

Spirits

YEAR'S END, YEAR'S BEGINNING: 2007–2008

I try to finish off one year and start the next with a special batch of reviews from several spirits categories. This issue's roster includes toothsome spirits from Scotland, Italy and France.

From serve-it-neat single malt whiskies to Armagnacs and grappas to mix-it-with-gin vermouths, this month's array of reviewed products covers the gamut of spirits enjoyment.

Of special note are Château de Laubade 1978 Bas Armagnac, Château de Laubade 1967 Bas Armagnac and Bocchino 10 Year Old Grappa Riserva della Cantina Privata. These three European brandies are brilliant examples of the distiller's art when it comes to dealing with grapes.

Happy New Year!

—F. PAUL PACUIT

FOCUS ON: GLENFIDDICH SINGLE MALT SCOTCH WHISKIES, DUFFTOWN, SCOTLAND

Established in 1886 in Dufftown, Scotland by William Grant, who had formerly been the manager of the Mortlach Distillery, Glenfiddich started with two secondhand pot stills purchased for £120 from the owner of nearby Cardow Distillery. Glenfiddich's first distillation occurred on December 25th, 1887. The company has never looked back. Today, Glenfiddich boasts 29 pot stills, the most of any malt whisky distillery in the world. They need them since Glenfiddich is the world's best-selling single malt Scotch.

SUPERB (90–95)/HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Glenfiddich 18 Year Old Ancient Reserve Speyside Single Malt Whisky (Scotland; William Grant & Sons, New York, NY); 43% abv, \$62. The bouquet offers tightly wound aromas of light caramel and unsweetened baker's chocolate; following aeration the bouquet turns slightly baked and caramelized. The palate entry is supple, semisweet and mildly honeyed; the midpalate features delectable flavors of coconut, peach cobbler and dark caramel. Concludes with beany notes of coffee and cocoa.

Glenfiddich 21 Year Old Gran Reserva Speyside Single Malt Whisky Caribbean Rum Cask (Scotland; William Grant & Sons, New York, NY); 40% abv, \$120. The nosing passes

SCOTCH

SUPERB (90–95)/HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Laphroaig Cask Strength 10 Year Old Islay Single Malt Scotch Whisky (Scotland; Beam Global Spirits & Wine, Deerfield, IL); 55.7% abv, \$60. A veritable aromatic feast of maritime notes: seaweed, iodine, pine needle, matchstick and olive brine. The palate entry is full of mint, Sherry, pork rind, bacon fat, chimney soot and find subtle, trademark Glenfiddich fragrances of cotton fiber, paraffin, yellow fruit and a slightly honeyed component. The palate entry is pleasingly lean, grainy sweet, honey-like and floral; the midpalate focuses on the honey sweetness and oak. Finishes well and with medium concentration on the oak.

VERY GOOD (85–89)/RECOMMENDED Glenfiddich 15 Year Old Solera Reserve Speyside Single Malt Whisky (Scotland; William Grant & Sons, New York, NY); 40% abv, \$46. The bouquet includes grainy/beaney scents, a backnote of paraffin, a banana perfume and subtle yeastiness. The palate entry tastes of baked banana and almond paste; the midpalate stage has a deft touch of sweetness that's more dried fruit-like (white raisin) than honeyed. Ends up clean, light-bodied and fresh.

Glenfiddich 12 Year Old Special Reserve Speyside Single Malt Whisky (Scotland; William Grant & Sons, New York, NY); 40% abv, \$36. The nosing passes find aromas of damp grain, wet cloth and flax with distant notes of candle wax and yellow fruit. The palate entry is clean, lean and mildly caramel-like; at midpalate flavors of candied almond and walnut paste are added. Finishes light-bodied and moderately sweet. Good for Scotch novices. *Best Buy.*

rancio tastes; by midpalate flavors of cocoa, coffee, pipe tobacco, chocolate-covered orange, marzipan and vanilla extract proliferate. Luscious and stupendously good.

VERY GOOD (85–89)/RECOMMENDED Laphroaig 10 Year Old Islay Single Malt Scotch Whisky (Scotland; Beam Global Spirits & Wine, Deerfield, IL); 43% abv, \$50. Aromas of new shoe leather, iodine, smoked trout, flowers, intense grain, soft cheese, peat-reek and dried seaweed. The palate entry is pleasantly smoky and grainy sweet; the midpalate flavors range from olive brine, seaweed, iodine, and wood smoke to baked pear, toffee and marshmallow. Concludes warm and toasty.

ARMAGNAC

CLASSIC (96–100), HIGHEST RECOMMENDATION

Château de Laubade 1978 Bas Armagnac (France; Baron François, New York, NY); 40% abv, \$135. The nosing passes find smells of chocolate-covered red cherries, old saddle leather, sweet-tart hints of grapefruit, kiwi and dried apricot. The palate entry is lush, fruity and intensely honeyed; the midpalate is creamy and concentrated on caramel, toffee and maple tastes. Ends silky, semisweet and nutty. A stunning B-A worth twice the price.

Château de Laubade 1967 Bas Armagnac (France; Baron François, New York, NY); 40% abv, \$175. This luscious bouquet offers notes of roasted pork loin, bacon fat, sawdust, with a touch of smokiness. The palate entry is cocoa sweet, intensely oaky, vanilla-like and honeyed; at midpalate the smoke from the nose reappears in tandem with a delicious chocolate covered apricot taste. Fabulously plump.

SUPERB (90–95)/HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Château de Laubade Intemporel No. 5 Bas Armagnac (France; Baron François, New York, NY); 40% abv, \$150. The zesty, inviting bouquet features an aromatic fruit thrust with layers of spiced apple, baked pear, oak and pastry components. The palate entry is oily, acceptably resinous and loaded with maple, caramel and marzipan flavors; the bittersweet midpalate adds honey, vanilla extract and beeswax, but is slightly flatter than the entry. Finishes chewy

and elegant.

Chateau de Laubade 1957 Armagnac (France; Baron François, New York, NY); 40% abv, \$300. The nosing passes find enormous aromas of fudge, palm oil and burnt toast with additional bitter-sweet notes of wood resin, figs, dates and pecan/praline. The palate entry has pepper, leather and sweetened coconut; midpalate is intensely nutty and nougaty and a touch maple-like. Ends full-bodied and concentrated, with a compelling flash of rancio

Château de Laubade 1947 Armagnac (France; Baron François, New York, NY); 40% abv, \$420. The initial aroma is very nutty; aeration settles the aroma down to engaging scents of beeswax and dried fruits. The palate entry features walnut butter; the midpalate has tastes of dark chocolate and rancio. In the finish there's an unexpected and unwelcome background taste of coin that undercuts the rancio.

Château de Laubade 1936 Bas Armagnac (France; Baron François, New York, NY); 40% abv, \$820. The bouquet features strong scents of wax paper and lanolin. I expect more oak and spice in a brandy of this age. The palate entry is gentle, satiny, and fruity sweet; the midpalate features chocolate-covered cherry, banana nut bread, candied almond and cocoa. Finishes deliciously sweet, medium-weighted, elegant and graceful.

GRAPPA

CLASSIC (96–100)

HIGHEST RECOMMENDATION

Bocchino 10 Year Old Grappa Riserva della Cantina Privata (Italy; Bedford International, Larchmont, NY); 45% abv, \$115/375 ml. The nosing passes find earthy grape must, sour apple and yeast-like aromas that nicely complement the assertive spirit. The zesty but balanced palate entry is lusciously

toffee-like; at midpalate incredibly tasty notes of orange peel and grapefruit take charge. Finishes concentrated, fruity and citrusy. Delicious.

SUPERB (90–95)/HIGHLY RECOMMENDED: Bocchino 16 Year Old Grappa Riserva della Cantina Privata (Italy; Bedford International, Larchmont, NY); 45% abv, \$240/375 ml. The nosing passes detect smells of cardboard, parchment and dried fruit. The palate entry is intensely nutty, nougaty and fruity; at midpalate the flavors are integrated, harmonious and wonderfully fruity. Ends semi-sweet, correctly acidic and elegant

VERY GOOD (85–89)/RECOMMENDED

Bocchino 15 Year Old Grappa Riserva della Cantina Privata (Italy; Bedford International, Larchmont, NY); 45% abv, \$180/375 ml. The bouquet features bakery-like scents, apple butter and fiber. The palate entry is focused on soy sauce, ginger, lanolin and nut butter. At midpalate the tastes turn resinous, heavily baked and a little bit citrusy. Concludes astringent, yet sweet and sour.

APERITIFS

VERY GOOD (85–89)/RECOMMENDED

Campari Bitter (Italy; Skyy Spirits, San Francisco, CA); 24% abv, \$25. The nosing passes find earthy/woody scents of brambles/vines, moss, forest floor and stones. The palate entry owns a unique tree bark-like taste that's oddly attractive; the midpalate stage features pungent flavors of ashes, roots, quinine, honey, citrus peels and earth.

Cinzano Extra Dry Vermouth (Italy; Skyy Spirits, San Francisco, CA); 18% abv, \$14. Fresh, dry, fabric-like and yeasty scents emerge from the glass. The palate entry is fresh, sinewy, lean and mineral-like; the flavor becomes even more dry and mineral-like at midpalate. Squeaky dry and utterly refreshing. **Best Buy.** 