profitable, but little by little they modify the product. Such is history... each generation makes its own contribution to the whole”.*

## **How we select products for La Gabare’s Cognac de Collection?**

As a broker, Jean has developed a very special and close relationship with his clients. In addition, we have been actively helped in our search by a sworn broker who is systematically contacted to evaluate inheritances and who has excellent contacts with many old Cognac families. This allows us to know when a family intends to sell or divide up its inheritance. At such times, we are often presented with samples of very old cognacs.

We only select cognacs aged in casks that have not been systematically topped up over time as the quantity of liquid diminished through evaporation. We also require official paperwork or archives tracing the product from the time of distillation. We then taste the cognac, first at full strength and then with water, and if satisfied - i.e. if the aromas and ageing of the cognac are of real interest - then the cognac is carbon-dated by the French National Scientific Research Institute to confirm the age indicated. Only if these three conditions are fulfilled is the new cognac permitted to enter our own cellars.

Another source for our Collection are the state-controlled warehouses where we are occasionally able to obtain cognac that has been stored there since its distillation. However, this is mostly young cognac distilled after 1975, only a few of which actually meet our Collection's quality requirements.

## **What happens to the cognac between distillation and your glass?**

Ideally, nothing should happen to it at all. Cognac should be left until, through natural evaporation, it reaches the ideal proof for drinking, 45 or 48%. This would mean patiently waiting 50 to 70 years depending on the humidity in the wine cellar, to be left at the end with just 20% of the initial volume! Financially, this is quite unfeasible which is why cognac is generally water reduced during the ageing process.

La Gabare's Cognac de Collection lies half way between a collection of strictly reduced 40% cognacs and one where the whole collection is entirely naturally reduced. Such cognacs, even the non-vintage ones, are rarely found on the market and are highly sought after by large trading houses in order to improve their blends. Furthermore, vintage cognacs of over 40 years old are practically impossible to find.

All of the cognacs we select are good enough to be drunk without reduction, much to the delight of cognac aficionados who unfortunately are quite rare these days, which is why the Collection also offers lower proof cognacs. When reduction is unavoidable, we make every effort not to distort the cognac. In particular we avoid the process of cooling the cognac to less than 5°C for one week followed by ultra-filtration. This tends to remove most of the oiliness, which is where the aromas lie.

In exchange for this maximum quality, the reduced cognacs in La Gabare's Collection may appear slightly cloudy, since they have kept their oiliness and thus their rich aromas. We never add caramel to adjust the colour, nor sugar as is generally done to make the cognac suppler and easier to drink. The great cognacs of La Gabare's Collection don't need such artifice to be remarkable. The very old and great naturally reduced cognacs in our Collection are unfiltered, with the exception of a light net used to remove impurities. Each molecule contributes to the aromatic balance of the whole.

## **Your guarantee of authenticity**

This is La Gabare's Cognac de Collection strong point. Here is how we can guarantee the information on the label is genuine:

- All of ours cognacs have been stored under state control in ORECO warehouses from the time of purchase until bottling;
- Any intervention or handling outside the warehouses must take place in the presence of a bailiff, and seals are affixed for transport;
- The age or vintage on the label can be proved at any time either by the archives, by carbon dating or by the duration of storage in state controlled warehouses
- Each bottle of La Gabare's Cognac de Collection bearing a vintage or age also carries a guarantee on the cork certifying that bottling of that particular cognac took place in the presence of a bailiff.

## **Which cognacs in the Collection?**

By definition, a collection is perpetually changing and so does our. Certain products go out of stock and disappear whilst other new products enter the collection. The Collection was first created in 1999 with six cognacs bearing aged for 24 years, 31 years, 41 years, 45 years, 50 years and 55 years.

Since then, La Gabare's stock has increased each year thanks to some magnificent discoveries. We can now offer about fifteen different years covering all five cognac crus and spanning from 1944 to 1974, in addition to the "Réserve", a very special 15 year-old blend. Some vintages, mainly pre 1960, are extremely rare and only available in small quantities, since very few winegrowers manage to conserve part of their previous harvests.

Despite an upturn in the late 1990s, the Cognac region has suffered a sharp drop in sales over the last two decades and this, combined with ever increasing costs, has forced winegrowers to sell off their production every year. At times, the year's production alone is not enough and they are forced to sell some of what their grandfather had set aside for example, in order to pay inheritance taxes or meet the financial requirements of the next generation. Most often, these very old cognacs come from winegrowers who were either already retired or reaching retirement at that time and had no heirs. As a result they were able to keep these reserves for a later date.

## **Who sell the Cognac de collection?**

We began selling them in France about five years ago. Today we are working with 200 independent cellarmen. We know each of them. The reputation of the Cognacs de Collection spread very quickly among professionals. Most French cellarmen either sell them or have heard of them.

The greatest French restaurants have also been approached and their reaction has been as favorable as that of the cellarmen. But it is a lot of time-consuming and costly work which we tend to entrust more and more to sales representative.

As we want to preserve their identity, the Cognacs de Collection cannot be found in any hypermarket or store chain.

Today, we export 40% of our production in Taiwan, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Austria, Russia, Spain, Italy, Monaco and Luxemburg.

## **Press-book**

The most important articles (>1 page) are:

- *De Wijnkrant* (NL), December 2001
- *Le Rouge et le Blanc* (F), N° 66, June 2002
- *Bilan* (Switzerland), February 2003
- *Corporate* (NL), N°2, April 2003
- *Vintage international*, N°9, May 2003
- *Sommelier International*, July 2003
- *Elan* (NL), November 2004
- *Actualité Poitou-Charente*, December 2004

## **The “La Gabare Reserve”**

This cognac was owned by one of La Gabare's wholesale suppliers for many years. As a result of the blending process, this is the only non-vintage cognac in the Collection and the only one not to have been bottled in the presence of a bailiff. The cognac has been aged for about fifteen years and is a blend of Fins Bois from the Jonzac region and Petite Champagne from Archiac. Like all cognacs in our Collection, no sugar or caramel has been added before bottling. The only addition is demineralised water, added a few years ago to reduce the proof.

*Tasting notes Cognac 45° blend*

- The sugar naturally contained in the vanillin in the wooden casks is very present, giving plenty of roundness to this cognac. Its lightness and delicacy comes from the limestone subsoil of Archiac, whilst the fruity notes come from the somewhat heavier soils of Saintonge, a renowned centre for Roman art in France. *Jean Groperrin.*

## **Grande Champagne 1980 (available in February 2005)**

We acquired this cognac in December 2004. This cognac comes from a Parisian widow whose husband - a highly successful magistrate - had invested in cognac for tax reasons. When he died, she discovered she was now the owner of dozens of barrels of cognac, some of which had been stored in government-controlled (ORECO) cellars for over thirty years. We bought all of them: Grande Champagne 1980, 1971 and 1970.

Today this cognac is in our cellars, and each barrel was sealed by a bailiff. We are actually reducing it with demineralised water. We will propose it at 51%. It is a beautiful cognac, which is both light and fruity. It is very well balanced.

## **Petite Champagne 1976 (25 years old)**

We acquired this cognac in 1999, when a merchant sold us a part of his stock of old cognacs. We decided to buy this cognac not only for its excellent quality, but also because it had been stored in government-controlled cellars since 1976.

*Tasting notes Petite Champagne 25 Years Old*

- There is just a small trace of wood in this cognac, which is only slightly tinted and, though not astringent, releases a very distinct initial aroma (alcohol present). For me, this is a "young" cognac when compared to the rest of the Collection, and yet for many cognac houses this is already an old, even a very old cognac. Light scent of jasmine, pepper and crystallised fruits. Pleasant and supple on the palate, with no trace of heaviness. This cognac, with its characteristic lightness and delicacy, most likely originates from a friable limestone subsoil. The cognac is now half way through its ageing process. *Jean Groperrin.*
- Light, straw-coloured hue. The nose is delicate, floral, fresh, airy and light with a hint of citrus. The palate is slightly rough, since the wood has not been fully assimilated.

Although its youth is apparent (this spirit is "only" 25 years old), it nevertheless has great delicacy. The finish leaves a slightly sweet trace of vanilla. This is one of La Gabare's less expensive products, which has been reduced over a period of four to five years. 13.5/20. *Le Rouge et Le Blanc*.

## **Bons Bois 1975**

The Bons Bois are located in the periphery of the others *crus* of cognac. However, according to the subsoil quality and the sun exposure, it is possible to find very good quality cognacs in the Bons Bois production. This cognac comes from an oceanic area of the Bons Bois. It has been stored under state control (ORECO) since 1975, what provide an absolute guarantee of the vintage.

*Tasting notes Bons Bois 1975 - 49°4*

- The nose has a strong touch of liquorice and crystallized fruits. The palate is powerful, iodized, with a dominant of ginger and leather. *Jean Groperrin*.

## **Petite Champagne 1974**

This Cognac has been produced by an old wine grower from Châteauneuf, who was used to purchase a new big barrel each year to stock his production. This cognac has been stored in the same big oak barrel since 1975. This man preserved the archives of this cognac with many attentions, and the carbon dating confirmed the vintage.

*Tasting notes Petite Champagne 1974 - 44°8*

- The nose is light, with a touch of honey and ripe fruits. The palate is direct, with a dominant of citrus fruits and ginger. *Jean Groperrin*.

## **Fins Bois 1972**

We acquired this cognac in 2002 from the heiress of one of the region's wine-producing estates, owner of two properties, one in Grande Champagne and the other in Fins Bois near Baignes Sainte Radegonde, where this cognac comes from. Since this old lady is not a winegrower herself, under French legislation she is obliged to store her annual production in government-controlled cellars. This was duly done immediately after distillation, thereby entitling the cognac to its vintage. No carbon dating was performed on this cognac, nor on the following one, since there are official records proving the date of harvest.

*Tasting notes Fins Bois 1972 – 54 °6*

- The palate is silky, dominated by crystallized fruits and prunes. *Jean Groperrin*.

## Grande Champagne 1971

The history is identical as this of Grande Champagne 1980. We decided to buy this cognac since it had clearly been stored in a particularly dry cellar, having lost nearly half its volume yet only 2 degrees of alcohol during its 30 year stay in the barrels. The result of such extreme storage conditions is an exceptional concentration of aromas, making this vintage one of most outstanding cognacs in the Collection.

### *Tasting notes Grande Champagne 1971*

- This cognac was aged in a very dry cellar and has lost very little alcohol during its 30 year ageing process, producing some exceptionally intense aromas. *Jean Grosperrin*.
- The glass should be warmed. The nose has a touch of cinnamon, Virginia tobacco, spices and liquorice. Traces of distillation, but which fade rapidly on swirling. The palate is long and sweet with a hint of vanilla. The rancio develops later, giving an oily, rather rugged palate. The empty glass is woody but a little volatile. Excellent product. *Pascal Baijot*.

## Grande Champagne 1970

It is the same story as the Grande Champagne 1980 and 1971. This cognac has been stored in the same state-controlled cellar, but close to the walls. This place is wettest and is the most favorable for the ageing process. It lost around 8 degrees of alcohol in 34 years (today 63°). Moreover, the oak barrels were new when this cognac has been placed under wood.

### *Tasting notes G.C. 1970*

Nose: liquorice, spices, vanilla. Palate: smooth, very round and consistent. Very strong vanilla notes. Ideal with Cuban cigars. *Jean Grosperrin*.

## Fins Bois 1969 (*exhausted*)

This comes from a merchant who stored himself this cognac since the distillation inside the government-controlled ORECO warehouses, providing an absolute guarantee of the vintage.

### *Tasting notes F.B. 1969*

- This cognac comes from a predominantly clay and marl subsoil. There is no aggressiveness on the nose or palate. Distilled with lees. Distinct aroma of wood and fruits (pear, quince). The palate is predominantly liquorice. *Jean Grosperrin*.
- A robust cognac with a taste of crystallised fruits and liquorice, characteristic of a thirty-year-old Fins Bois. *Pascal Baijot*.
- Amber colour. Full-bodied, round nose with a warm, smooth, crystallised, wine-like side to it. Traces of macerated orange peel, peat and rancio. The palate is less powerful and more delicate than the nose, with citrus and a hint of smoke at the bottom of the glass. 14/20. *Le Rouge et le Blanc*.

## **Fins Bois 1968**

This cognac has always been stored in the ORECO warehouses in Barbezieux in a small, damp cellar ideal for ageing.

*Tasting notes F.B. 1968*

- Very intense aromas and taste. Distilled with fine lees. The wood is well balanced. Fruity aromas are dominant, with traces of almond and apricot. Full and pleasantly non-aggressive palate, with a taste of liquorice and mushroom. A fine cognac that is just beginning to reach maturity. Comes from a vineyard with limestone subsoil. *Jean Groperrin*.
- Nice rancio on the palate with a trace of vanilla. No harshness. A good, long palate for a cognac that is nevertheless still immature, lacking oiliness and roundness. The empty glass is a little young. Limestone. *Pascal Baijot*.
- Very clear colour. The nose is very peppery and lemony, followed by violets and coffee, then smoke. The palate is light and fresh, very slightly rough and sharp. The alcohol is still sensitive. There is a constant underlying mineral presence. This is a product with great finesse, a result of Fins Bois on limestone soil. A "discret, secret and delicate" cognac. 16/20 *Le Rouge et Le Blanc*.

## **Borderies 1965, 1964, 1961 and 1960**

All of these cognacs share the same origin as they come from the same property, were distilled in the same still and stored in the same ageing cellar. The history of these cognacs is astounding. An 80-year-old couple sold them to Jean. The husband had worked all his life for the department for consumer protection, competition and fraud, where he was in charge of officially supervising the cognac business. His father-in-law had died 20 years previously, and had been a winegrower and distiller. Every year, he would give his children one or two barrels of that year's cognac, which this elderly couple were to sell to us some 40 years later.

What makes these cognacs unique is that the barrels had been stored in a very small cellar with no electricity, and had never been topped up. After 40 years, some contained only 120 litres of the initial 350 to 400 litres of cognac they had contained when full! All the rest had evaporated.

Lastly, the archives for these cognacs had been scrupulously maintained, and are truly an outstanding example of how cognac archives should be kept. When Jean mentioned this to the old men he replied that this was only natural, since his job had been to penalise people who kept poor archives!

*Tasting notes Borderies 1965 – 49°5 (exhausted)*

- Cognac stored in new Limousin barrels since its distillation means vanilla aromas. It was distilled with "seconds" i.e. the cutting was done at a lower degree than normal, giving the cognac its very pleasant patisserie taste. Cutting is the moment in the distillation process when the "cut" is separated from the distillation residues. Nervy palate, with a combination of spices and crystallised fruits. Leave this cognac for an hour in a glass and you will be surprised by its softness and the intensity of the aromas released. *Jean Groperrin*.
- For all the Borderies: vanilla, very floral (white flowers and honey). Traces of caramelised fennel (crystallised aniseed) and acacia. Persistent woodiness. Crystallised walnuts in the empty glass. Cloves, honey, spices. *Pascal Baijot*.

*Tasting notes Borderies 1964 – Reduced to 43°5*

- Very aromatic, with traces of blackcurrant and linden. The distillation with lees has left its mark, conferring an oily, silky character. The wood and cognac combine smoothly and harmoniously. There is a scent of cedar and also of damp cellars (mushrooms, grottos with stalactites). Magnificent Borderies cognac with a great deal of depth and power. *Jean Groperrin*.
- First nose (glass at rest): quite discreet, predominantly vanilla. Second nose (after slow swirling): fruity, peach, crystallised apricot. Third nose (after rapid swirling): a combination of the first two noses. Fourth nose (glass at rest): vanilla. Palate: the first impression is very warm and slightly sharp, vanilla. Finish: light, a little short. *Marie-José Dupont*.
- This cognac comes from gypseous soil and has been recently reduced. The hue is amber and still cloudy. The nose is ample and soft with rancio, and mushroom or humus. The finish is iris and tuberoses, then liquorice and dried figs. Smooth well-balanced palate, though still a little rough and fragmented. This cognac is judged to be a little rustic, though the terroir does give it character. *Le Rouge et Le Blanc*.

*Tasting notes Borderies 1964 – Unreduced 50°7*

- The color is clearer than the reduced product. The nose is closed and powerful, predominantly floral (tuberoses), with damp earth (roots) then vanilla and dried bananas. The palate is salty, at once oily and mineral. There is a damp effect of roots on the palate, followed by ginger and violet, then lastly smoke. This cognac seems to change all the time and has a strong personality and a great future. Borderies enthusiasts will love this cognac. 14.5/20. *Le Rouge et Le Blanc*.

*Tasting notes Borderies 1961 – Reduced 49°7*

- This cognac is more floral than fruity, with vanilla and vineyard peach on the nose. The first impression on the palate is silky with a slightly peppery note of liquorice. It is slightly "seconded", giving it suppleness with ageing. An excellent Borderies! *Jean Groperrin*.
- Amber color. The nose is prune, crystallised orange then pepper and spices, almost violent and yet soft at the same time, with rancio. Powerful, exuberant palate that is not yet tamed. It reacts wildly, with a combination of fire and softness, smoothness and brilliance. The finish has rancio. The nose is exceptionally persistent, and the taste

is remarkably precise, despite or perhaps because of the combination of opposites. The rusticity of the Borderies terroir is almost tangible. This is a cognac for Borderies enthusiasts. 16/20. *Le Rouge et Le Blanc*.

#### *Tasting notes Borderies 1960 – Reduced 43°0*

- Comes from a very damp cellar, which explains the characteristic trace of undergrowth and saltpetre. There is an easily detectable aroma of cedar and cigar box. The tannin from the barrels is in perfect harmony with the grape and distillation aromas. A magnificent cognac that has spent 40 years in its original cask! *Jean Groperrin*.
- First nose (glass at rest): (sweet) rum. Second nose (after slow swirling): the first nose is accentuated. Rum, vanilla, patisserie. Third nose (after rapid swirling): the rum fades on the nose and becomes more complex. Currants, crystallised ginger and spices. Fourth nose (glass at rest): the rum emerges once more. Palate: The first impression is very supple. Covers the mouth well and then the palate. Exotic fruits (guava, mango). Everything about this cognac is on the palate, leaving the impression that it has not even touched the throat. Not aggressive at all. Difficult to dislike. Finish: Raisins, then a return to the first nose (the sign of a great cognac). A very charming cognac, long, easy and “feminine”. *Marie-José Dupont*.
- The color is beginning to turn to amber. The nose is pharmaceutical and pear, with the pear becoming stronger once allowed to breathe. Powerful palate, though the alcohol remains discreet (stored in new barrels from the very start). Then figs and dried bananas. The finish is very soft with a perceptible trace of mushroom. The product is still fragmented due to recent reduction, with a combination of softness and violence probably due to the new wood. 14/20. *Le Rouge et Le Blanc*.

#### *Tasting notes Borderies 1960 – Unreduced 50°4*

- The color is clearer. The nose is similar to the previous cognac, but more assertive. There is a presence of wood and a dominant trace of tuberose (hyacinth, iris) then violet, with plenty of freshness and lightness. The palate is phenomenally powerful, still oily, with the iris still present along with violet and sandalwood, in a much more distinctive form than in the reduced version. This spirit is still young, combining power, delicacy and concentration, with a sensitive woodiness on the gums that the tasting committee particularly liked, despite some differences of opinion. 15/20. *Le Rouge et Le Blanc*.

## **Petite Champagne 1962**

Another cognac, another legend. This cognac comes from a family that has lived for nearly 80 years, just a few kilometres from Chateauneuf. Some elderly members of the family sold us

this remarkable cognac, which was distilled in a 10 hl. antique still heated using coal briquettes. In the past, this had been one of the region's larger properties (16 hectares of vineyards) but since there was no heir willing to take over the business, all production ceased more than 20 years ago. A few barrels of cognac were left in the cellar and these are the ones that we were able to buy little by little. Here too, the archives are very well kept and carbon 14 dating has provided exact confirmation of the dates indicated by the owner.

*Tasting notes Petite Champagne 1962 – Reduced 44°5*

- A delicate eau de vie from a very dry cellar and one that does not seem to have suffered from its reduction in October 2000. Characteristic of a cognac distilled without lees, making it somewhat dry, to the satisfaction of some enthusiasts. There is a taste of raisins and liquorice and the vanilla is clearly detectable despite the strong presence of wood. Excellent first impression on the palate. After warming the empty glass for 2 to 3 minutes in the hands, the exceptional power of the aromas emerges. *Jean Gersperrin.*
- This spirit was reduced from 62.8 to 44.5 degrees and comes from a dry cellar. Pale amber colour. Light and floral nose, at once fresh and crystallised. Light, salty palate. Extremely soft and delicate, with a mineral structure. Pleasantly long and elegant. There is something very harmonious and airy, flattering and pretty (in the best sense of the word) about this cognac, which is a fine example of the delicacy of Petite Champagne. In all, this product is less contrasted than the Borderies and was easier for the tasting committee to agree upon. 15.5/20. *Le Rouge et Le Blanc.*

*Tasting notes Petite Champagne 1962 – Unreduced 62°8*

- The colour is lighter than the previous cognac. Extremely soft, delicate and tight on the nose. The nose is at once floral, fruity and spicy: violet, fresh grapes, figs, cocoa, liquorice (coconut powder), and rice powder. The delicacy and elegance on the palate is superb, without the slightest asperity, with a silky, tight, smooth grain and a slightly salty finish. There is combination of density and lightness, very fresh yet fiery. An admirable Petite Champagne that wins the committee's unanimous approval. 17.5/20. *Le Rouge et Le Blanc.*
- Colour: golden yellow (slightly green tint). First nose (glass at rest): the first nose is already complex (which is rare). Exotic fruits, flowers, heather. Second nose (after rapid swirling): like being in the Highlands. Is it cognac or whisky? If tasting were done blindfolded, it would be anyone's guess! Fruits, citron, grape, apple, pear, plum brandy and heather. A bouquet of aromas that opens more and more with oxygenation. Palate: the first impression is superb, almost smooth. Fruits: peach, citron, guava. Then a note of sweet spices develops on the palate (vanilla, marshmallow), followed by the emergence of woody notes (cedar, conifer). This is a cognac for the palate and throat that makes you salivate. Finish: spicy, sharp and warm. As the effect on the palate fades, the throat takes over. This cognac is sensual, then masculine (because of the degree of alcohol). I find it superb. *Marie-José Dupont.*

## **Petite Champagne 1958**

The history is the same as the Petite Champagne 1976 and Fins Bois 1968. Stored at the "Les Granges" cellar in Barbezieux since 1966. Cognac referred to as "Petite Champagne 55

Cottereau" in the previous owner's archives. Carbon 14 dating indicates that the harvest dates from 1958, which is the date Jean has chosen to apply to this cognac.

#### *Tasting notes Petite Champagne 1958 - Reduced 41° 1*

- Very delicate, slightly floral (acacia, jasmine). Also, aromas of cigar box and cedar. On the palate we find a good balance between the alcohol and tannins and the aromas persist well. A slightly winey taste characteristic of the Petite Champagne appellation. There is a surprising presence of vanilla in the empty glass. *Jean Groperrin.*
- Traces of citrus. A very feminine cognac. Nicely bitter. Ideal for serving with foie gras. *Pascal Baijot.*
- This cognac was reduced three years ago. Yellow amber colour. The nose is oxidised, mineral, very delicate, as is the palate, which is light, firm and tasty with traces of balsamic and mushroom. The finish brings caramel and salted butter. A very delicate, tight architecture and core, though perhaps lacking in magnitude. The mineral character of Petite Champagne is clearly present but the palate is a little more discreet. 15/20. *Le Rouge et Le Blanc.*

### **Fins Bois 1954**

Jean bought this cognac in 1999 when first creating Cognacs de Collection. Thanks to the inventory books of the family business, the cognac can be traced all the way through from the first records in 1953 until 1999. Carbon 14 dating has confirmed that the cognac was produced prior to 1955. The cognac was distilled in a wood-fired still, leaving strong traces of smoke that have led many tasters to mistake this cognac for a Highland whisky.

#### *Tasting notes Fins Bois 1954 – Reduced 43°3*

- Heavier and more marked by its *terroir* than the Petite Champagne 1958. Nevertheless, it is very elegant for a Fins Bois. More robust without heaviness. Mushrooms, coconut, cloves. Marked by its long stay in a damp cellar. The palate is particularly silky. A fine product, very representative of Fins Bois vineyards. *Jean Groperrin.*
- Chalky nose, characteristic of Fins Bois. Slight harshness on the palate. Trace of cinnamon. Peaty. *Pascal Baijot.*
- Yellow amber colour. Light, earthy nose, sooty with rancio. Soft, round, sweet, tasty palate, not very complex but very pleasant. The smoke emerges in the finish along with rancio and mushroom. A very pleasant cognac, relatively easy to approach, but which is unable to conceal the flaws of its distillation (soot). 14/20. *Le Rouge et Le Blanc.*

### **Bons Bois 1944**

This cognac appears in the archives as "Bons Bois 1938 Chermignac", indicating that like the previous cognac, it comes from the family property of the cognac merchant who sold it to us. It remained in the same family for more than 60 years, stored in its original location, a huge paved cellar, until Jean transferred it to government-controlled cellars in February 1999. The owner's chateau was occupied by the German Wehrmacht and the archives dispersed at the end of the war, making it impossible to prove that it dates back to before 1944. The end of the war brought with it widespread pillaging, both by occupying forces and local inhabitants, as well as the murder of one of the founding members of the family business

Thanks to certified photocopies of the original documents, there is an administrative trace of the cognacs' history from 1944 to 1955 and from 1986 until they were sold to us in 1999. Between these dates, when the running of the family business passed to the next generation, inventory methods changed. Pure alcohol was grouped together, and not broken down per batch as was the practice in the past. It was not until 1986 when the present generation took over that records were once more kept in the old style. Fortunately, carbon 14 dating has confirmed that this is definitely the same product!

*Tasting notes Bons Bois 1944 – Unreduced 42°7*

- This cognac's lightness and delicate aromas makes it atypical for its cru. It therefore most certainly comes from a limestone soil. Surprising vitality yet softness and roundness, and an unforgettable prune palate. This is proof that even smaller crus can produce wonders! *Jean Groperrin.*
- There is no nose upon warming. Prune - caramel - vanilla, and a spicy character. The empty glass is caramel and strongly crystallised. *Pascal Baijot.*
- A bold, shiny amber colour. The nose is extremely sweet, melted and worn: prune, pear, rum, rancio, liquorice and sweet spices. The palate is paradoxical, much more violent, straight, mineral, not very complex but with plenty of personality. The finish is a little elusive, with iodine and caramel. Originally there were 434 litres of this cognac, aged in a damp cellar, and which in reality would seem to date from 1938. 15/20. *Le Rouge et Le Blanc.*

## **Grande Champagne 1944**

This cognac comes from the same source as the previous ones. First recorded in the company's archives in 1944 as "Grande Champagne 1934 Criteuil" and still present in the records in 1999. Authenticity confirmed by carbon dating. The origin, percentage of evaporation and ageing were all verified in 2000 by the fraud department, which confirmed that this is the same product throughout the entire ageing process.

*Tasting notes Grande Champagne 1944 – Unreduced 42°2*

- This cognac, which is nearly 70 years old, is still very powerful. Raisins and liquorice are dominant. The feminine softness for which Grandes Champagnes are renowned is confirmed here. Give this cognac time to unveil its charms (5 to 10 minutes before drinking), then discover the delicate marriage of tannins - devoid of all harshness - and the fine aromas of the cognac. *Jean Groperrin.*

- Nose: leather and cigar box. Strong traces of tobacco and bitter cocoa, as in great Cuban cigars. Persistent. Mushroom is dominant in the empty glass. The nose is oily, smooth and round. Very nice rancio, and very long on the palate. *Pascal Baijot*.
- Bold amber colour. The nose is supremely delicate and complex. There is a perfect balance between the magnitude of this cognac and its softness. Liquorice and mushroom, acidity and freshness with irresistible traces of tea rose and tobacco. The palate is similar to the nose, fresh and pure, tense and refined, with an impalpably delicate grain and texture, combining violets and crystallised fruit. The smoothness and length develop in stages. Persistence, mineral character, complexity and elegance all meet in this bottle which, like great wines, is a combination of contradictory qualities. There are 1200 bottles of this gem, which greatly impressed a unanimous committee. Every cognac enthusiast should taste this cognac to discover the full accomplishment of Grande Champagne. With this cognac, a simple tasting exercise turns into a highly emotional moment. Absolutely sublime. 18.5/20 *Le Rouge et Le Blanc*.

## **The Treasures of La Gabare**

This is a series of Cognacs of more than 50 years of age, one of which dates from the First World War. Since the archives are not complete enough to prove the vintage, they are presently stored in government-controlled cellars and are one of our company's greatest treasures. These very old cognacs are all naturally reduced and are stored in demijohns.

- Fins Bois 1934 ‘‘Râteau’’
- Grande Champagne 1924
- Grande Champagne 1922
- Petite Champagne 1914
- Petite Champagne 1935
- Grande Champagne 1934
- Very old lees (Grande Champagne)
- Bons Bois turn of the century and 1938

### **Fins Bois N°34 (1934) (*exhausted*)**

This cognac had the same owner for 52 years, where it is first recorded in 1949. At that time, the quantity was 5.90 HL at 59%. The cognac can be traced all the way through the archives until Jean bought it in 2001, when the volume remaining was just 1.98 HL at 42.5%. This represents a loss over this period of 3.92 HL due to natural evaporation (the angels' share), an evaporation rate of exactly 2% per year of ageing.

The vintage cannot be indicated. No cask can survive 50 years of ageing in a damp cellar, and for this reason, the cask was changed during the ageing process. It was probably during this changeover that the mistake was made, by placing the cognac in a cask that had once contained a younger cognac. The younger cognac contained in the cask wood has influenced the results of Carbon 14 dating, which makes any indication of vintage impossible.

Yet this has had no impact on the quality or integrity of this extraordinary Cognac, which is one of La Gabare's greatest treasures.

It will be delivered to you as "Cognac Fins Bois Origine Râteau", with no other details on the label. The bottles, labels and boxes are identical to those you have already seen. The nobility lies in the product, not the packaging, which is deliberately simple. However, we can provide you with a handmade, solid walnut presentation box at cost price.

### **Grande Champagne N°24 (1924)**

This cognac belonged to a broker in Cognac, who passed away more than 20 years ago. He had kept for himself the finest cognacs he had acquired, rather than putting them on the market. His treasure was kept in a cellar of which only he alone had the key. It was only after this man passed away that his heirs discovered this and a few other casks containing cognacs dating back to the beginning of the last century.

*“I hereby certify that this extremely rare, very old cognac originated from the cellar of this broker-dealer, who lived in the Grande Champagne appellation in the Cognac area. The cognac’s cask indicates the origin of the cognac, quantity acquired, alcohol level and the 1924 vintage. However no documents were found. This cognac has aged in silence for many decades and, over time, has lost almost 80 % of its initial volume through natural evaporation. In Cognac, we call this evaporated part the “angels’ share.” The cognac remains remarkably strong for its age, with an alcohol percentage of 42.2. This cognac reveals notes of fruits, mushrooms, spices and tobacco. As is the case with all of our Cognacs de Collection, sugar nor caramel were added so as to offer you a truly natural product”.*

### **Grande Champagne N°22 (1922)**

Jean bought this cognac in 1999 in order to constitute the Collection. It is one of the older we have. The previous owner was an old cognac merchant family. It remained in the same barrel for many decades, and Jean stored it under state control (ORECO) when we became the owners. The story of this cognac is recorded in the family archives till 1944. Then, it appears in the archives of 1955 and from 1986.

Between 1955 and 1986, when the running of the family business passed to the next generation, inventory methods changed. Pure alcohol was grouped together, and not broken down per batch as was the practice in the past. It was not until 1986 when the present generation took over that records were once more kept in the old style. It became possible at this moment to join again with the product history.

This cognac has been reduced for many years in forecast of a bottling which never took place. The alcohol content dropped gradually from this date until 1999, when Jean placed it under glass in a demijohn. The degree was only 33.2%.

However, according to the French legislation a cognac has to have a minimum degree of 40° and a brandy of 36% minimum. Nevertheless, this cognac is a divine breuvage.

The only possibility to sell this cognac was to blend it with another cognac in order to rise the degree. We did it with the Grande Champagne 1924 in December 2004, and the alcohol content is now 40%.

*Tasting notes G.C. N°22 - 40%*

- Nose: citrus fruits, tobacco, crystallized fruits and mushrooms. Palate: very smooth and round. Liquorice. Black tea. Persistent, elegant and very fresh. This freshness is astonishing for a so old cognac. Beautiful. *Jean Groperrin*.

### **Petite Champagne N°14 (1914)**

A merchant sold it to Jean in 1999. The archives of this society recalled it under the denomination “Petite Champagne 1914 Paror” and it is possible to follow its history during a few years from 1918, when the war finished.

The particularity of this cognac is certainly to have been distilled by women. In 1914 women were in charge of companies, because all the valid men were to fight. The First World War has been the most fatal war of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in France.

This cognac lot disappeared then during many years because of the Second World War. In 1946, at the end of this war, it is possible again to follow its history during a few years. It disappeared again in the archives until the 1970's. From this date, years after years, this cognac is mentioned in the archive under its original denomination.

Jean bought all the stock, 285 liters. It is our treasure and, for this reason, actually we don't want to sell it. Moreover, it would be impossible to sell it like a “1914”, according to the very restrictive cognac vintage legislation.