

# VIGNOBLES FONTAN

## Armagnac XO



### STORY

Vignobles Fontan is located 150 km from Bordeaux and 120 km from Toulouse. Nadège and Sylvain Fontan are the fourth generation to tend this land, a vineyard of 80 hectares bursting with promise, using typical grape varieties suited to its 'terroir'. They actively promote the typicity of Gascony wines by organizing regular events and tastings at the estate.

Armagnac comprises 3 different areas, as shown by the map. Vignobles Fontan's Armagnac comes from the western area called "Bas Armagnac". The climate is temperate and gentle. The humid oceanic influence reduced by the Landes forest is particularly noticeable in this part of the Appellation.

### GRAPE VARIETIES

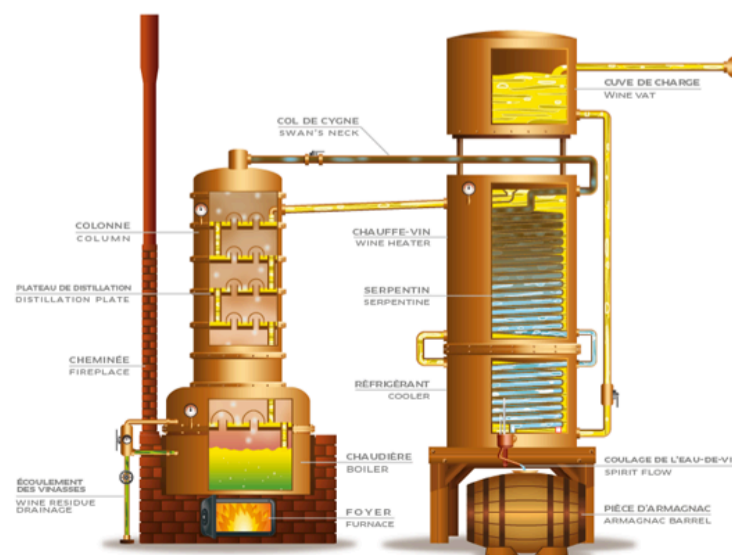
From the ten grape varieties authorized for making Armagnac, Vignobles Fontan use Ugni-blanc grapes grown on clayey, chalky and sandy soils. Ugni-blanc is the ultimate distillation grape, giving acidic and low alcohol wines which, following distillation, produce a fine Armagnac of excellent quality.

### DISTILLATION

The distillation takes place for Fontan late October/early November (limit date of 31st March of the year following the harvest) at the end of the fermentation process. The wine is distilled on the estate by a travelling distiller.

Armagnac is obtained using a specific alambic called a continuous Armagnac alambic. It is a pure copper apparatus that was endorsed in 1818 and has since been adapted, modified, and improved by the region's distillers. It gives the Armagnac real personality.

The wine is permanently fed into the alambic from the bottom of the cooler, thanks to which the alcohol vapours contained in the serpentine cool down. It is driven towards the distillation column where it descends from plate to plate until it reaches the boiler. The strong heat provided by the furnace pushes the vapours from the wine back up the column so that they bubble through the wine at the level of each plate and are enriched with the alcohol and the aromatic substances in the wine before being condensed then cooled in the serpentine. On leaving the alambic, the eau-de-vie is transparent and its alcohol degree varies from 52% to 72%.





## AGEING

Once it has been distilled, Armagnac is put to age in "pièces", the name given to 400-litre barrels made of oak sourced mainly from the forests of Gascony or Limousin.

These *pièces* are stored in the cellars where the temperature and humidity are important for the quality of the ageing. Thereafter, the cellar master monitors the evolution of the liquor, or "eau-de-vie", i.e. the extraction of the tannin compounds and aromas from the barrel. The evaporation of part of the eau-de-vie and the reduction of the alcohol degree (about 1/2 degree per year) is poetically referred to as the 'angel's share'.

The aromas of the wood and the wine develop during the slow oxidation of the Armagnac by contact with the air through the barrel.

The eau-de-vie stays in new barrels just until the dissolution level of substances in the wood is optimal. It is then transferred to older barrels, to avoid an excessive extraction of wood, and continue its slow evolution: the substances in the wood become more refined, aromas of vanilla and prunes develop, and the alcohol degree diminishes gradually through evaporation of the alcohol. The eau-de-vie takes on a lovely amber colour that subsequently turns to mahogany.

## TASTING NOTES

Armagnac XO has a deep orange colour, the nose of vanilla and gingerbread is lightly toasted. The palate is soft and round. It blends with cinnamon, vanilla and a hint of liquorice, with a finish of menthol. XO is a blend of several Armagnacs, the youngest of which has been aged for at least 10 years. In this case, most of the barrels are from the year 2000.

## SERVING SUGGESTIONS

It can be drunk as a digestif after a meal. Serve at room temperature in a special Armagnac glass to bring out the full aromatic richness.

