

The Mystery of the Louis XIII Black Pearl

100 years in a bottle



By Lyssiemay Anich



Lyssiemay Annoh discovers the mystery surrounding Rémy Martin's Louis XIII Black Pearl

Is it a mystery? It cannot be, because *Louis XIII Black Pearl* – the ultimate luxury Cognac, is now available in a handful of London's most exclusive hotel bar.

From what I knew before embarking on a journey to the inner sanctum of Rémy Martin estate of Domaine du Grollet, where the Louis XIII is born, this rare special edition of Louis XIII has been encased in an innovative Baccarat decanter with metallic sheen.

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Rumour has it that 786 bottles of the Black Pearl have been created from one specially selected barrel from the family's personal reserve at the historical estate Le Grollet; so you can understand my excitement when I set off on my adventure to acquire an exquisite taste in "fine champagne".

My destination was the French town of Cognac which lives up to its reputation. Cognac is home to most of world's finest cognac. In fact, cognac life is so exclusive that Rémy Martin has launched 'Le Club Coeur du

Cognac' which offers private individuals tours of this hallowed estate. This exclusive visit includes a vineyard tour, lunch in the private dining room at Domaine du Grollet and a tutored tasting of Louis XIII by Cellar Master Pierrette Trichet. The tour costs €450 per person (excluding transport/accommodation) and with the numbers/visit dates strictly limited I could not miss on an opportunity to explore and taste the Black Pearl.

I had already envisaged the people whom I thought would enjoy and appreciate Louis XIII and ensured that I was going to travel in such a way, that I could appreciate the fine contents even more. The flight was in true executive traveller style, aboard a private aircraft, and arriving at Angoulême, a small airport which is located at Brie Champniers (about 10 km from Angoulême) and served by Regional Airlines with daily flights from:

France (Clermont Ferrand, Dijon, Lyon, Marseille, Mulhouse, Nice)

Italy (Milan and Turin)

Switzerland (Geneva)

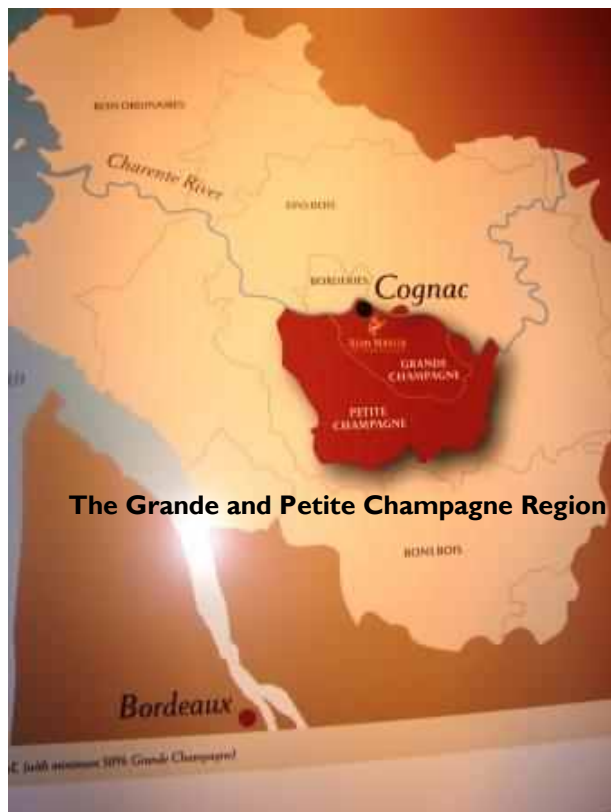
Cognac and Saintes operate airports that accept private and charter flights. The Cognac airport itself is a military base so you will need to make prior arrangements if wish to travel there. On this particular visit, to Cognac, the Cognac airport was closed to private flights – hence my arrival at Angoulême. Other airports nearby are La Rochelle (8km). Commercial flights are also available from London to Bordeaux (20km).

The whole purpose of my visit was to solve the mystery surrounding the Louis XIII Black Pearl in a cellar at Le Grollet, the family home of Rémy Martin's descendant, Madame Hériard-Dubreuil. I was so convinced of solving the mystery that I felt that Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot would have been proud of me!

For those of you who are yet to be acquainted with one of the greatest pleasures in luxury life, the Louis XIII Black Pearl is the absolute, definitive cognac created by the House of Rémy Martin. Rémy Martin has the appellation "Fine Champagne Cognac" something



Baccarat crystal glass decanter



The Grande and Petite Champagne Region

the House acquired as far back as 13th January 1938 and that speaks for itself. To acquire this appellation, two crus of champagne have to be blended together to create “fine champagne cognac”. These two crus should be made up of petite and grande champagne and there should be at least 50% eau de vie of the grande champagne. I was therefore hoping that my visit to the vineyard, distillery and barrel room will help me discover the many stages in the life of Louis XIII.

I am now in Cognac and the tour starts and before I could digest my lunch, I quickly learn that to create the Louis XIII, the House of Rémy Martin draws on the long tradition of craftsmanship it has nurtured since it was founded 1724. This means that the Louis XIII Black Pearl, that I was hoping to taste has been created by a cellar master who no longer exists, managed by another perhaps too old to enjoy it now and being finalised by one of the finest female cellar masters in the world. This information on its own is a mystery - I had to see how it was made and perhaps taste it – but will I? I was going to find out. I knew that it would be great to taste the Louis XIII but like every ambitious person, my ultimate dream was the Black Pearl so I had to show commitment. I started by picking grapes, paying attention to the cellar lectures and even tried to work

out the codes on the barrels, saluted a military ‘fly past’ all in a bid to taste this legend. Well – I wasn’t going to taste it in stage three of my tour either so I guessed that by meeting Rémy Martin’s MD Vincent Gère, I was definitely going to be in with a chance.

I headed to the Head Office hoping that someone, somewhere must keep a bottle there and if that was the case I was going to have to befriend this person especially if that was the only way I was going to get a chance to taste the legendary “eaux de vie” aged in a century-old “tierçon” barrels of Limousin oak, which are laid down in the limestone-walled cellars of Le Grollet, the historic of the Rémy Martin family. Over the years, these “eaux de vie” have been moved from one cellar to another, transferred from one barrel to another, to ensure that they develop harmoniously and reveal their full aromatic potential. I decided that if the Managing Director doesn’t know, no-one else will so I have to trust him. After all, it is only after a hundred years of aging and blending, blending, blending and aging of some one thousand two hundred eaux-de-vie, originating solely from the grapes in the Grande Champagne region, the finest and most sought after vineyards throughout Cognac, will the “tierçon” barrels yield up their treasure. In other words, it cannot travel too far in the estate.

But guess what? I met the MD alright, and he served me with seven shots and gave me an opportunity to sniff, inhale, taste and appreciate every stage of their production; my first glass was a year old, then the next was ten, things started getting better when I was told that my third glass was twenty years old, then forty, fifty, 68 – I was therefore convinced that last glass will surely be 100 years old but alas it was only 84 years old, tasted exquisite. However, it was not old enough to be the Black Pearl! This is because the

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Grapes from the Remy Martin Estate



The seven production stages of Louis XII

Black Pearl had to be 100 years old and I am not being ungrateful here but this was my only chance to taste the Black Pearl until perhaps another 16 years!

I did not despair because I had another chance of tasting the century old “fine champagne”. I had been invited to dinner and surely that would be an opportune time for them to serve the Black Pearl as an after dinner drink? This would be my ultimate chance to taste the King of cognac. Since its creation, Louis XIII has been the cognac of Kings, it has been famously enjoyed by Winston Churchill, Queen Elizabeth and more recently Jamie Foxx, John Galliano and Elton John – it had to be my turn this time.

During our pre-drinks, the Louis XIII was beautifully presented in its Baccarat crystal glass decanter all locked up and could only be admired from far. At lunch, I had learned that the ‘XO’ one of seven stages of the “eau de vie” complements fruit desserts well so when the chef announced that dessert was going to be stewed fruits, I knew that my prayers would be answered. Nevertheless, dinner was over and I had still not tasted the Black Pearl, two more cellar tours and the legend was soon to be unveiled. It is a whole ceremony with the French and perhaps wine producers but I was thirsty, in dire need of a taste of nothing but the elusive, expensive, and impossible to replicate Louis XIII Black Pearl. I finally had something in my glass but I could not taste it immediately, because I had to smell it, sniff it, swirl it, admire it and cherish it before I was aloud to taste. I had tasted an 84 year old Louis XIII and I knew this must be much older. One is simply mesmerised by the smoothness of the aging and the blending and blending and blending ... and the aging of some one thousand two hundred eaux-de-vie, originating solely from the grapes in the Grande Champagne region, the finest and most sought after vineyards throughout Cognac in such a way that that you are conveyed to a completely new planet with a simple taste. I was overwhelmed but had to be sure that this was the Black Pearl. Alas it

was not! This particular blend was 98 years! Two years short of the mystery legend but tasted just as exquisite. After all only 786 bottles of Black Pearl were ever created and it was wishful thinking to expect to drink it simply by dining with the MD.

I have good news though, I am well informed that:

- Alexandre Quintin, Brand Ambassador for Louis XIII has selected a limited number of London’s most exclusive hotel bars where this unique cognac will be available.
- Sofitel St James London is one of four hotels to offer Louis XIII Black Pearl not only by the bottle but also by the glass, with the others being The Berkeley, The Dorchester and Claridges.
- It costs £10,000 for the bottle and £495 for a glass this is a truly luxurious experience for a select few.
- Classic Louis XIII is also available at Sofitel St James at £125 for a glass.
- Each hand-blown carafe housing eaux-de-vie from the century-old barrel C100-29 will be individually numbered from 001 – 786;
- The original Louis XIII carafe is a metal decanter found by a peasant in 1850 on the site of the battle of Jarnac
The new decanter combines classicism and modernity – crystal caressing steel. This technology has never before been commercially available, and the marriage with such a precious liquid is truly a benchmark in the luxury world.

If you have to have it at home, the RRP (registered retail price) in shops is £5,000. For stockist information please call: 01786 430500

Travelling to Cognac

By Auto route

- A10 from Paris, exit No 34 St Jean d’Angély/ Cognac (4 hours)
- A10 from Bordeaux, exit NO 36 Pons/Cognac (1 hour, 30 mins)
- From La Rochelle, auto route La Rochelle/Saintes, then RN141(1 hour, 15 minutes)

By Train

- TGV Paris-Angoulême direct (2 hours, 15 mins), followed by either a train or 30 minute drive.

By Air

- Cognac Aerodrome (5kms)
- Angoulême Airport (50 kms)
- Bordeaux International Airport (120kms)
- La Rochelle Airport (100kms)

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