

BACHE-GABRIELSEN OFFERS DEPTH AND RANGE AT A COMPETITIVE PRICE

The Best Cognac from Norway

story and photos by Richard Carleton Hacker



Bache-Gabrielsen's family of cognacs includes the Classical series (l. to r.) which consists of the light and herbaceous 3Kors, the fruity VSOP, the deep, creamy XO and the complex pears and spice of Hors d'Age; the mixologist-friendly Natur & Eleganse series boasts a meaty XO and the lighter VSOP.



At Lilly's French Café & Bar in Venice, CA, owner Yon Idiart (left) toasts his new lineup of Bache-Gabrielsen Cognacs with Jean-Christophe Pandolfi, a cousin of the distilling family and head of their U.S. importation.

Here's a question worthy of asking your most tight-lipped customer, because it is almost certain to elicit a response. And possibly a sale. Simply inquire, "Would you like to see the newest cognac from Norway?"

Of course, this latest double-distilled arrival to our shores comes from the Cognac region of France, but it has its origins in Norway. In 1905, a young Norwegian Army officer, Thomas Bache-Gabrielsen, traveled to Cognac and teamed up with another Norwegian, Peter Anton Rustad, an entrepreneur who had purchased the fabled Cognac house of Edmond Dupuy, which had been in existence since 1852. Because of the strong Norwegian connections and experience of its new owners (the Bache-Gabrielsen family had previously distilled brandy in Norway), Dupuy cognac became the favored digestif of Scandinavia. During Prohibition, the Norwegian government even granted Dupuy a "medicinal" dispensation for importation of their light and fruity 3 Kors. Today, Dupuy commands the Norwegian market—a country of 4 million people who consume 3.5 million bottles of cognac annually—a third of Bache-Gabrielsen's production.

Now, as the sixth generation of the founding family, Hervé Bache-Gabrielsen, who succeeded his father as head of the company in 2009, is bringing the hand-crafted cognacs of his family's small, 20-man distillery into the new age and the New World, and with a new name (to America, at least): Bache-Gabrielsen. As part of this expansion, Bache-Gabrielsen has already established itself in Germany and Asia. But recently, starting with Minnesota's heavily Norwegian-American population, the company experienced a 20% growth last year. Bache-Gabrielsen cognacs are now sold in thirteen states so far, including California, Nevada, New York, New Jersey and Florida.

The reason for Bache-Gabrielsen's dramatic success in such a short time can be attributed to two factors: the unparalleled depth of taste of their artisan cognacs, and their tremendously competitive pricing. Plus, in spite of its small size, Bache-Gabrielsen doesn't hesitate to compare itself to the Big Four.

"We are more like Rémy Martin than Hennessy," says Jean-Christophe Pandolfi, a cousin of Hervé and overseer of U.S. importation. "Our style is floral and less woody, and our XO, for example, is half the price."

Indeed, the toasted cream and apples of their XO won Double Gold in 2009 and a Gold Medal in 2010 at THE TASTING PANEL's San Francisco World Spirits Competition, yet its SRP is under \$70. And Bache-Gabrielsen's top-of-the-line Hors d'Age, a 100% Grande Champagne cognac aged in Limousin oak for fifty years, has a complex spiciness that Pandolfi compares to Rémy's Louis XIII, yet it is composed of just seven cognacs and has a SRP of around \$200.

In addition to their classical sipping Cognacs, Bache-Gabrielsen has introduced the mixologist-friendly Natur & Eleganse series, consisting of the spiced cedar and honey VSOP (\$39) and the deep dried fruit of their XO (\$69), both made without sugar or caramel and fine-tuned for mixing and informal sipping.

"The big difference between us and the Big Four is inventory," says Pandolfi, referring to Bache-Gabrielsen's \$10 million in eaux-de-vie dating back to 1860. "So we don't have to blend as many cognacs to achieve a balanced taste."

As Americans are now discovering, that's why the Norwegians love cognac. ■■