

F. Paul Pacult's Spirit Journal

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ties. Still, it's a bold and idiosyncratic BA that's worth the time and expense.
Spirit Journal Rating 2008:
★★★/Recommended

Baron de Lustrac
1982 Folle Blanche Bas Armagnac
(France; CVI Brands,
San Carlos, CA)
42% abv, \$110.

Amber/autumnal golden maize/marigold color; some minor sediment spotted — no problem. Opening inhalations encounter plump floral, tropical fruit-like, biscuity scents of baked and spiced banana, fruitcake, and vanilla wafer; aeration stimulates additional sumptuous scents, including tapioca, almonds sautéed in butter, and older Madeira, like a Bual; a multilayered bouquet that is worth the money on its own. Palate entry is off-dry and intensely fruity in a yellow dried fruit way, especially white raisins and dried banana; midpalate turns significantly tarter/more astringent than the entry but fills out texturally, offering slightly baked flavors of banana nut bread, walnuts, and tobacco. Finish goes a bit tight in focus, flavor-wise, but there's still lots to enjoy, in particular, from aroma through entry.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:
★★★/Recommended

Chateau du Tariquet
8 Year Old/Cask Strength
Folle Blanche Grape Bas Armagnac
(France; CVI Brands,
San Carlos, CA)
52.2% abv, \$58.

Brilliant amber/topaz color; sediment-free clarity. First aromatic contact is spirited, piquant, prickly, and biscuity/doughy rather than fruity/acidic; the heightened abv really jacks up the assertiveness of the bouquet in a positive way as aeration brings out scents of candle wax, pears, flowers, white grapes/white raisins, and oak. Palate entry is potent and toffee-flavored, but not in the least, harsh or biting considering the cask strength; midpalate features succulent, candied flavors of caramel, nougat, and roasted peanuts. Ends on a sappy note. While robust and velvety textured on the surface, I feel that there should have been more

"core" elegance here, which would have brought better balance. Certainly better than average and agreeably punchy, though.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:
★★★/Recommended

Chateau du Tariquet
12 Year Old/Cask Strength
Folle Blanche Grape Bas Armagnac
(France; CVI Brands,
San Carlos, CA)
52.1% abv, \$70.

Luminous saffron/ocher/tarnished gold color; impeccable purity. Intriguing initial sniffs encounter pine needle and cedar; additional time in the glass adds lush aromatic elements of dark caramel, new leather, and citrus. Palate entry highlights the tree sap and piney qualities, but leaves behind the fruit; midpalate sees chocolate covered banana/chocolate covered orange flavors emerge from behind the cedary curtain, making for quite pleasurable drinking. Finishes long, sweet, prickly on the tongue, and dark caramel-like. It numbed my lips by the end of the evaluation.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:
★★★/Recommended

Chateau du Tariquet
15 Year Old/Cask Strength
Folle Blanche Grape
Bas Armagnac
(France; CVI Brands,
San Carlos, CA)
51.9% abv, \$86.

Oddly, this offering is lighter in color than either the 8 or 12 year old siblings; dark amber color; flawless clarity. To my surprise, this nose is closed off in the opening inhalations, offering nothing more than a meek fragrance of sawdust/wood chips; swirling and further aeration stimulate more assertive and mildly pleasing scents of light toffee, cream, and margarine. Palate entry is honey sweet, almost sugary, in its bearing; midpalate focuses on roasted/toasty tastes that remind me of walnuts and prunes. Ends well on a sap-like, honeyed note.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:
★★★/Recommended

P. Grassa Three Star Bas Armagnac
(France; Robert Kacher Selections,
Washington DC)
40% abv, \$28.

Bright topaz/burnished gold color; some sediment spotted floating around. Smells of lemon zest and spice in the opening inhalations after the pour; the fruit element continues after additional air contact, adding subtle notes of limestone, apricot, and green melon. Palate entry is tidy and compact, with just enough fruitiness and acidity to make a positive impression, but this taste profile gives nothing away for free; midpalate is moderately nutty, off-dry yet ripe, fruity in a yellow/green fruit manner (apricot still plus kiwi), and focused. Concludes tight, a bit narrower than I like, nutty, and austere. At every stage, there was quality worthy of three stars, but there was never anything really special to push this into more exciting territory and a fourth star.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:
★★★/Recommended

CALVADOS - FRANCE

Domaine Dupont Fine Reserve
Pays d'Auge Calvados
(France; Robert Kacher Selections,
Washington DC)
40% abv, \$40.

Old sauternes/yellow-gold color; sediment-free clarity. Smells first of marginally sour apple and is light, pleasing tart, and slightly spiced; the sour apple turns a bit riper following further air contact and becomes more like apple strudel/apple pastry than fresh apples; a good bouquet. Palate entry is smooth, sweet/sour, astringent, and keenly apple-like; midpalate highlights the apple peel nearly as much as the apple pulp and is now gently sweet. Composed, slightly sweet, and delicate in the finish. A very charming and evolved Fine calvados that is constantly growing and expanding with time. Genuinely lovely.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:
★★★★/Highly Recommended

Domaine Dupont Vieille Reserve Pays d'Auge Calvados
(France; Robert Kacher Selections, Washington DC)
42% abv, \$51.

Amber/burnished gold/maize color; excellent purity. Offers moderately toasted/baked aromas of baked apple, lemon peel, and oak resins; top-drawer notes of apple butter and apple sauce dominate the second stage of sniffing which aromatically carries the essence of apple from start to finish. Palate entry is delightfully spiced (vanilla, nutmeg) like spiced apple fresh out of the oven; midpalate showcases the baked spiced apple theme to the max, making the taste profile zesty, ripe, fruity/citrusy, and pastry-like. Finishes with an added dash of spice and oiliness (buttery-type oil). Luscious, period.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:

★★★★/Highest Recommendation

COGNAC - FRANCE

Bache-Gabrielsen Natur & Elegance XO Cognac (France; J&M Heritage Imports, LLC, Glenwood, IA)
40% abv, \$100.

Pretty jonquil/marigold yellow color; ideal clarity. Initial whiffs encounter toasty, warm and welcoming aromas of sautéed almond, buttered walnut, and peanut brittle; further aeration stimulates subtle notes of tropical fruit (banana, papaya) that match up well with the nuttiness that persists. Palate entry features roasted/baked tastes of toasted wheat bread, buttered almonds, nougat, and sweet oak. Concludes with a bit of tobacco leaf, prune, fig, and honey. Lithe, yet plenty of nutty substance.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:

★★★★/Highly Recommended

Bache-Gabrielsen XO Fine Champagne Cognac (France; J&M Heritage Imports, LLC, Glenwood, IA)
40% abv, \$100.

Gorgeous bronze/auburn color; flaw-

less purity. Smells of pork rind, palm oil, lanolin, and lard; aeration brings out scents of raisins, cranberry, toffee, salted butter, and old, worn leather. Palate entry highlights layered bitter-sweet flavors of cocoa bean, brown butter, bacon fat, cinnamon, fruitcake, and dark caramel. Palate entry displays almost juicy tastes of white raisins, custard, and almond paste; midpalate offers dry, dusty flavors of shale/mineral, prune, black raisins, and figs. Finishes long, off-dry, caramel-like, lightly honeyed, and silky.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:

★★★★/Highly Recommended

Courvoisier Exclusif Cognac (France; Beam Global, Deerfield, IL)
40% abv, \$50.

Chestnut/rose-gold color; flawless purity. First whiffs encounter ripe scents of dried red fruits, especially raisins and prunes, with background traces of oloroso sherry and egg cream; aeration turns the red fruits into yellow tropical fruits, in particular, baked pineapple and guava, as the bouquet deepens and gets noticeably baked and roasted. Palate entry is pleasingly sweet and caramel-like; midpalate offers good balance between fruit and acid, giving off a clean but substantial flavor profile that's a touch too candied, but it works well enough due to the maintenance of high acidity. Concludes full, assertive, chunky, toffee-like, and clean, with bits of coffee and cocoa. Nice job here.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:

★★★/Recommended

Delamain Le Voyage Grande Champagne Cognac (France; Kobrand Corporation, Purchase, NY)
42% abv, \$7,000.

Burnished copper/rusty orange color; impeccable purity. Fine scents of white chocolate, marshmallow, dried apricot, and tropical fruit rule the early inhalations; additional air contact stirs up added aromas of English toffee, butter cream, chocolate covered orange rind, marmalade, and the beginnings of rancio; could easily and happily smell this classic all day. Palate entry is vibrant, woody/resiny, dry to bittersweet,



beany, and moderately oily; midpalate is long, lush, and deep, with a taste finale that includes flavors of caramel, treacle, prunes, and very old sherry. Ends elegantly yet forcefully. A gem whose character never fades.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:

★★★★/Highest Recommendation

Paul Giraud VSOP Grande Champagne Cognac (France; Robert Kacher Selections, Washington DC)
40% abv, \$43.

Gold/deep straw yellow/amber color; inconsequential sediment spotted — no bother. Opening sniffs detect soft aromas of clay, white grapes, and banana; aeration fails to open up the bouquet any farther, which is disappointing. Palate entry is medium-bodied, satiny, and properly toffee-like; midpalate tastes include oak, sawdust, white raisins, figs, and almonds. Ends on a high note of good fruit-acid balance and elegance.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:

★★★/Recommended

Paul Giraud Napoleon Grande Champagne Cognac (France; Robert Kacher Selections, Washington DC)
40% abv, \$59.

Only slightly deeper in amber/straw color than the VSOP; excellent clarity. Initial inhalations detect dried fruits, namely dates and black raisins; aeration brings on only muted scents of holiday baking spice and pecans; like the bouquet of the VSOP, the meekness of the aroma plays against the experi-

ence as a whole. Palate entry is elegant, graceful, understated, and clean, as the innate acidity holds firm and the dried fruit aspect turns mildly sweet; midpalate is moderately toasty and gently ripe in a grapy/pruny manner. Finishes delicately and a touch lean. There's certainly enough charm here to recommend it, but one expects a Grande Champagne to offer more depth.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:

★★★/Recommended

BRANDY - USA

Aqua Perfecta Framboise Eau-de-Vie Raspberry Brandy (USA; St. George Spirits, Oakland, CA)
40% abv, \$40/375 ml.

Excellent clarity. Initial inhalations catch a slightly metallic/tanky scent that throws me off at first; further aeration activates the raspberry fruit, but even then, it comes off as reluctant and more as a supplement to the coin metal/berry seed smell; not what I had hoped for aromatically. Palate entry is tart, astringent, and raspberry-like to a lesser degree than I'd like and is actually more seed- and pod-like than fruity; midpalate stage brings out more of the raspberry fruit and pulp, but not enough to rescue it from two star territory. There's something lack-

luster and lazy about this flaccid and uninteresting brandy. It never takes flight.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:

★★/Not Recommended

Aqua Perfecta Poire Eau-de-Vie Williams Pear Brandy (USA; St. George Spirits, Oakland, CA)

40% abv, \$40/375 ml.

Unblemished clarity; silvery transparency. First whiffs detect rich, concentrated aromas of ripe, just-picked pears; further aeration brings out the dry, dusty smell of pear peels; this aroma is so authentic, that it's something of a miracle. Palate entry is dry as desert sand and minerally, yet is juicy and clean; midpalate is lean, austere, bone dry but earthy, fruity, and incredibly fresh pear-like. Finishes astringent and shale-like, even chalky. Unique among domestic poire eaux-de-vie because of the unbridled earthiness.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:

★★★★/Highly Recommended

Aqua Perfecta Kirsch Eau-de-Vie Cherry Brandy (USA; St. George Spirits, Oakland, CA)

40% abv, \$40/375 ml.

Limpid perfection; flawless purity. Ripe scent of red cherry is compelling, satisfying, and stunningly genuine;

additional aeration stimulates deeper red cherry fruit and juice smells that take the aroma to the limit of authenticity; a truly sublime and memorable bouquet. Palate entry is delicate and elegant, then intensely fruit stone-like and astringent; midpalate features the flowery taste of unaged distillate that greatly suits the cherry fruit and fruit stone. Finishes grandly and firmly, with a welcome touch of oiliness that gives this wonderful eau-de-vie grip and the final note of substance that affords it a worthy fifth star.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:

★★★★★/Highest Recommendation

Aqua Perfecta Zinfandel Grappa (USA; St. George Spirits, Oakland, CA)

40% abv, \$40.

Perfect in its clarity. Nose after the pour reminds me strikingly of cotton fabric, goose down, and/or new wool blanket/scarf; secondary sniffs after aeration expose the must/pomace scent that one expects and does so in a dry, grape skin manner more than a fruity/pulpy way. Palate entry is dry, tart, earthy, and spicy/peppery; midpalate displays a fleeting touch of orange blossom flavor that fades quickly, allowing a more assertive green pepper/green vegetable taste to dominate. Ends on a grapy, musty note.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:

★★★/Recommended

new white spirits reviews

TEQUILA - MEXICO

Herradura Seleccion Suprema Extra Añejo 100% de Agave Tequila Natural (Mexico; Brown-Forman Beverage International, Louisville, KY)
40% abv, \$350.

Color is old gold/maize/old sauternes; unblemished clarity. The first couple of whiffs after the pour detect

resiny notes that are kind of textile-like as well; an oaky sweetness emerges over time in the glass and that manifests in the aromatic form of malted milk or pastry dough. Entry is slightly fat with oaky creaminess, but it's not enough to overshadow the structural acidity that holds its together; the midpalate offers earthy tastes of egg cream, peppery spice, jalapeño pepper, dill leaf, and nutmeg. Ends on an off-dry note that's nicely peppery and woody.

Spirit Journal Rating 2008:

★★★★/Highly Recommended

GIN - INTERNATIONAL

Gale Force Gin (USA; Triple Eight Distillery, LLC, Nantucket, MA)
44.4% abv, \$29.

Strangely, minuscule bubbles are seen clinging to the inside of the glass and others are seen rising from the bottom — that's a first for me in 20 years of gin evaluating. Smells of turpentine or