



IGP Côtes de Gascogne - AOP Bas Armagnac

Our Bas-Armagnacs ***A « Savoir-Faire » of Tradition***

History & Terroir

At the beginning of the XIV^e century, Master Vital Dufour, prior of Eauze in Gascony considers that the **Armagnac has “40 virtues or efficiencies” to “preserve health and stay in good shape”**. This text dated from 1310 makes the « aqua ardente », which will become Armagnac, **the oldest eau de vie of France**.

A few centuries later in the Middle Ages, **King of France Henri IV** was in love with the Béarn region for his favorite hobby: hunting. And then he crossed through the historical village of Bas Armagnac « Labastide d’Armagnac » (8km away from Domaine de Papolle) where he tasted the local elixir, which he brought back to the royal table for his guests. Since then, the **Armagnac is called “King’s eau de vie”**.

The Armagnac land is composed of 3 different “terroirs” (soils): the Haut Armagnac, the Ténarèze & the **Bas Armagnac**. Each one is characterized by a very specific soil which gives different style to the eau de vie.

The Bas Armagnac inherits the best reputation for its terroir made up of fawn sand (sand and silt) producing fine and fruity Armagnac, able to very old ageing.

We could even assert that the **canton of Cazaubon, where the Domaine de Papolle is located can be named as the “Great Bas Armagnac”** due to its particularly acid grounds. This factor is essential for the elaboration’s success of the Armagnac.

Typical Grapes :

- **Folle Blanche** : very fruity & flavoured, then get smoother with time lasting to reveal a strong power proper to Folle Blanche. The Armagnac of connoisseurs and **unrivalled**.

- **Baco 22A** : no elegance when young (<10 years) but **apt to good ageing**. Baco is the grape that made the reputation of Armagnac, the oldest eau de vie. The **best Armagnac vintages** come from Baco.

This is the only hybrid grape allowed in the Appellation, such is the importance of its qualitative characteristic – crossbreed of Folle Blanche and Noah.

- **Ugni Blanc** : produces round Armagnac, structured and fruity, grape of trust, **a classic**.

- **Colombard** : very soft, producing eau de vie with no interest. At Papolle, we do not distil this last grape, we use it for our well appreciated white wines only.

Culture & Wine making

Our Bas Armagnacs are exclusively elaborated from the grapes Baco, Folle Blanche and Ugni-Blanc made out of the distillation of the wines from the estate of Papolle. **The grapes are vinified, distilled and aged in the respect of the Armagnac traditions :**

- *wine-making without any additives, except yeast*
- *distillation with wood,*
- *natural ageing in oak barrel,*
- *natural degrees commercialised,*
- *bottled to order,*

It is important to understand that to make a good and tasty Bas Armagnac, it is necessary to **harvest and vinify a wholesome grape**, with low degree (8° to 10° alc.) and a great level of acidity (approx. 7), at the **opposite of a still wine in bottle** in terms of analysis & taste, the optimum ripeness level being uncompleted.

The **cold temperature controlled** (16°C) vinification will allow the aromatic revelation of the wine which will be recreated into the distilled eau de vie. **Any additive is prohibited, in particular sulphur**, except the yeast which launches the fermentation. The wine is thus alive and natural !

Then we understand **the interest of the terroir**, which reveals all its character **naturally** from the grape, the human intervention being negligible.

Distillation

Distillation is done really **quickly after fermentation** to avoid oxidation and distortion of the wine, and **to keep freshness and flavour potential** given the non-addition of additives to the stabilization of the wine (sulphur or other additives).

Distillation in « continue » (single hit, one passage) traditional in Armagnac region, at 55°C, **warmed in the wood of the vineyard** as in the past, grape by grape in an Armagnac still, **thereby perpetuating the tradition**.

Blanche d'Armagnac: recently distilled, l'eau de vie going out of the still can also **not be aged** so as to be stored in stainless tanks. It is stirred during 3 months to evaporate esters – the bad side of alcohol – and only reveal **the floral aromas**. This spirit, still a white spirit which is very **charming and delicate**, an eau de vie but is not an Armagnac since there is no barrel ageing. Awarded AOP status since 2007.

The Blanche d'Armagnac is characterized by a powerful floral aromatic and a very fat and ample mouth, used for cocktails or served on its own.

Can be compared with other noteworthy white spirits on the market: Grappa, Vodka and so on.

Ageing in barrel

As soon as distilled, the Armagnac is placed into new oak barrels of 420 litres from Gascony, named as “**Pièces**”: the subtle **marriage between alcohol & wood begins, conferring colour and aromas** on the alcohol. It's only after **2 years of ageing** that we can talk about (Bas) Armagnac, according to the specifications.

All the work is done during the ageing in barrel, a **regular monitoring**, with **stirring and airing** to soften as much as possible to gain delicacy and less taste of “bad alcohol”.

We make a **rotation of barrels to develop the qualitative ageing** of this young eau de vie:

- « **Pièces Jeunes** » (new or 1 year old), Armagnac will age in there from 0 to 2 years.
- « **Pièces Rousses** » (5-7 years old), Armagnac will age in there from 2 to 10 years.
- « **Pièces Vieilles** » (more than 10 years old), Armagnac will age in there for 10 years minimum, until the vintage bottling or the blending.

This rotation system will allow a powerful colour and aromas within the early years of ageing, to then soften the phenomenon by transferring in barrels with a minimum age. The ageing can be considered at the same time as to answer a demand of blend for example for a VSOP 5 years and as to plan to wait 30 years in barrel to become an extraordinary vintage !

It evaporates at about 3 to 6% per year.

Blends

Blends are made only after distillation & ageing, depending on the taste & the result we want to obtain.

Papolle **does not add nor reduce the alcohol degree** of its Bas Armagnac vintages to keep the authentic distinguished quality and authenticity.

Bottling

Once bottled, Armagnac does not evolve, that's the reason why **bottling is made to order**, resulting in a short delays (approx. 10 days), once ordered.

Quality control : done by the Organisme De Gestion Armagnac (Management Institution Armagnac), official administration.

Knowing how to read labels :

To **understand mentions on labels**, it is necessary to know the different trade names attributed to the Armagnacs, **depending on their ageing in oak barrels**.

Blends and Age mentions :

Blends : VS, VSOP, XO, Hors d'Age,

Or Age Mentions : 15 years, 20 years, 25 years

Except vintages, these mentions are always referring **to the age of the youngest eau de vie in the blend**.

In this way, the « Hors d'Âge » is a blend of 1 or several eau de vie among which the youngest is aged at least 10 years in oak barrel. Our Hors d'Age has an average of 12 years, for instance.

It is the same for the Armagnacs that are presenting under age mentions.

The vintages :

Finally, the vintage (minimum 10 years ageing) « armagnacaise » specificity **corresponds exclusively to the harvest year mentioned on the label** : 1934, 1965, 1976,...

The authenticity of the product is in its entirety if the winegrower is bottling to order.

Towards a simplification...

Napoléon, Réserve, VSOP, XO, Old, Very Old, and even more old... All studies show that nobody understands anything of the erudite and varied appellations anymore... neither do us, perhaps !

Which Armagnac for which use ?

Here is a table and classification board that will allow you to gain a clearer understanding...

Range	Age	Naming	Tasting advices
Bottom of the range	+ than 1 year	3 stars	<i>Cocktails or cooking: traditionnal « gastronomic » use.</i>
Mid-range	+ than 4 years	VSOP	<i>Good start for a tasting initiation: good value for money, easy-approach product, aromatic, fresh, bright.</i>
	10 years	Hors d'Âge, XO	
Top of the range	+ than 10 years	15, 20 ou 25 years, Vintages	<i>Ultimate consumption or tasting pleasure: this product shows the typicity of Armagnac in organoleptic terms: complexity, richness...</i>
Very top of the range	Harvest year	Old Vintages	<i>Tasting pleasure for the connoisseur (strong typicity) and gift purchase. The specificity of Armagnac. You can taste all the complexity, the aromatic evolution and the richness over the years.</i>