

400+ WINES REVIEWED

TOP 100 CELLAR SELECTIONS 2020

ICONIC WINES OF NAPA

BEST OF BAROLO

WINE ENTHUSIAST

DECEMBER 2020

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BUYINGGUIDE

SPIRITS

XO Cognac: Getting older, getting better

Two years ago, the XO—Extra Old—Cognac category got a little extra older. More specifically, Cognac producers typically blend together brandies (eau-de-vie) of various ages. In April 2018, the age classification was changed so that for a Cognac to carry the XO designation, the youngest eau-de-vie in the blend must have been aged in barrels for at least 10 years, instead of the six years previously required.

This was done to help bolster the perception of XO Cognacs as high-quality products, as well as to eliminate confusion between the XO and Napoleon category. For the latter, the youngest eau-de-vie in the blend remains at six years old, yet both often incorporate brandies that are much older than the minimum.

Though XO has a reputation as luxurious and expensive—to be fair, both aspects can be true—there are signs that Cognac is slowly becoming more accessible. For starters, some producers are moving away from age-specific designations

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altogether, including the XO status as Ferrand's Sélection des Anges.

Another signpost is a democratic XO put together by Flaviar, a "club for spirits enthusiasts." A with Cognac house Frérot encourage of Flaviar members to weigh in

blend. The blend eau-de-vie from a making regions.

Perhaps the n find more unexpe consume often-p Speaking in June Xchange Gimme ference, Shangha tender/spirits ex

Piccolo observed that in South China, XO is a casual pour, "a

bottle of XO plunked on the table," often alongside fresh, local seafood.

Here in the U.S., XO is likely to remain a special-occasion sipper—especially now that the category is specified as a longer-aged blend. But even the oldest spirit exists for one key reason: to be opened and enjoyed. —Kara Newman

94 Ferrand Sélection des Anges Cognac (France; W.J. Deutsch & Sons, Stamford, CT). Named for the "angel's share"—the portion of spirit that evaporates from the barrel during the aging process—this Cognac offers warm, oaky aromas and intense flavor. The palate opens with walnut and plum skin dryness, leading into long, luxe ribbons of maple and walnut. It finishes with a hint of apple and lots of mulling spices.

abv: 41.8%

Price: \$190

