

# SA brandy the ‘unsung hero of the spirit world’

“Water of life” — what a delightfully apt way to describe a heart-warming beverage that perks spirits up after a long day, ends a fine dinner or celebrates a special moment.

And no, this time we’re not talking about wine, not in the usual sense anyway.

Eau de vie (water of life in French) is the term for the “base” wine, usually made from colombar and/or chenin blanc in SA, that is twice-distilled in copper potstills, followed by maturation in French oak, to produce brandy.

Brandy can be distilled from the fermented juice of a whole range of fruits (Calvados is an apple brandy, for instance), but



## A Vine Time

SAM VENTER

it’s only when distilled from fermented grape juice that it can be called cognac — and it can only be called cognac if it comes from the Cognac region

of France.

The SA equivalent at the top of the brandy world is potstill brandy, matured in oak for at least three years — and before you choke on your Courvoisier XO, SA potstill brandy is considered among the finest in the world, winning the Worldwide Best Brandy trophy at the respected International Wine & Spirits Competition (IWSC) for 15 of the past 20 years.

Cape Wine Master Winnie Bowman calls SA brandy “the unsung hero of the spirit world”.

As with wine, there are rules about what a product can be called, depending on how it’s made and the length of

maturation, and a world of terminology to learn.

Potstill brandy is matured in oak for at least three years, often much more, and is best enjoyed neat, with ice if you like or a splash of mineral water; while vintage brandy is matured for at least eight years and made from potstill brandy blended with matured wine spirit, and the “entry level” blend is potstill brandy plus unmatured wine spirit, and matured for three years at least.

Meanwhile, XO in the world of cognac and of potstill brandy stands for “extra old”, meaning the youngest brandy in the blend must be at least six years old; VSOP is “very superi-

or old pale”, in which the youngest brandy has matured for at least four years in oak; and VS is “very special”, aged at least two years.

Here endeth the lesson — and now for something new.

Cape Town’s Sugarbird Distillery, best known for its range of premium fynbos gins, has added its fynbos touch to brandy, launching Sugarbird XO 14-Year-Old Potstill Brandy (R450).

It’s quite an interesting journey — Sugarbird’s artisan blender, Edmund Paulsen, got his hands on some 14-year aged barrels of potstill brandy, made from chenin blanc and colombar in the Breedekloof,

and trickle-filtered it through honeybush and other fynbos botanicals to create a smooth, distinctive Cape Fynbos brandy.

It’s great for slow sipping, especially in these chilly days, either neat or with a block of ice — revealing aromas of honey, dark chocolate and vanilla that unfurl in layers in the mouth with more honey nectar tones, dried peaches, dates and raisins, with a honey-smooth texture and warming finish.

I’m still a loyal wine lover, but I loved this.

Sugarbird brandy (and gins) can be ordered at [www.takealot.com](http://www.takealot.com)



**LIQUID GOLD:** Cape Town’s Sugarbird Distillery, known for its range of premium fynbos gins, has added its fynbos touch to brandy