

THE SPIRIT OF COGNAC

RÉMY MARTIN
300 YEARS OF
SAVOIR FAIRE



Flammarion

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OF
COGNAC

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1724–1924 **7**
Rémy Martin,
Winegrowers and Merchants

Soil and subsoil 8

History 27

1925–1965 **47**
VSOP Fine Champagne
Sets Out to Conquer the World

Grapevines 48

Wine 80

1965–1991 **95**
One of the Greats
of Cognac

Origins 96

Distillation 121

Since 1991 **149**
Time
Regained

Eau-de-vie 150

Cognac 171



1724–1924
RÉMY MARTIN,
WINEGROWERS
AND MERCHANTS

1695 Rémy Martin was born to Denis and Marie Martin on a February day in 1695, near Rouillac in the winegrowing region of Charente in southwestern France. As soon as he was strong enough, he worked in the vineyards alongside his father, harvesting the grapes, gathering up the vine shoots, and learning the delicate art of pruning. He also discovered how to estimate the weight of the vines and support the branches with wooden stakes for maximum exposure to the sun. Unlike growers in the provinces of Aunis and Saintonge, closer to the sea and easy trading opportunities, inland producers such as the Martins did not try to obtain the highest possible yield by allowing their vines to grow unchecked; instead, they preferred to raise and tend them with loving care. Well aware of this, foreign buyers sailed up the river to the port of Cognac to load their ships with cargoes of the finest eaux-de-vie.

Rémy Martin was a strapping fourteen-year-old when the region was hit by the devastating winter of 1709. Frost destroyed years of diligent work in a single season, and the vines shriveled and died one after the other. The Martins' hard-won prosperity almost gave way to poverty, but despite their suffering, the family survived. With the deep-rooted fatalism of his rural upbringing, Rémy accepted the vagaries of nature, and that harsh winter taught him

that he should always set a few barrels aside in case of hard times. Eau-de-vie darkens over the years, which makes it all the easier to sell: the liquor acquires both color and flavor in the barrel, becoming less bitter and astringent. Time causes wheat to mildew and fruit to rot, but adds elegance to cognac, which becomes finer and more dynamic with the passage of time. Young Rémy was already beginning to glimpse its magic.

TIME CAUSES WHEAT TO MILDew AND FRUIT TO ROT, BUT ADDS ELEGANCE TO COGNAC, WHICH BECOMES FINER AND MORE DYNAMIC WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME. YOUNG RÉMY WAS ALREADY BEGINNING TO GLIMPSE ITS MAGIC.

Eager to begin his adult life, he was only nineteen in January 1714 when he married Marie Geay, the daughter of a merchant from the nearby hamlet of Lignères. For Rémy Martin, this marriage was also the union of two destinies: his father had taught him the art of winemaking, and his father-in-law, Jean Geay, instilled in him a passion for business. Rémy would successfully combine the two.

Cognac: it is a small area and a lot of time, as well as multiple generations of winegrowers, distillers, coopers, and cellar masters, without whom the soil of Charente would never have achieved its fame. The story of cognac is one of a passionate, and at times capricious, relationship between the people and the land, united for the better and—when one tries to gain the upper hand over the other—for the worse. But with every new cycle, the time it takes for the wine to be distilled and the eau-de-vie to age, the two are reconciled.





En 70

CHARLES AMABLE HONORE
Barentin, Chevalier, Seigneur d'Hardi-
villiers, les Belles-Ruries & autres Lieux,
Conseiller du Roy en ses Conseils, Maître
des Requêtes ordinaires de son Hôtel, In-
tendant de Justice, Police, & Finances en
la Généralité de la Rochelle.

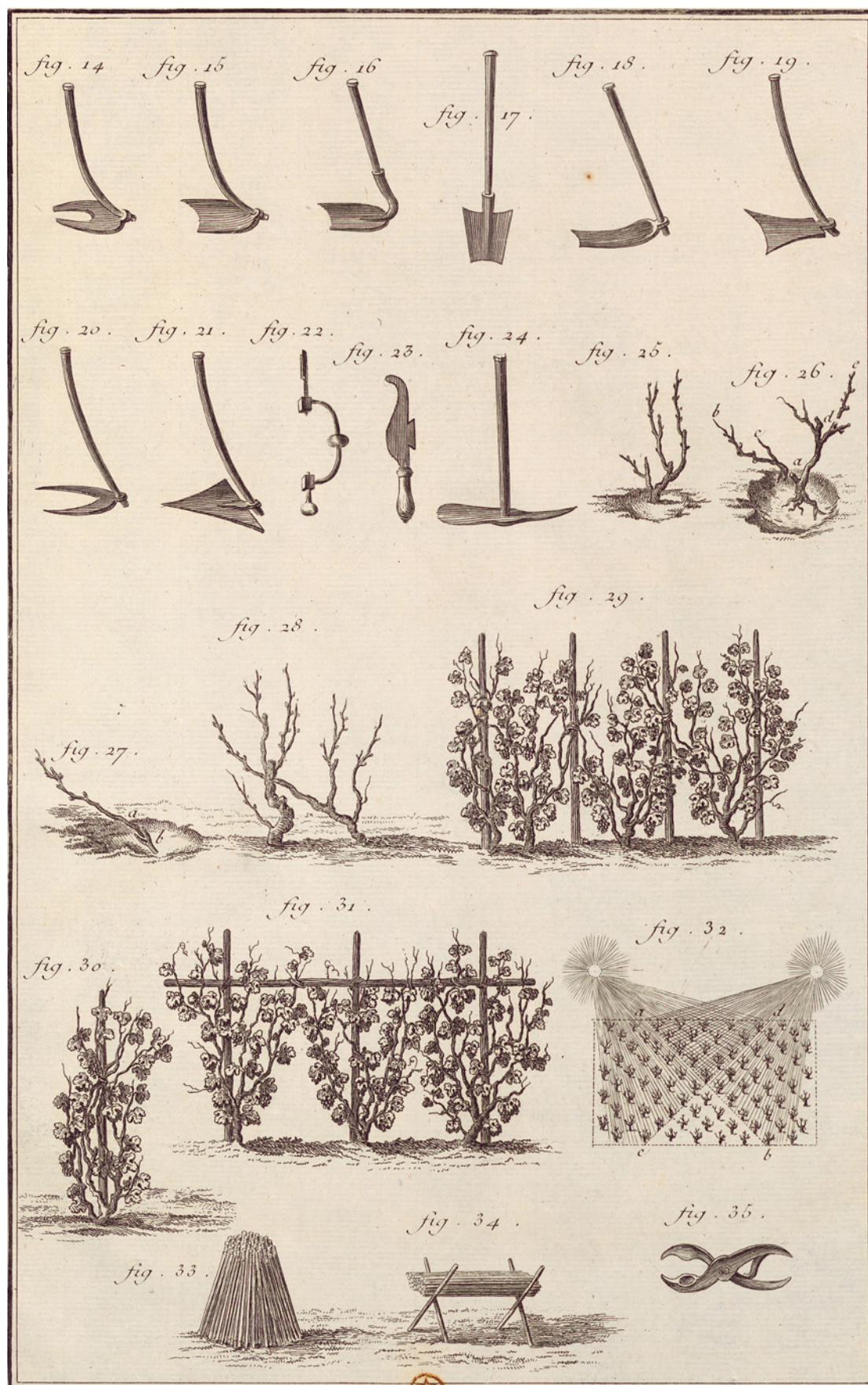
V^U l'Arrêt du Conseil du 5. Juin 1731. portant qu'il ne
sera fait à l'avenir aucune nouvelle plantation de vignes
dans l'étendue des Provinces & Généralitez du Royaume;
& que celles qui auront été deux ans sans être cultivées, ne
pourront être rétablies sans une permission expresse de Sa Ma-
jesté, à peine de trois mille livres d'amende: L'Ordonnance
de Mr. Bignon du 24. du même mois, portant que ledit Arrêt
seroit exécuté suivant sa forme & teneur dans l'étendue de la Gé-
néralité de la Rochelle: La Requête à Nous présentée par *Remy martin tendant*
à ce qu'il nous plairait lui permettre de faire replanter en vignes deux pieces de terre
dans la paroisse de Pouillau de la Communauté de Douze Jours

Et l'avis du Sieur *Rancurelle* notre Subdelegué,
qui a vérifié le terrain *cy après énoncé*.

Nous AVONS, sous le bon plaisir de Sa Majesté, permis &
permettons àudit *Remy martin* de faire replanter en vignes les deux pieces
de terre qui confrontent à avoir la première à la vigne de *Joury farreau* et à la
seconde de *François Brian*, la seconde à la vigne de *Gabriel Caille* et à celle de *Bernard*
Sauton, lui faisons défenses de faire aucune plantation de vigne dans la
voisine de dites pieces sous les peines portées par le dit arrêt du Conseil du
5. Juin 1731. Enjoignons au Juidic. de la dite paroisse de *Pouillau* de tenir la
main à l'exécution de notre présente ordonnance et de nous en informer des
contraventions qui pourroient être faites à peine de *Deux cens livres*
d'amende.

Fait à la Rochelle le 31^e jour de *Decembre*
mil sept cens trente huit

Amable



Winegrowing: an illustration from Diderot and d'Alembert's 1759 Encyclopédie.

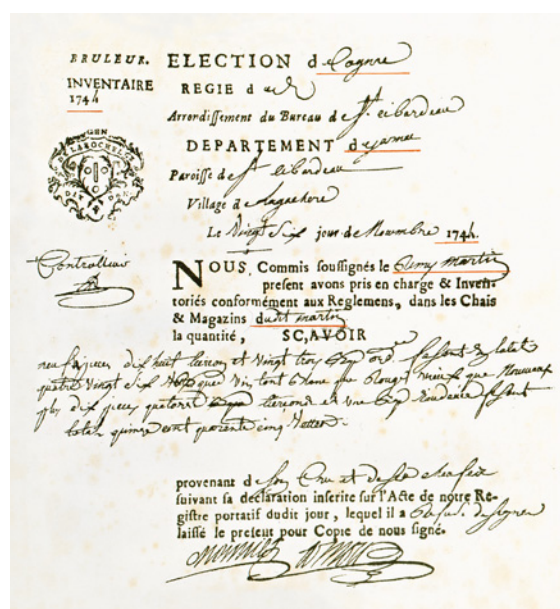
1724 By 1724, the enterprising young man had an iron constitution, a brood of fine children and acquired land, and his ambition knew no bounds. Following the death of Louis XIV, the Cognac region had reestablished its ties with Europe and revived its export trade, stifled by decades of war. The economic climate was favorable, and the time had come to create a full-fledged commercial business. Consequently, the house of Rémy Martin was founded in 1724, discreetly and without ceremony. Winegrowing and trade went well together; as a man of the land, Rémy Martin let time do its work, and as a shrewd trader, he realized that a healthy business had to expand. He understood one of the secrets of success: selling little when a market glut forced prices down, and clearing stocks in times of scarcity. Many winegrowers had to sell their harvest as soon as it was vinified, but Rémy chose to put some of it aside. His cognac earned him extra money, so he could buy more land or lend, at interest, to other growers. Those who could not repay him in cash did so with land.

By the time he moved to the Boisbreteau domain in the early 1730s, Rémy Martin had become a man of influence, managing two estates north of Rouillac, at Lignères and La Gaschère. As owner of land with seigneurial rights, he was already a person of some standing. In 1738, the king's steward willingly granted him an official license to plant two new

vineyards, despite the 1731 decree prohibiting any further planting throughout the kingdom to avoid a crisis of overproduction.

BY 1724, THE ENTERPRISING YOUNG MAN HAD ACQUIRED LAND, AN IRON CONSTITUTION, AND A BROOD OF FINE CHILDREN, AND HIS AMBITION KNEW NO BOUNDS.

Rémy Martin's potstills operated night and day, and his storehouses filled up. On the death of his father-in-law in 1745, he became "Sire" Rémy Martin—a man of the land, but also a landowner in charge of ever-growing estates, stocks of cognac, and wealth. With his many



Inventory of the cognac in Rémy Martin's cellars and storerooms in 1744.



AN EXCEPTIONAL TERROIR The great secret of cognac lies in its terroir. The soil, subsoil, and climate combine to produce a wine whose depth develops in the pot still. Charente distillation methods can be copied, and eau-de-vie can be left to age slowly in Limousin oak anywhere in the world. But the soil of Charente is unique; it can never be expanded, replicated, and least of all, exported. The process that created this soil began some one hundred million years ago, in the Mesozoic Era, when the various stages of the Late Cretaceous age—Coniacian, Santonian, and Campanian—formed on a hard Jurassic limestone base. A geological event occurred in the early Tertiary Period that profoundly transformed the soil structure of the Charente region.

business contacts and a fistful of IOUs, he bought more and more land and speculated with his cognac.

At the age of sixty-four, Rémy was preparing to stand down when his only son, Pierre, died. Having thought his life's work to be done, he had to summon the strength and will to run the business for almost fifteen more years, through old age and sickness, until his six-year-old grandson Rémy was old enough to take over. He succeeded against all odds, and in 1773, when he died in his seventy-ninth year, his twenty-year-old grandson—the second Rémy Martin—inherited a prosperous business. Despite his newfound wealth, the young heir's soul remained steadfastly that of a Charente farmer, and he held fast to his grandfather's conviction that good land management also meant keeping a watchful eye on the changing destiny of his region.

In Paris, Louis XV's grandson ascended the throne of France as Louis XVI, inheriting an exhausted country with a tottering economy. Famine returned and dissent grew, turning to open revolt fifteen years later. Rémy Martin eagerly embraced the French Revolution of 1789. With waves of chaos and disruption sweeping the country, the wealthy farmer saw the doors of power opening to him. He acquired a passion for politics and became one of the most active members of the Rouillac

town council. In 1791, when the new council was looking for a tax collector, he applied for and was offered the position, which earned him considerable prestige but little money—a salary of 137 livres, barely the price of a half-barrel of cognac. However, Rémy Martin II could afford it; the steep taxes he paid were a sign of his flourishing business.

1789 The early years of the Revolution had little impact on the economy of the Cognac region. The Charente winegrowers remembered the year 1789 for its bitter winter, when the wine froze in the storehouses, rather than as the first year of the French Revolution. However, the reputation of Angoulême eau-de-vie was already firmly established, sales continued to grow until 1792, and prices rose to truly dizzy heights.

The following year brought disillusionment. The enemy of cognac was neither monarchist nor republican, neither Montagnard nor Girondin: it was economic ruin. The eau-de-vie trade was hard hit by the commercial and monetary crisis, exports fell by two-thirds, and production dropped sharply. A true recovery would not occur until about 1820.

The formation of the Pyrenees mountains, about 250 miles (400 kilometers) to the south, brought to the surface a Jurassic terrain in one area, and a rich Cretaceous layer, with soft, spongy permeable chalk, in another. Just as grapevines have particular geological affinities, cognac adheres to a simple principle: variations in the quality of Charente eaux-de vie depend on the hardness of the chalk, and the amount of clay it contains.





Bacchus celebrating the vines,
17th-century engraving by Francis Cleyn.

WHATEVER THE INFLUENCE OF THE “IMPERIAL” COMET SEEN IN THE SKY IN MARCH 1811, THAT YEAR’S VINTAGE WOULD BE ONE OF THE GREATEST IN THE HISTORY OF COGNAC, AND RÉMY MARTIN SET ASIDE A LARGE PART OF THIS GIFT FROM THE GODS, WHICH WOULD GO ON TO ACQUIRE EVEN GREATER VALUE.

Others around him were losing their footing, but Rémy Martin forged ahead, sure of his own worth and respectability. Revolution or no Revolution, it was business as usual, and he even had his storehouses enlarged to hold his wines and eaux-de-vie. In Paris, the king was executed, the deputy Jean-Paul Marat was assassinated, and war was declared on England, Holland, and Spain—but the people of Rouillac lived in a world of their own. The locals signed a petition against Rémy Martin, accusing him of the heinous crime of diverting the village water supply to irrigate his land.

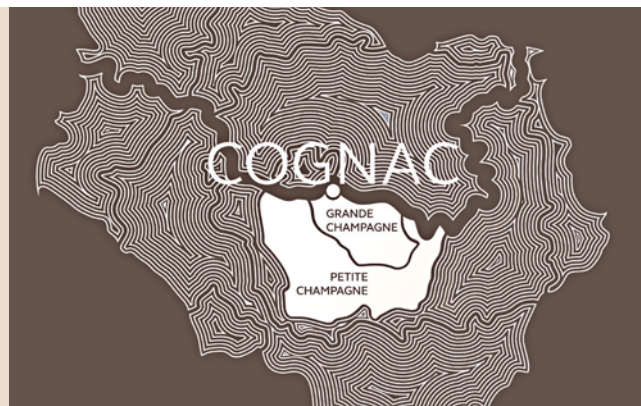
1811 That incident did not harm his business or political career, however, and in 1800, the town councilor Rémy Martin swore allegiance to the first French Constitution. His right of inspection into municipal matters was highly beneficial to his own activities. As a member of the town council he was in a particularly favorable position to identify



land available for purchase, and opportunities were abundant in the middle of an economic depression. In a period of changing governments, Rémy Martin placed himself firmly on the winning side. His position was now strong enough to survive the First French Empire and the Bourbon Restoration, true wars, and false peace. He had everything a Rouillac merchant could wish for in the early nineteenth century: land, stock, and the power associated with a political role. The year 1811—which would remain in the memories of winegrowers as the year of the Great Comet—brought an exceptional harvest, in terms of both quantity and quality. Whatever the influence of the “Imperial” comet seen in the sky in March 1811, that year’s vintage would be one of the greatest in the history of cognac, and Rémy Martin set aside a large part of this gift from the gods, which would go on to acquire even greater value.

In 1811, a comet streamed across the sky. That year, the harvests were exceptional, in terms of both quantity and quality.

The 1938 decree delimiting the six production areas or crus of the cognac appellation merely confirmed what the people of Cognac had known for centuries. The best wine is produced in the two Champagne crus, where the clay is least prevalent and the chalk softest. It’s important to remember that in France there are two Champagnes: one, a historical province and wine region in northeast France which gave its name to the sparkling wine known and loved around the world; the other, the one that concerns us and the only one that makes cognac, is located in southwest France, in the departments of Charente and Charente-Maritime, through which flows the river of the same name.





Rémy Martin III (1781–1841).



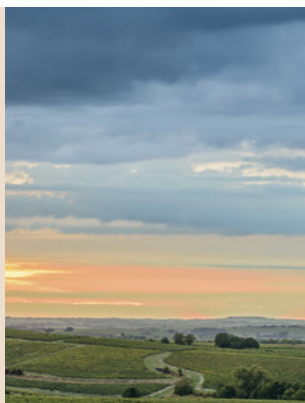
Advertisement published around 1895 in a Spanish newspaper.

1818 He then had to oversee the inheritance of his estate. Methodical and mindful of the extent of his fortune, he had an inventory drawn up in 1818, at the age of sixty-five. He chose as heir his son Rémy, born in 1781, who was working as a notary in Cognac at that time. The stakes were indeed high: in his will dated June 26, 1818, Rémy Martin II left all the property required for the business to his son. The young Rémy thus inherited not only the Lignères and La Gaschère estates, but also other land around Rouillac, from Aigre to Fleurac, including La Chapelle, Bonneville, and Genac.

1821 The third Rémy Martin was forty years old when his father died in 1821. He left Cognac to settle with his family in the Château de Lignères, an opulent dwelling flanked by pointed turrets. He was more of a landowner than a winegrower—a rigorous manager, who hid his determination beneath a calm exterior. He added to the impressive amount of real estate accumulated by his ancestors, and consolidated the foundations of an active trade as the sector recovered from 1820 onward. By then, eau-de-vie sales for the region, which had dropped to 20,000 hectoliters in 1810, were in excess of 100,000 hectoliters.

RÉMY MARTIN III PASSED AWAY IN 1841 AND SCARCELY HAD TIME TO LEAVE HIS MARK ON THE COMPANY THAT BORE HIS NAME; TWENTY YEARS IS HARDLY LONG ENOUGH TO PRODUCE A GREAT COGNAC.

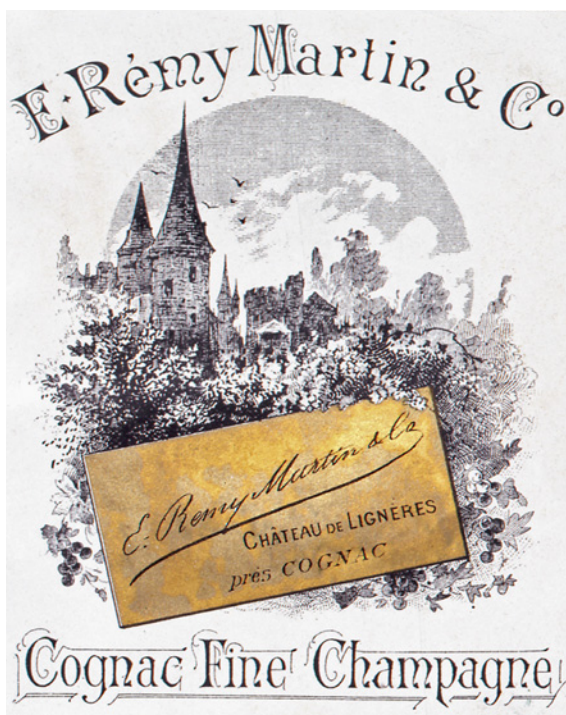
Rémy Martin III passed away in 1841 and scarcely had time to leave his mark on the company that bore his name; twenty years is hardly long enough to produce a great cognac. Neither pretentious nor humble, he was simply content to be a link in the family chain. His son, Paul-Émile Rémy Martin, born in 1810, was destined to take over. With another revolution



Those heading south via the sea, seeking sun, first find it there, around La Rochelle. The vegetation itself, with Atlantic pine growing alongside cork oak, shows that the region is hospitable. It's no surprise that the Charente, the northernmost of the warm regions, has throughout its history attracted merchants from Northern Europe, from the Dutch to the English.



Paul-Émile Rémy Martin I (1810-1875).



convulsing the country, Émile Rémy Martin (as he was known in Rouillac) followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, who had experienced the Revolution of 1789. Like his ancestor, he took part in local politics and, in 1848, was elected chairman of the district committee responsible for vetting candidates for the French parliament. Debonair and cultivated, he was also a shrewd merchant. Boosted by the commercial euphoria that marked the reign of Louis Philippe and the Second French Empire, he succeeded in establishing the Rémy Martin brand image, building up stocks, and affirming a company policy based on quality.

AS THE HEIR TO A COMPANY DATING BACK MORE THAN A CENTURY, PAUL-ÉMILE RÉMY MARTIN WISELY AVOIDED THE TEMPTATION OF CONSERVATISM.

A dispute on trade policy had broken out in the region in the early days of Louis Philippe's reign. Innovators questioned the need to continue selling by the barrel and pushed the idea of selling by the bottle and case—a practice already adopted by a number of producers. Traditionalists disdained this new form of trade, scornfully leaving it to merchants newly established in Cognac. As the heir to a company dating back more than a century, Paul-Émile Rémy Martin wisely avoided the temptation of conservatism. At a time when cognac was widely seen as just another eau-de-vie among many, he knew that success hinged on his brand's reputation, and realized that selling in bottles would enable him to protect his products and emphasize their individuality. Selling by the case did not become the general rule in Cognac until the late nineteenth century, when new forms of transport made it possible and the need to combat imitations made it necessary. However, Paul-Émile Rémy Martin did not wait that long; he marketed his first bottles while continuing traditional sales by the barrel.

THE LAND OF COGNAC. Cognac is a small town with a population of less than 20,000 people, yet its name is famous throughout the world. The region forms a series of concentric circles around the 32,000 acres (13,000 hectares) of Grande Champagne, which is cognac's *premier cru* with a Campanian subsoil that provides scant but regular water for the vines. Fossilized oysters, from a time when the land was underwater, make the chalk so soft that the roots of the vines can push deep below the surface in search of nutrients.





Different Rémy Martin labels, from a 19th-century register.



The most beautiful and prestigious Rémy Martin bottle ever produced was the Louis XIII decanter. The ring-shaped glass flask was found by chance in 1850 on the site of the Battle of Jarnac where, three centuries earlier, Catholics and Protestants had clashed in bloody combat. Paul-Émile Rémy Martin immediately saw how he could use this splendid bottle decorated with fleur-de-lys, reflecting the influence of the Italian Renaissance during the reign of Louis XIII. He purchased it and registered the reproduction rights before donating it to the Musée de Cluny museum in Paris. Inspired by this antique piece miraculously recovered from the earth, the decanter was the ideal container for the noblest of the earth's products. From 1874 onward, it was used to hold the oldest cognacs—some of which were made from the exceptional vintage of 1811, which Rémy Martin II had wisely allowed to age. The “Louis XIII” blend of eaux-de-vie

sold in these bottles came exclusively from the Grande Champagne vineyards, the superiority of which was now recognized by all.

The region's vineyards were classified by French geologist Henri Coquand in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1852, Coquand demonstrated the close links between the quality of Cognac wines and the soil in which they were grown. The importance of this analysis was not only scientific, it was also economic. Rectification techniques had been developed for grain and sugar beet alcohol, and the way was open for producers of other liquors to compete with the Cognac merchants. In Coquand's words, “The ease of fraud has encouraged it, and expanded it to such proportions that alarm has spread among the [vineyard] owners facing unfair and unbearable competition, and threatened in their territorial wealth.”

AS COGNAC EVAPORATES DURING ITS LONG AGING PROCESS, IT NATURALLY RELEASES THE “ANGELS' SHARE,” *LA PART DES ANGES*.

Accompanied by a wine taster from the Société Vinicole (a syndicate of local winegrowers)—“a man of great skill in his field, but useless outside his specialty, who did not know the

The subsoil of Grande Champagne is porous; it therefore retains water that is then returned sparingly to the vines during dry periods. It also means that the vines grow slowly, particularly during the critical period when the grapes are beginning to ripen. In the hands of the distillers, the wine from these grapes yields a subtle eau-de-vie promising depth but one that requires a great deal of time to mature. In the Petite Champagne cru, next in order of merit, the chalk is slightly harder and there is more clay. Very fine eaux-de-vie, aging scarcely more rapidly than those of the *premier cru*, are produced from the 40,000 acres (16,000 hectares) that form a crescent around the Grande Champagne cru.

COGNAC DEFIES TIME,
ACQUIRES THE GLOW OF AGE,
DRAWS STRENGTH FROM MATURITY.

RÉMY MARTIN HAS EMBODIED
THIS SPIRIT FOR 300 YEARS.

A STORY OF TERROIR AND SAVOIR FAIRE,
PRESTIGE AND HUMILITY,
DARING AND PERSEVERANCE.

