



CHÂTEAU DE BRIAT

MAUVEZIN D'ARMAGNAC

Bas-Armagnac Hors d'Age
1987 Bas-Armagnac Vintage

Soils: Sables Fauves (iron-rich sand); 15 barrels/year production; distillation degree upon exiting the still: 52° (104 proof); Limousin barrels; oldest spirit still in cask: 1979, youngest in cask: 1999; stock: 130 barrels; blended armagnacs available: Hors d'Age (14 years old), vintages available: 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988.

Château de Briat has a long and impressive history. Built in 1540, it first served as the hunting manor for Queen Jeanne d'Albret. Her son, Henri de Navarre, later Henri IV, King of France, often stayed in the castle, but in 1587 gave it to one of his fellow officers as a reward for saving his life in battle. After changing ownership several times, the domaine was taken over by Baron Raoul de Pichon-Longueville in 1864.

The Pichon-Longueville family, which at one time owned the famous Pauillac château of the same name, used the Briat estate as a country retreat while continuing armagnac production. The estate was passed down to Baron Raoul de Pichon-Longueville's maternal ancestors, the de Luze family.

Gilles de Luze was an editor at the Larousse editing house in Paris for most of his adult life, but returned to manage the family's estate in the small Bas-Armagnac town of Mauvezin (population 213) in the early nineties when his father retired. Gilles died in a 2003 car accident with his wife. Château, a former literary editor in Paris, died in an automobile crash. He was 53 years old. The fatal accident took place in the early hours of morning just south of Paris as de Luze was returning home from an independent producers salon in Lyon. De Luze's wife, Adeline, was also pronounced dead at the scene.

In the late 1990's, de Luze teamed together with four other armagnac producers (Yves Grassa from Chateau de Tariquet, Martine Lafitte from Domaine Boingneres, Jean de Boissesson from Chateau de Lacquy and Pierre Laberdolive or Armagnac Laberdolive) and formed the Cru Legendaires, a grouping which promoted traditional, rare and deluxe cask strength vintage armagnacs from their independent estates in the Bas-Armagnac.

It was in the atmosphere of three star restaurants and fine wine merchants that de Luze character thrived; he brought a rare intelligence to the small world of artisan producers, provided a breath of fresh air to armagnac's governing bureau (the BNIA) and served as an energetic and dignified spokesman for small growers within this humbly regal appellation.

The de Luze's son, Stephane, in his mid-twenties, suddenly found himself head of the historic chateau. Stephane soon enlisted the help of his cousin Jean de Mareuil. At the chateau in Mauvezin, a tiny town (population 213) located between Lagrange and Labastide, the two continue the production techniques established by Gilles. 7 hectares of vines (17.5 acres)

are divided between Bacco, Colombard and Folle Blanche. Unlike many other armagnac producers, Briat is a firm believer in keeping yields low and is not opposed to cutting fruit to give a final harvest of 60 hl/ha. Colombard is a particular favorite, and the eau de vie is made strictly with this grape.

Each varietal is distilled separately to 52°, and all of the 10 barrels aged at the property during a given year see new wood. After two or three years, they are transferred to older casks and, apart from an airing once a year, left to rest in the spacious yet primitive chai. Topping up is not practiced; at

Briat, they prefer to let the level fall, promote air contact, and therefore create a spirit that is less aggressive. Assemblage of various grapes takes place after a minimum of four years and, at times, not until their 10th birthday.

1987 (65% Bacco, 35% Colombard): Notes of plum, brown sugar, mashed almonds and spices on the nose. Soft palate feel without aggressiveness. Plum and a touch of dried apricot on the palate, with plenty of vanilla. Mouth-coating texture. Excellent length.

Hors d'Age (75% Bacco, 15% Folle Blanche, 10% Colombard, 44°, 12 Years Old): Amber with extremely attractive legs. Supple, elegant texture holds notes of licorice, chocolate, toffee and oak. Excellent value. A barrel of this Hors d'Age is seen aging in the Briat cellar above.

