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An Intro to Citadelle Gins with Alexandre Gabriel

OK! So I recently wrote an article about a [Rum Master Class](#) I attended. Well, during that same week I got to attend another session with [Alexandre Gabriel](#), but this time it was to learn more about [Citadelle Gins](#), another product that Cognac Ferrand produces.

Alexandre started this session by telling us the story as to how he got started with gin. The original recipe for Citadelle Gin was developed by a distillery in Dunkirk in 1771 (at the time an important port for the spice trade). In 1775, Louis XVI authorized two Frenchmen, Carpeau and Stival, to open a distillery making genièvre at the Citadelle of Dunkirk, which soon became a royal distillery with an exclusive 20-year charter. The two founders had 12 traditional copper pot stills made for the distillery, allegedly the first of its type in France.

Skip forward a few hundred years, Citadelle Gin is now produced in Cognac. Back in the late 80s Alexandre Gabriel decided it was time to distil a gin and began doing research, working his way through old records and files in Flanders and then developing a modern plan to distil gin at the Pierre Ferrand cognac distillery.

After coming across the story of Citadelle Gin, Alexandre decided that a gin bottled under the Citadelle name and distilled in a similar way to that of the original, produced after more than a century's absence, would be befitting of his vision of bringing back excitement and diversity back to the gin category.

By 1989, the research was complete and Gabriel and his team were getting ready to produce the very first batch. Although the production techniques have improved over the centuries, Citadelle Gin is still made according to principles laid down in the original recipe. This includes some of the botanicals stated back in 1775. However, it wasn't until 1995 that the gin was officially distilled. No one had ever received permission to make gin in cognac pot stills in France before and getting permission to do so required braving the French bureaucracy, gin had never been considered.

Alexandre Gabriel recounts "I was more trying desperately to convince the French government to allow me to produce gin at my cognac distillery. You know, by French AOC laws we can only distil cognac from November through March and after that our beautiful little pot stills were idle! Since I had done extensive research and learned that historically gin was produced in pot stills over a naked flame. Perfect! That is exactly how our

pot stills were designed! But no one in France had ever approached the government with this request. It took me

five long years to finally receive the AOC approval to distil gin in cognac!".

Citadelle Gin is triple-distilled from wheat and spring water; before being steeped in neutral alcohol, the master distiller selects the botanicals that will complement the freshness of the juniper with tart, floral and exotic flavours. I learnt that the goal of any master distiller is to enhance the main taste or flavour if you will – his main goal is to allow the main ingredient or element to shine through! A work of fine balance, allows the flavours and aromas to intermingle in a perfect harmony. Once the steeping is complete, the infusion is then distilled in small Charentais pot stills with an open flame. The slow distillation allows the distiller to precisely select the heart of the gin, whilst the relatively low swan's neck favours the concentration of essential oils; all of which contributing to the gin's aromatic quality.

I learnt about how different pot stills are used, how the height of the swan neck determines the 'weight' of the alcohol, how distillation occurs, the differences between open flame distillation (that was used in the old days) versus the newer steam distillation process. *[Note: Flames and high proof alcohol have proven to be a unreliable combination resulting in numerous distilleries burning to the ground!]* I also learnt about how botanicals are introduced – in a progressive fashion because every botanical behaves differently. *[Forgive me if my languaging around this is still simplified - I'm still in learning mode!]*

Over the course of meeting Alexandre Gabriel over a few days I realised that he's passionate about learning his craft; and continues to do so. I love his stories, how he's always aiming to produce better quality products and how he continues to research the products he current produces. He's an avid collector of Rum, Gin and Cognac – always searching out products from the past to compare and learn from them!

Cognac Ferrand

[Cognac Ferrand](#) is the result of the encounter in 1989 between Alexandre Gabriel and one of the oldest winegrowing families in the Cognac region. Alexandre Gabriel's intention was to breathe new life into Cognac Ferrand and make the world's best cognac. He wanted to keep the ages-old craft-based production methods which were worlds apart from mass production techniques, and sought to bring back to market the true expression of the great terroir of Grande Champagne, known as Cognac's finest region.

It is around these core values of authenticity and character that Cognac Ferrand has built its business, first with cognac, then with other distinctive fine spirits like gin whose particular character is based on a unique production method, and their rums which are matured using a very special technique. Today, Cognac Ferrand is a highly regarded company that distributes its fine spirits in more than 40 countries in some of the world's most prestigious outlets. Cognac Ferrand draws on a dynamic team of people with a passionate interest in what they do.

