

A SNIFTER OF LOCAL SPLENDOUR

Musgrave Copper: Refreshingly Different

South Africa is renowned for its exceptional pot-still brandy. Double distilled in copper pot stills and aged in oak barrels is the way it's been done for over 300 years. Considered a status symbol in many parts of the world, much like Cognac, no drinks trolley is ever complete without a bottle or two of the finest XO. For centuries brandy has captured the imaginations of many with its secret language and mysterious ways in which to drink it, making its pretentious nature limiting when trying to appeal to a younger audience.

South Africa has been making brandy since the late 17th century, which is roughly when Cognac made its debut in France after the Dutch first introduced it to the Cape. But what many people don't know is that brandy is an ancient category, and the distilling process has been experimented with since the Middle Ages, and quite possibly even as far back as before the birth of Christ.

Traces of its production can be found in all corners of the globe, from California to Peru and even far-flung vineyards in Cyprus, Georgia, Canada, Mexico, Armenia, and Israel. Wherever one found a vineyard of fermented grapes, plums, berries, pears, apples, pineapples, and cherries, there would be alchemists, physicians and scientists experimenting with the distillation process. This included boiling, vaporisation and cooling the mists of the fermented wine, which would result in crude high alcohol spirits and possibly a type of brandy, as we know it today. Some of the first practitioners of this mysterious art are thought





to be of Chinese and Indian descent. The use of pot stills is also an ancient tradition. They were often used for spiritual pursuits by alchemists in their search for magically powered potions or pathways to ether, and for medicinal elixirs to relieve common ailments such as dyspepsia, arthritis and tooth and gum maladies.

IS COGNAC ALL THAT?

Over the years, a lot of fuss has been made about Cognac, and connoisseurs of the liquid gold will tell you while all cognacs are brandy, not all brandy can be called Cognac. But as history might reveal, France may not be the birthplace of ancient brandy after all. While they

may have formalised its practice, and legally claimed the name due to the region where it's produced, there are many other brandies in the world that have taken centuries to perfect, that one should be getting excited about.

This is especially true for South Africa. The French began producing brandy in the Cape around the time of Simon Van Der Stel, who found conditions like that of Cognac in France, only that South Africa's wine-producing regions are warmer and dryer than Cognac, resulting in much higher sugar levels in the grapes used in the base wine for distillation. Cognac's base wine usually contains around 8% alcohol by volume (ABV) versus the 10% to



12% ABV in South Africa. And roughly 95% of the wine distilled is made from Chenin Blanc or Colombarid grapes, two varieties that are naturally high in acidity. Since sulphites can't be used to preserve wine intended for distillation, the high acidity helps protect the wine from spoilage.

BUSTING THE STEREOTYPE

Even though South African brandy has been proven to be as good as any cognac, it still struggles with stereotypes and perceptions. That is, however, until the release of Musgrave Copper in 2018. Until then, the sector had little in the way of innovation to excite newcomers and to help change perceptions. What was once thought to be cheap and only for men, or best taken with cola, has been turned on its head. Founder of Musgrave Spirits, Simone Musgrave, partnered with South Africa's largest brandy producers, Distell and Van Rhyns, to create two innovative, infused pot-still brandy blends – Musgrave Copper Vanilla and Musgrave Copper Black Honey.

It's finally the shake up the sector needed, introducing a new genre that remixes the brandy category to play

where Cognac has feared to tread and crafted to be the “Bourbon” of brandy.

Younger brandy drinkers have been looking for innovation, and Copper certainly delivers. It's luxurious, disruptive, infused and made to mix. It's a flavour-infused brandy with subtle flavours and a distinctly African palate. Musgrave Copper is more aligned to the Cognac drinker than to a traditional brandy drinker, using the finest pot-still brandy with the added excitement of flavour infusion. It attracts a consumer who exists beyond the preconceptions of their gender, age, or race; they seek out the new. Musgrave Copper embraces a “remixing tradition”, bringing together some of the African continents most celebrated ingredients. With access to winter honey, collected by local communities within the national parks of Zambia, and vanilla from the Indian Islands around the coast of Africa, the blend makes for a sumptuous infusion that has elevated Musgrave Copper to the next level.

Pushing boundaries of tradition also appeals more to a daring and sophisticated female market. The 2021 *Platter's Wine Guide* awarded Musgrave

Copper Vanilla with four stars, while the Musgrave Black Honey received four-and-a-half stars – a massive feat for a product that just launched.

Simone describes Musgrave Copper as the brand that aims to “Act like cognac, talk like whisky, drink like brandy, spend like champagne, boom like gin, sell like vodka.”

For more about Musgrave Copper, visit www.musgravespirits.com or follow them on Instagram @musgravespirits. 📌

by *musgrave spirits*