

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Amy Wakeham meets Baptiste Loiseau, the cognac mastermind who is making history for future generations to enjoy



Baptiste in the Louis XIII vineyards in Cognac

There aren't many jobs that involve creating something you may never get to experience yourself. But that's the reality of Baptiste Loiseau, cellar master at Louis XIII. Every day he makes his rounds of the cellars in the fertile Cognac region of south-west France, tasting each decades-old cask of eau de vie to determine whether it's ready for blending and bottling. Only one to three percent have the right characteristics to become Louis XIII cognac after 40-plus years of ageing – 'it has to be rich, it has to be elegant, it has to be fruity,' Baptiste explains. His mission is to create a consistent blend year after year. Most of the work he does now will come to fruition in decades to come, long after he's retired.

But there's one career highlight he can enjoy right now. Every so often, a cask comes along that's so superior, it's chosen to become a standout Rare Cask: cognac that isn't blended but comes from a single exceptional barrel. This hasn't happened for ten years, and never in Baptiste's tenure as cellar master.

'It has to be linked with emotion – the emotion is the master,' explains Baptiste of how he decided which barrel was ready to be selected. The previous cellar master, Pierrette Trichet, to whom Baptiste was apprenticed, discovered two rare casks in her career, one in 2009 and one in 2013; 'it took me ten years to feel the emotion of something singular coming from the *tierçon* [cask] again,' she says. 'It was three years ago that I was touched by the floral notes that are really moving for me, and it took me one more year to decide that it was the perfect balance.' The result is



Rare Cask 42.1, a cognac with an exceptional aromatic profile. It's available exclusively at the Louis XIII boutique at Harrods, in a limited run of 775 statement black crystal decanters, and to sample by the glass at The Dorchester.

Of course, when you're working with decades, not days, in mind, sustainability has to be woven into the heart of everything you do. 'We are facing big changes now with the climate and our agricultural practices,' says Baptiste. 'We are testing a new grape variety to see if it'll be the right one for making cognac in the next 20-30 years, because we know the temperature is rising and we will perhaps lack water in the next 50 years. So we have to be prepared to give all this advice to the next generation. Sustainability, what we call the "Sustainable Exception", which is in the DNA of the house, has to be embodied from the fields to the vision we share with our clients.'

This vision encompasses not just the new Rare Cask, but also the new 'Infinity Experience', which will allow Louis XIII lovers to send their decanter to be refilled at one of three Louis XIII boutiques, including Harrods. The new refillable decanters reduce CO₂ emissions relating to packaging by 57 percent.

Also on the horizon is the 300th anniversary of Rémy Martin, Louis XIII's parent company, in 2024. 'We will be celebrating the heritage but with a vision of what it means for the next 300 years,' says Baptiste. He may not be here to see it for himself, but his work today will live on for decades – maybe centuries – to come. uk.louisxiii-cognac.com ■