



As Marc Boissonnet, Hennessy's *ambassadeur de la maison*, observes, "To live is to age." Aging is something cognacs do very, very well. Like out-of-work actors, they spend time resting to develop taste, scent, complexity, depth and subtlety.

Embracing the traditional and the new—that fills both the industry and the glass. Not far from Cognac, France, where villages are older than America herself, cocktail historian Mauro Mahjoub at Mauro's Negroni Club in München, Germany, teaches that cognac is a cornerstone of classic cocktails. He also uses the spirit to build new drinks, though nobody denies the pleasure of sipping fine cognac from the glass. It doesn't take standing in an aging cellar, sipping a 1914 Voyer or an 1848 Martell to prove this, though that certainly doesn't hurt.

You can get pretty close to that experience at The American Restaurant (200 E. 25th St., Ste. 400), where general manager-cum-sommelier Jamie Jamison stocks Maison Surrene Heritage 1875. About cognac's Victorian image, Jamison says: "It's just like what wine went through 20 years ago; you have to talk to the [sommelier] with all the stuffiness and see whether you're good enough to use it." These days, people are at ease with ordering wine; it's time to get comfy with cognac, as well.

In America, sipping true cognac-cocktail history can be a challenge, but Kansas Citians are lucky; enjoy the 1840 Original Formula at The Rieger Hotel and Grill (1924 Main St.) and the M&S Grill (4646 JC Nichols Parkway). Let Ryan Maybee or Paige Unger pour you the best of the past and mix it with a cocktail as fresh as a prairie breeze.

And although the people of Cognac want you to take their spirit seriously, they'd also like you to be playful with it. "The classics are the best way to start," says Maybee. "If you want to experience the nature of cognac in a cocktail, then go for something stirred: a Sazerac or a Manhattan."

Over at The Majestic (931 Broadway Blvd.), Shawn Moriarty echoes Maybee's recommendation. "I'd probably start them off with a Sidecar," Moriarty says. "If they wanted something adventurous, then an old-fashioned Sazerac is the way to go. It adds more depth to an already complex liquor, and it was originally made with cognac. If they want something lighter, then a Horse Feathers with cognac is delicious."

Those curious about cognacs don't need to spend \$200 to sip this variable drink. The American's glasses start at just \$9. Plan to linger after the meal, give Jamison your budget, and ask him to pour a flight of cognacs. He will happily tell you about each distiller in your flight, which is a delightfully added bonus to the tasting.

And this drink doesn't have to fly solo. "Cognac pairs beautifully with chocolate," Maybee says. For a rich meal, "you might choose something that has some citrus in it, or a Collins topped with Champagne would do beautifully." From France with love, cognacs are the new *pièce de résistance* for the Kansas City social scene. ■

## The Summit

In the city of Cognac they offer this drink—an adaptable, friendly spirit with a respectable history. How Kansas City is that?

- 1 zest lime
- 4 thin slices of fresh ginger
- 1-1/2 oz. VSOP cognac
- 2 oz. traditional lemonade
- 1 long piece cucumber peel

Place the lime zest and ginger slices in an old-fashioned glass. Pour in 3/4 oz. VSOP cognac. Lightly press the lime and ginger two or three times. Fill half the glass with ice; stir for five seconds. Add 3/4 oz. of VSOP cognac, 2 oz. of lemonade and cucumber peel. Stir for five seconds and serve.

STORY BY SEÁNAN FORBES

PHOTOS BY KENNY JOHNSON

FROM LEFT: Nothing can break cognac's glass ceiling like naming a drink after a Harry Potter character, as Paige Unger did with her Luna Lovegood cocktail. You can also explore new cognac horizons by sipping a Sazerac at The Majestic, a glass of 1840 Original Formula at The Rieger, or Maison Surrene Heritage 1875 at The American.