

Introduction to Brandy



Brandy is the name used for a wide range of potable spirits, made mostly from grape wines but sometimes also from other fruits (Eaux-de-Vie). The name brandy is a shortened form of brandywine, which is an anglicized form of Dutch *brandewijn*, which means "burnt wine".

This is precisely what brandy is. To make brandy, wine is heated in a still until it separates into its components, which evaporate at various points on the temperature scale. The more volatile the component, the lower the temperature at which it evaporates, leaving behind the impurities and heavier compounds. This is the process used to turn wine into brandy.

In part, the development of brandy can be attributed to customs and excise taxes. In the days when alcohol sales were taxed by volume, without regard for alcoholic strength, expedient wine merchants sought out ways to reduce the amount they paid. By distilling their wine down, they not only made it easier to transport, but paid less tax on it. The distilled wine could then be brought back to its original volume at the end destination simply by adding water. The challenges of transportation have been responsible for several of the world's most interesting wines, among them Madeira, Port, and Champagne.

Like wine and whisky, brandy is often aged in wooden barrels, which increases its complexity and color intensity. The attractive amber hue of aged brandy is often replicated in unaged brandy through the use of soluble food colorings such as caramel color (additive number E150). The length of aging and the type of barrel used are both important elements in determining the qualities of the brandy inside.

In Cognac and Armagnac, southwest France, brandy production has been taken seriously for centuries. Both of these areas have protected appellations for the brandy they make, and legally regulated labeling terms are used to communicate the length of time a brandy has spent in barrel. VS (Very Special) denotes that a Cognac has spent a minimum of two years in cask, while VSOP (Very Special Old Pale) requires at least four years. XO is the finest grade and is reserved exclusively for those cuvees aged for six years or more. "Hors d'Age", although unofficial, is also used to mark Cognacs which have exceeded even the most demanding barrel ageing regimes.

Being a carefully manufactured product with specific organoleptic properties, brandy is consumed neat more often than many other spirits. It can be consumed either at room temperature or chilled with ice; the finer the brandy the more likely it is to be consumed neat. When mixed, brandy is most often accompanied by ginger ale. As a cocktail ingredient it plays a part in the Brandy Alexander and the Sidecar (Cognac, triple sec, lemon juice).

Italy's most famous strong alcohol, grappa, straddles the accepted definitions of eau-de-vie and brandy, as some are aged in barrel, while others are not.

Classification of brandy by the TTB in the USA.

Spirits distilled from the fermented juice, mash or wine of fruit or from its residue at less than 95% alcohol by volume (190 proof) having the taste, aroma and characteristics generally attributed to brandy and bottled at not less than 40% alcohol by volume (80 proof).

Type	Definition
Fruit brandy	Brandy distilled solely from the fermented juice or mash of whole, sound, ripe fruit or from standard fruit wine, with or without the addition of not more than 20 percent by weight of the pomace of such juice or wine or 30 percent by volume of the lees of such wine or both. Such brandy may include up to 30% on a proof gallon basis of lees brandy. "Brandy" is grape brandy. Other types of fruit brandy must be further identified, e.g., "Peach Brandy". Grape brandy must be stored in oak containers for a minimum of 2 years.
Pisco	Peruvian grape brandy stored in other than oak containers.
Applejack or Apple Brandy	Type of fruit brandy made from apples.
Kirschwasser	Type of fruit brandy made from cherries.
Slivovitz	Type of fruit brandy made from plums.
Cognac	Grape brandy distilled in the Cognac region of France in compliance with the laws and regulations of the French Government.
Armagnac	Grape brandy distilled in the Armagnac region of France in compliance with the laws and regulations of the French Government.
Calvados	Apple brandy distilled in the Calvados region of France in compliance with the laws and regulations of the French Government.
Raisin Brandy	Type of dried fruit brandy made from raisins.
Lees Brandy	Brandy distilled from the lees or sediment from fermentation of fruit wine. "Lees Brandy" is grape lees brandy. Other types of lees brandy must be further identified, e.g., "Cherry Lees Brandy".
Pomace Brandy or Marc Brandy	Brandy distilled from the skin and pulp of sound, ripe fruit after the withdrawal of the juice or wine. "Pomace Brandy" or "Marc Brandy" is grape pomace or marc brandy. Other types of pomace or marc brandy must be further identified, e.g., "Apple Pomace Brandy," "Pear Marc Brandy".
Grappa or Grappa Brandy	Type of pomace brandy made from grapes.
Neutral Brandy	Any type of brandy, e.g., "Fruit Brandy," "Residue Brandy," etc., distilled at more than 85% alcohol by volume (170 proof) but less than 95% alcohol by volume (190 proof). "Neutral Brandy" is grape neutral brandy. Other types of neutral brandy must be further identified, e.g., "Neutral Plum Brandy," "Neutral Citrus Residue Brandy".

Cognac is brandy made in the Cognac region of Southwestern France.

Cognac is mostly made from three major varietals of grapes that you rarely see in wine: Ugni blanc, Folle blanche, and Colombard, as well as smaller percentages of a few other grapes like Sémillon.

These grapes, if fermented, would make a wine that is extremely acidic and often unpalatable, but when distilled makes for a spirit that is unparalleled in aging and blending potential.

Distillation takes place in copper pot stills, which are regulated in size and shape by the French government.

Once distilled, Cognac is stored in French oak barrels to age.

All Cognacs are blends of various barrels, and each individual Cognac in a blend is referred to as *eau-de-vie* or 'water of life.'

The age statement on a bottle of Cognac is an indication of how old the youngest *eau-de-vie* in the blend is, and for really exclusive bottles, the other Cognacs in a blend can be over a hundred years old.

Cognac doesn't usually carry direct age statements like a bottle of whiskey, however; Cognac aged up to two years is listed as **VS** or 'very special', aged up to four years it's called **VSOP** or 'very superior old pale', and aged up to eight years it can be called either **XO** for 'extra old' or **Napoléon**.

In 2018, the XO minimum age rule goes up to 10 years, though typically XO cognacs are considerably older than this.

Armagnac is brandy made in the Armagnac region in Gascony, further south than Cognac.

Armagnac uses Ugni blanc, Folle blanche, and Colombar grapes like Cognac does, with the addition of Baco blanc, a grape that outside of Armagnac isn't used for much of anything.

Instead of Cognac's copper pot stills, Armagnac is typically distilled in column stills similar to American bourbons, Armagnac is only distilled once instead of twice in the case of Cognac.

The single distillation and the column still combine to make Armagnac generally a more aromatic and brooding spirit than Cognac, perhaps a better entry into French brandies for someone used to bourbons.

Armagnac uses the VS/VSOP/XO designations for age as Cognac, but the ages don't match up perfectly; the youngest *eau-de-vie* in a XO Armagnac only has to be aged six years instead of eight.

Also important for the imbiber more conscious about how much they're spending on alcohol, as Armagnac isn't as well-known outside of Europe, old Armagnac tends to be cheaper than similarly-aged Cognac.

To summarize, Cognac is distilled twice in copper pot stills, and Armagnac is distilled once in column stills, and the grapes used can be a bit different.

Calvados is a pear and apple-based brandy from the northern part of France along the English Channel in the Normandy region. With a history dating back nearly 500 years, the region has a long tradition of distilling their ciders into delicious and complex spirits. While not as well-known as Cognac or Armagnac, Calvados holds a dear place in the hearts of many spirits lovers.

To create calvados, apples and pears are collected from the ground during the autumn and pressed into juice. The unclarified juice is then fermented into a cider with between 6% and 8% alcohol. This cider is then passed through a still, where a 70% alcohol will eventually emerge. This clear spirit then goes into barrel, where it picks up color and additional aromas and flavors. It can be sold after its 3rd birthday but is often aged for much longer.

There are three appellations in Calvados

Calvados Pays d'Auge Contrôlée

The Pays d' Auge was established in 1942. Apples dominate in this appellation, and most calvados in the region is made with only apples. Calvados from the Pays d' Auge must be distilled twice, a process that sets it apart from the other appellations.

Appellation Calvados Contrôlée

At one point, the expansive area now known as Appellation Calvados Contrôlée was divided into regulated regions, spread all across Normandy and spilling across the borders of several neighboring departments. These regulated regions were grouped together in the 1980's. The soils vary widely from region to region. Most producers use only apples in their cider and the majority distill their cider once in a column still.

Appellation Calvados Domfrontais Contrôlée

This appellation, established in 1997, surrounds the town of Domfront-in-the-Orne, from which it takes its name. Using at least 30% pears in their distillate is obligatory in the Domfrontais, although it is common for some producers to use 70% or 80% in their ciders. Distillation takes place once in a column still as is done in Appellation Calvados Contrôlée.



Copper Cognac Alambic Still (double distillation)



Mobile wood-fired copper Armagnac still (single distillation)



Semi-mobile Calvados still (double distillation)



Austrian Kothe® still at Koval in Chicago

Korbel California Brandy

\$12.99

Distilled from California grapes in a copper lined continuous column still to a distillation strength of 84.5% alc./vol. and then aged at 65% alc./vol. in 52 gallon charred American oak barrels in a solera system. Some 360,000 cases are produced annually.

ABV:

40%

Appearance:

Clear, mid-golden amber.

Aroma:

Honeysuckle, cinnamon, apple and pears with cedarwood.

Taste:

Toffee/caramel apple, cinnamon and orange with fiery cracked black pepper spicity heat, dry slightly smoky oak and bitter woody tannins.

Aftertaste:

Hot spicy finish with dry oak, apple and tannins.

Dancing Goat Brandy

\$secret (ask Fred)

- Finest California Brandy barrel aged, blended & bottled in Wisconsin
- Floral aromas of white wine with notes of vanilla and caramel
- Makes the best Old Fashioned

ABV:

43%

Aroma:

Vanilla, White Wine and Brown Butter

Taste:

Buttery white wine, vanilla, caramel and white sugar

Mouthfeel:

Vinous and Bright

Germain Robin XO

\$129.99

Germain-Robin XO is an icon of California Brandy. Distilled exclusively in Puhlo Charentais Pot Stills and aged in Limousin Oak Barrels, XO highlights the unique flavor and characteristics of California Pinot Noir grapes.

DISTILLER'S NOTES:

The high-quality California wine grapes in Germain-Robin XO showcase unique flavors and layered textures. The signature grape, Pinot Noir, provides a dark cherry character and a rich silky mouthfeel. Colombard distillate adds a fresh apple character while Sémillon provides richness with peach and apricot notes. The balance of both fruit and oak flavors is unique to Germain-Robin XO. The vanilla and toast flavors from the French oak complement the fruit which creates layers of complexity that only can be found from sourcing great fruit. The fermentation and distillation is driven with the goal of emphasizing fruit and mouthfeel and then paired with aging in select Limousin Oak Barrels. Texturally, the brandy is extremely smooth and has an incredibly long finish.

SIGNATURE FLAVORS:

Cherry, Vanilla, Oak

Copper and Kings American Apple Brandy

\$29.99

ABV 46%

Finished in Kentucky Bourbon and New American Oak barrels.

Alembic distillation.

Superb exclusively copper pot-distilled. Non chill-filtered. No added apple flavors. Or essences.

No added boisé (oak flavor or infusion), or caramel color.

Craft distilled modern American Apple Brandy. 92 proof for robust structure & backbone. Authentic natural flavor. A velvety, American interpretation of Apple Brandy.

Some natural cloudiness, faint sediment or suspension may be apparent in the distillate, particularly at colder temperatures.

Our ambition is to retain the integrity of the distillate with minimal intervention.

Enjoy on the rocks, with your favorite premium mixer or in the composition of imaginative cocktails.

Copper and Kings Oskar Blues

No longer available

ABV 55.5%

Pure Pot-Distilled American Brandy Finished in Oskar Blues Imperial IPA Barrels

We are inspired by the imagination & fearlessness of America's Craft Brewers.

We share their passion for their craft. We are proud to share our American Brandy barrels & share the barrels previously used to finish craft beers to refine & polish the maturation of our craft distilled American Brandy.

Our ambition is to directly infuse the character and personality of the individual beers within the American Brandy with honest authenticity.

The brandy is aged for a full 12 months in beer barrels. The spirit proof entering the barrel is a full bodied +/- 130 Proof to maximize flavor extraction. Bottle proof at 111 Proof is chosen to maximize the craft beer flavor profiles by minimizing dilution with just a touch of water to enable the flavors to authentically bloom & soften the heat just a touch.

The brandy is unadulterated by any additives that may impact on the authentic & direct flavor from the barrels – Non-Chill Filtered – which would extract flavor, no addition of boisé – which would muddy flavors with a fake oaky profile, no caramel color – the spirit is the natural color from the barrel.

The craft beer barrels have deeply influenced the aroma & taste of the brandy with their unique profiles & personalities. They boogie.

NOSE: Citrusy, hoppy nose, hints of renegade florals.

TASTE: Clean, Crisp, hints of black pepper, interesting grapefruity IPA finish.

Copper and Kings Sierra Nevada

No longer available

ABV 55.5%

Pure Pot-Distilled American Brandy Finished In Sierra Nevada Imperial Smoked Porter Barrels

We are inspired by the imagination & fearlessness of America's Craft Brewers.

We share their passion for their craft. We are proud to share our American Brandy barrels & share the barrels previously used to finish craft beers to refine & polish the maturation of our craft distilled American Brandy.

Our ambition is to directly infuse the character and personality of the individual beers within the American Brandy with honest authenticity.

The brandy is aged for a full 12 months in beer barrels. The spirit proof entering the barrel is a full bodied +/- 130 Proof to maximize flavor extraction. Bottle proof at 111 Proof is chosen to maximize the craft beer flavor profiles by minimizing dilution with just a touch of water to enable the flavors to authentically bloom & soften the heat just a touch.

The brandy is unadulterated by any additives that may impact on the authentic & direct flavor from the barrels – Non-Chill Filtered – which would extract flavor, no addition of boisé – which would muddy flavors with a fake oaky profile, no caramel color – the spirit is the natural color from the barrel.

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NOSE Red Currant, surprisingly fresh, faint citrus.

TASTE Unexpectedly hoppy, strong vanilla and malt, hints of smoke. Finishes very mellow and smooth, with a slight hoppy return.

Copper and Kings Against The Grain

No longer available

ABV 55.5%

Pure Pot-Distilled American Brandy Finished In Again the Grain Smoked Scottish Ale Barrels

We are inspired by the imagination & fearlessness of America's Craft Brewers.

We share their passion for their craft. We are proud to share our American Brandy barrels & share the barrels previously used to finish craft beers to refine & polish the maturation of our craft distilled American Brandy.

Our ambition is to directly infuse the character and personality of the individual beers within the American Brandy with honest authenticity.

The brandy is aged for a full 12 months in beer barrels. The spirit proof entering the barrel is a full bodied +/- 130 Proof to maximize flavor extraction. Bottle proof at 111 Proof is chosen to maximize the craft beer flavor profiles by minimizing dilution with just a touch of water to enable the flavors to authentically bloom & soften the heat just a touch.

The brandy is unadulterated by any additives that may impact on the authentic & direct flavor from the barrels – Non-Chill Filtered – which would extract flavor, no addition of boisé – which would muddy flavors with a fake oaky profile, no caramel color – the spirit is the natural color from the barrel.

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NOSE Is this a Scotch Whisky? Smoke, peat, vanilla and oak, with a take you by surprise floral note.

TASTE Fresher than nose suggests, spearmint with just a hint of briny saltiness, honey and light caramel. Long, lingering finish.

Jacoulot “J” Petit Marc

\$37.99

Le Petit Marc was created to give the mixologist a unique brandy option from an independent, traditional producer. It is single distilled from the skins and pips from pinot noir, referred to jointly as marc or pomace. Though other Marc de Bourgogne producers may include stems in their distillation, Jacoulot takes great care to use only de-stemmed fruit, giving the marc notes reminiscent of great Burgundy and taming the fiery and astringent nature of lesser brandies. Jacoulot distills its marc between November and March each year using a mobile alembic still to match the natural rhythms of the harvest and the winemaking process. After distillation, the spirit is transported to Jacoulot’s cellars and left to rest in French oak barrels. 228-liter barriques and 600-700 liter demi-muids are used for élevage.

ABV 45%

Tasting Notes

Beautifully integrated notes of coffee, cocoa, and red fruit. Lively raisins and a backbone of spice make it a perfect base for cocktails, from the refreshing to the spirituous.

Recommended Pairings

Pairs beautifully with natural-aged brandy friends, including orange liqueur, sweet vermouth, amontillado sherry, almond, and red fruit liqueurs.

Source 100% de-stemmed pinot noir pomace

Aging 4 years

Lustau Solera Gran Reserva

\$34.99

Lustau's Solera Gran Reserva Brandy is a D.O. protected Brandy de Jerez produced from 100% Airen grapes.

Single distilled in accordance with Brandy de Jerez solera reserva D.O.

It is aged for 10 years in ex-Oloroso sherry casks made from American oak using the traditional solera system.

Mahogany in color, the concentrated aromas of tobacco leaves, roasted coffee and walnuts prime the palate for a warm and mellow sip with nougat and dark chocolate on the palate and a long, drying finish.

ABV 40%

Clear Creek 2-Year Old Apply Brandy

\$29.99

Whole Golden Delicious apples from Oregon are crushed, fermented and aged in French Limousin oak barrels for two years.

Excellent for mixed drinks and cooking with flavors of citrus and fresh apples and a touch of oak.

ABV 40%