

WHITE IS THE NEW ARMAGNAC

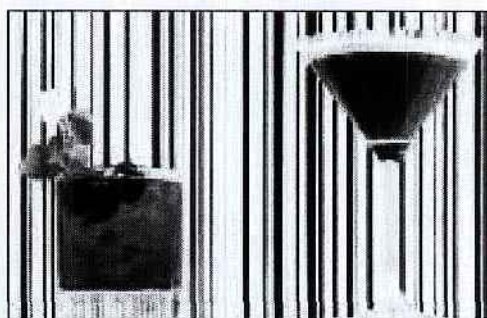
The last time we looked, Armagnac was brown and served with a cardigan. How things have changed. By Richard Woodard

The traditional way to enjoy Armagnac is to swirl it endlessly in a balloon glass until everyone in the restaurant has left, the staff have all gone home and the manager is in tears. But the classic old buffer's drink is about to be reborn. Formerly known as an eau de vie, white Armagnac has been awarded an Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée and is now called Blanche.

'The new breed of white Armagnacs are only aged for a year or two – which is why they're clear,' explains Ben Brown (above), cocktail barman at London club Paper. 'If you aged them in oak barrels, they would eventually turn brown, just like brandy. The clear Armagnacs are increasingly popular – we served white Armagnac cocktails to the guests at Julien MacDonald's London Fashion Week party this year.'

Even the most premium of Armagnac brands, such as Laubade, have joined the white Armagnac rush. They're all sold in identically shaped bottles, like champagne, so as to be instantly recognisable. 'If you're bored with premium vodkas, make this your new party drink,' says Brown.

Still not convinced? It's worth noting that the residents of the Armagnac region live five years longer than other Frenchmen, so this spirit could also be the elixir of life. ■



MIX YOURSELF A MODERN CLASSIC

WHITE GODFREY

(A twist on the classic Godfrey cocktail)

- 30ml white Armagnac (usually Cognac)
- 15ml Grand Marnier
- 15ml crème de mûre
- 10ml lemon juice
- 4 blackberries

Serve in an old-fashioned glass and garnish with a sprig of mint and the blackberries.

ESPRESSO ARTINI

- 50ml white Armagnac
- 15ml caramel syrup
- 1 single shot of espresso
- 3 coffee beans to garnish

Shake the ingredients together and strain into a cocktail glass.

Paper, 68 Regent Street, London W1. Call 020 7439 7770, or visit paperclublondon.com



BLANCHE DE CASSAGNOLES

£23, brandyclassics.com

Lip-smackingly strong, Cassagnoles is matured briefly in steel vats (oak would interfere with the fruitiness). It is renowned as a base for cocktails and desserts and is popular at the ultra-trendy Crazy Bear in London, where barman Henry Howes serves it over crushed ice in a tall glass with honey and kiwi juice.

Verdict Highly aromatic. Perfect in cocktails and desserts or as a sorbet.

CHÂTEAU DE LAUBADE BLANCHE

£25, berkmann.co.uk

Laubade has been enjoyed in Gascony for the past 20 years. When it's served ice-cold between courses at a rich, gastronomic meal it is known as the Trou Gascon. The Châteaux's expertise shows in its complex flavours. It's currently taking Las Vegas's finest cocktail bars by storm.

Verdict Complex notes of spiced fruit, a whiff of aniseed and a finish like a well-kept herbaceous border.

CHÂTEAU DU TARIQUET BLANCHE

£35.25, 01582 406300

Tariquet is made with the folle blanche grape, known as 'lip stinger' because of its high acidity. Extremely awkward to grow, the tight bunches don't allow air to flow and are prone to mildew, hence many estates ripped them up in the late Nineties. Château du Tariquet didn't, and now has an impressive 25 hectares.

Verdict Crisp and juicy, with robust notes of lime, charged with a rich, floral orange-blossom aroma.

CHÂTEAU DE MILLET BLANCHE

£24.50, tastingroom.co.uk

Extremely robust, Millet tastes and smells like a Black Forest gâteau – the real thing, that is, not those frozen blocks you were fed as a child. Luxuriant notes of plum and black cherry make it ideal with caviar, charcuterie and foie gras – pretty much the staple diet of the whole of the Gascony region.

Verdict Sour cherry notes. Serve frappé, in place of vodka, with dishes of smoked fish or caviar.

BLANCHE DE PELLEHAUT, £22, carookes.co.uk

The Béraut family not only grows grapes, but rears Blonde d'Aquitaine, a local breed of cattle, using the constant supply of top-drawer 'organic matter' to fertilise the vines. The family recommends drinking the blanche in coffee before a boar hunt or, when it's hot, over crushed ice with lime and sugar, making a traditional Brazilian *batida*.

Verdict Musky flavours of lemon and rose water, and warmer notes of tangerine. Perfect as a long drink with tonic or soda.