



VINOUS

“Exploring the World of Armagnac

Jason Wilson

DELORD

Prosper Delord began in 1875 as one of Armagnac’s traditional roving distillers, bringing his pot still to the various farms of Bas-Armagnac. His son Gaston took over in 1925, settling in the village of Lannepax, where great-grandsons Jerome and Sylvain now carry on the tradition, along with their father Jacques and Uncle Pierre. Delord grows all four of Armagnac’s main grapes on its own 42 hectares, as well as working with other local growers. While they once bought wine to distill, on my last visit, Jerome Delord told me that the family has invested more in winemaking over the past decade and now only buys grapes, giving them even more consistency and quality control. Delord’s 25-year-old is one of the great Armagnac blends, a timeless classic.

Napoléon Armagnac 89 points

Delord Napoléon is honey-colored with a surprisingly complex nose of brown sugar, dried fruit, and maple-glazed ham. Soft and nutty, with a briny, fleshy olive finish. (Bas-Armagnac, 40% abv.)

XO Armagnac 96 points

Light copper in color, but rich and unctuous in the mouth, with a long velvety finish. Delord XO is a dense and complex 15-year-old with scents of wildflowers and spring herbs, flavors of orange zest, fig, nougat, and a gorgeous, lengthy crème brûlée finish. Excellent value that could convince a committed Bourbon drinker to embrace French brandy. (Bas-Armagnac, 40% abv.)

25 Ans d’Age Armagnac 97 points

Delord’s 25-year-old is surely deep and complex, but it surprises with its vibrance and freshness. Perky, patisserie aromas of pineapple cake, candied ginger, and orangette entice, then give way to darker notes on the palate of chocolate, coffee, and hints of rancio, culminating in a rich finish of walnut, membrillo, and cheese that lingers for what seems like hours. (Bas-Armagnac, 40% abv.)

DARTIGALONGUE

“My Armagnac, my strength,” is the Dartigalongue family motto; an image of a 19th century manual typewriter is the first thing you see on the company’s homepage. Those two elements should give some sense of the house style – robust, traditional, anachronistic. Since 1838, the family has been making fine brandies in Nogaro, in the heart of Bas-Armagnac. In 2010, Françoise Dartigalongue, then at the helm, convinced her niece’s husband, Benoit Hillion, an agronomist in Paris, to take over the company. I met Benoit soon after he’d settled in Nogaro, and I recall his joy in opening brandies from deep in the library, including a savory 1893 that was so alive and redolent of antique varnish, clove, and sweet hashish-like smoke that it’s stayed with me ever since, a benchmark of old Armagnac.

XO Armagnac 93 points

Dartigalongue’s XO is burly, with cologne-like aromas, and surprisingly complex for its youth (10-year-old brandies in the blend). Buttery, with flavors of dried plum, candied ginger and walnut, and a spicy finish of clove and cardamom. A Rye drinker’s Armagnac. (Bas-Armagnac, 40% abv.)

Grande Eau-de-Vie Armagnac 97 points

One of the benchmark blends in Armagnac, Dartigalongue Grande Eau-de-Vie is aged a minimum of 25 years. Complex, swirling aromas of winter spices, pine forest, fruit pastry, and leather. Subtle at first on the palate, maple and apricot, but then introduces black notes of pepper, and rancio on the midpalate and finally an extraordinary finish full of licorice and tobacco. (Bas-Armagnac, 40% abv.)

Hors d’Age Armagnac 94 points

Slightly older than Dartigalongue’s XO, this deep amber Armagnac offers more savory notes, with a nose of grilled apple, toffee, and smoke and flavors of black tea and buttered toast on the palate, with a tobacco finish. (Bas-Armagnac, 40% abv.)

1998 Armagnac 93 points

Twenty years old with attractive notes of baked pear and nutmeg. On the palate there’s fresh acidity, solid structure, and a spicy, lingering finish. With Dartigalongue, the blends offer the best value, but at \$100, this is a good entry point for someone beginning to explore vintage Armagnac. (Bas-Armagnac, 40% abv.)