

LETTER FROM PARIS NO. 4: BON WEEK-END À COGNAC

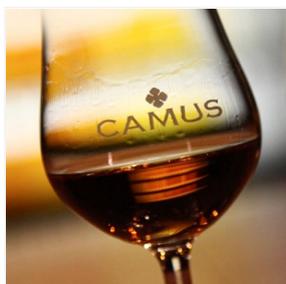
Extrait de l'article ci-dessous

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As early as the mid-nineteenth century, Girard-Perregaux maintained offices in New York, Buenos Aires, Yokohama and, of course, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland. In that globetrotting spirit, MoS will publish regular dispatches from its offices and boutiques abroad — covering lifestyle and culture, regional events and exhibitions, and offering insider insight about what's trending now from the four corners of the world. — The Editors

WHETHER YOU'RE TAKING the 250-mile route from Paris to Angoulême by rail or auto, a weekend sojourn to the village of Cognac delivers delights that reach far beyond the realm of the tawny spirit. Earning its commercial status in the ninth century first as a salt-trading town, then as the booming center of wine cultivation and later brandy, present-day Cognac offers romantic public gardens, bucolic country inns, craft cocktails and hyper-flavorful produce that'll quickly make you want to surrender your passport.



To spend a few days in Cognac and not nose and taste a few of the region's eaux-de-vie would be as much a crime as to scoff at a Bucatini while in Rome. Certainly, there are the big boys of the brandies, **Courvoisier**, **Rémy Martin** and **Hennessy**, but if a more boutique experience is what you're after, start with an intimate tasting tour within the corridors of **Camus**. The name alone immediately evokes introspect, intellectual enlightenment and a brilliant, tweed-clad charmer. While the Algerian philosopher is of no relation to the Camus family of cognacs, Frederic Dezauzier, Cognac's global brand ambassador, notes that the spirit has always been considered "the thinking man's Cognac." Five generations of Camuses — none named Albert — stand behind the namesake and have produced a legacy built

on the region's six crus: Grande Champagne, Petite Champagne, Borderies, Fin Bois, Bons Bois and Bois à Terroirs. The château is unique, one of the most interesting you'll find in the region.

Round off the afternoon with a jaunt to the house of **Hine**, offering one of the best ways to panoramically appreciate the vines of Grande Champagne, the region's finest Cognac cru. Hine's unique two-stage aging process of eight months in new barrels followed by long incubation periods in *barriques rousses* creates the spirit's prized



richness and delicacy. This distinction is just one of the reasons Hine is the only Cognac officially appointed to Her Royal Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.



As the late-afternoon sun illuminates the streets of Jarnac with a magnificent orange haze, the robin's-egg-blue doors of **Louis Royer's** family château welcomes visitors to the verdant grounds. Beyond the beauty of the boulevard (and of the bottle, for that matter), Royer is one of the most style-centric brands of eau-de-vie in the region, having previously collaborated with the French designers André Courrèges, Pascal Morabito and the interior designer Andrée Putman, who conceptualized the house's modernist visitors' center. After immersing yourself in Royer history, be sure to leave room in your suitcase for the exceptional tasting gift set, which includes five one-liter bottles of Royer's favorite crus — perfect for re-creating the tasting and blending experience at home.



Jardin de Hôtel de Ville

On your second day in the village, shift to non-Cognac imbibing. Start the morning with a visit to the **Place du Solençon** market in the St. Jacques district. Pick up a few spice-covered buttons of chèvre, a carton of candy-sweet strawberries, a bottle of locally harvested wine and a crunchy-pillowy baguette from a boulangerie en route to the sprawling gardens of **Jardin de Hôtel de Ville**, where you'll picnic among the foliage, fountains and charming footbridges. Neighboring the park is the **Musée des Arts du Cognac**, which houses artists from modernists to masters. Take a cab or drive into town to the shopping district on Rue Aristide Briand. Begin at **Le Victoria**, a quaint tea parlor offering homemade quiches, cakes and pies, then marvel at the stained glass and

intricate stone masonry of the **Église Saint-Léger**, the largest church in Cognac, which dates to the twelfth century.

Stop by **Chocolaterie Letuffe** and indulge in whisper-light chocolates in addictive flavors of nougatine, pineau des Charentes and Cognac. For bibliophiles, a spectacular stop along the oldest street in Cognac, Rue Grande, is **Au Plaisir de Lire**, an antique book-repair shop housed in a ninth-century building of intricate wood and stone detail. Dine a few doors down at **Bistro Claude** on the region's freshest catches of fish and shellfish.

Retire for the night at the **François Premier Hotel**, which boasts an indoor swimming pool, hammam and massage salon, plus large, comfortable rooms — some that offer stunning views of the square's bustling roundabout, and some with large soaking tubs just steps from your canopied bed. Before settling in for the evening, let the craftsmen at the hotel's lobby bar, **Louise**, prepare for you one of the house's signature drinks or a bespoke cocktail tailored to your taste.



François Premier Hotel

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River Charente. In the ninth century, the canal was used as a highway for trading salt and, later, Cognac. Today, it's used to wile away a lazy sunny afternoon by way of canoe or kayak, to take in a concert on **La Gabarre Dame Jeanne** or to hop among the waterfront distilleries on **Canal Boat Holiday's Cognac Cruise**. The more aquatically inclined may wish to drift to sleep gently bobbing on a houseboat docked on Cognac's "green Venice." Coordinate a charter or your weekend living quarters through **Boat Rentals France**.

—Georgette Moger

Posted on October 30th, 2014