

Bartales

Best of

N. 43 | APRIL 2023

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LIQUID STORY / MADE IN ITALY
GIN & BLACK CHERRY



LIQUID STORY / ROMANO LEVI
THE LORD OF THE LANGHE



HOT SPIRIT / SINGANI
MOUNTAIN SPIRIT



ZOOM / AGAINST THE GRAIN
SINGAPORE MIX



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THE MEANING OF A LIFE

Distilling and drawing – slowly, like in the old days and with painstaking patience, while nurturing a shy, childish, perhaps even slightly naive enthusiasm. Like that of Romano Levi, the gentle and unforgettable “grapato”, attached to his still like a child to his favourite toy and which he cared for with devotion because, as he always loved to say, “it’s a little jewel, a toy, that if you give it what it wants, what it needs, and you don’t push it and adapt to it, will work miracles”. And his grappas are indeed miraculous, among the best ever made. Grappas from the Langhe, an aristocratic expression of that perfect balance between tanning in underground pits and long ageing in wood, followed by discontinuous distillation over an open flame in a copper still – the only one in the world still being used today. In short, treasures like those hand-sketched labels that Romano started drawing quite by chance sixty years ago and which up until his last one, drawn on the evening of 1 May 2008, enrich the Griva collection. Art “Brut” that is raw and spontaneous, and seemingly cultureless. In the simplicity of those honest lines – pastel blue, red and green – is held the meaning of the life of the “angelic grappa maker”. The values of sacrifice and love for women, the Women of the Langhe, who were brave and fierce, proud and tireless. A powerful femininity that inspires poetry, and which becomes a solemn hymn to life – a shy, simple, silent life, authentic and hidden from the public eye. Just like that of Romano, the “uncrowned king of Piedmontese distillation”.

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DRINK RESPONSIBLY

GIN & BLACK CHERRY

Fragrant and intense, Fabbri's new spirit pays tribute to tradition

BY SARA DE MARCO

Gin, the hero of the new cocktail culture, continues to achieve high-level performances on the market. The Italian gin movement is seeing new entries but also great comebacks. Such as Fabbri Gin, introduced at the end of 2022 and which features Fabbri's iconic ingredient, the black cherry. This spirit is inspired by the original recipe from the 1930s with a botanical body of juniper berries, citrus peel, coriander, bitter orange peel, liquorice and angelica roots.

Totally clear, Fabbri Gin has an in-

tense and balanced aromatic body, and the hint of black cherry is unmistakable. On the midpalate, spiciness is enhanced with coriander and juniper, followed by the freshness of citrus fruits. The elegant packaging has smooth lines, and the label reflects the Liberty style. The "shoulders" of the bottle evoke Bologna's porticos and its link with the territory.

Fabbri 1905 is one of the companies that made Italian tradition famous all around the world. It operates within four main industries – ice cream, confectionery, bartending and mixology, and the pas-



try chef industry. As is so often the case with Italian businesses, its interesting history is intertwined with the facts and

vicissitudes of Italian society and spans two centuries.

It all began with founder, Gennaro Fab-



BOLOGNA
 RIGHT,
 GENNARO
 FABBRI AND
 RACHELE
 BURIANI.
 BELOW, THE
 FIRST FACTORY.



bri, born in Bologna on 15 January 1860, who started his career as a labourer and roundsman. Over the years he set up several businesses which were then sold shortly thereafter. In 1905 in Portomaggiore (in the province of Ferrara), Gennaro took over a grocery store with an adjoining vat room where he intended to start a liqueur business. To avoid going to the banks, he asked his brother Antonio for a five-year loan of 3,000 lire, and called the business Premiata Distilleria Liquori G. Fabbri, now known as Fabbri 1905. Four years after opening, in 1909, the company sold its first products: Liqueore 1° Maggio and Amaro Carducci.

Thanks to a combination of factors, such as names inspired by political and artistic movements, illustrations on the label, and a price that was considered affordable, the products spread rapidly. In 1914, business was going very well and to expand production, a building was purchased in Borgo Panigale (Bologna) that would become the first Fabbri factory.

After about a year, production grew to include both alcoholic and non-alcoholic syrups. Gennaro's wife, Rachele Buriani, created the recipe for the most famous product: the "Marena con frutto" ("black cherry with fruit"), followed by syrups such

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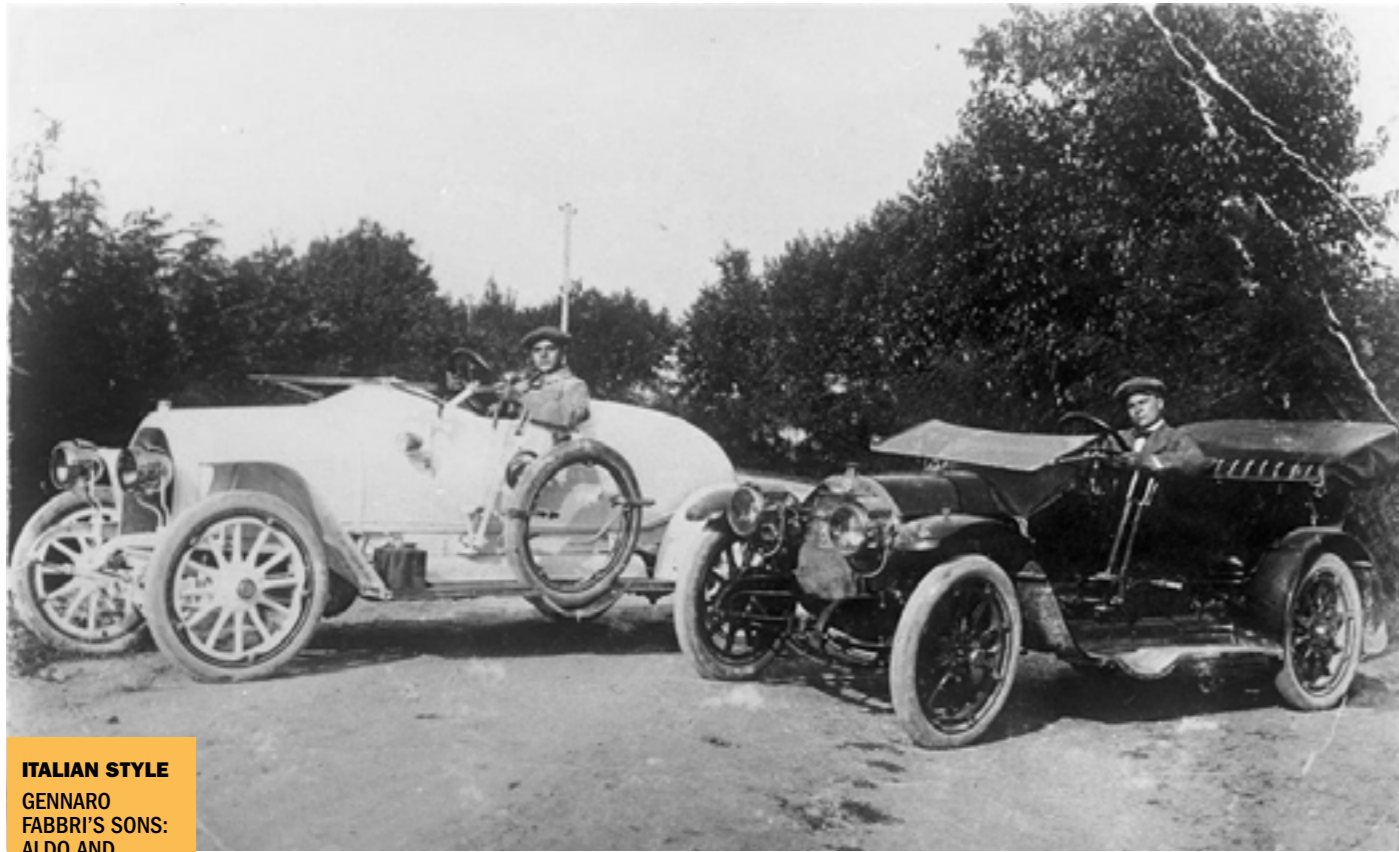


as mint, grenadine and the famous Amarena Fabbri.

However, in those years, competition also grew in proportion to sales. Numerous distilleries were operating as early as the second half of the 19th century. Others opened around the same time as Fabbri which therefore decided to expand its market to public establishments such as cafés, restaurants and liquor stores.

Fabbri's attention to social, industrial and political changes meant it did not remain powerless – the company was constantly on the lookout for innovation, quality and exclusivity. Gennaro's sons, Aldo and Romeo, soon abandoned their studies to work in the family distillery. They became reps for the company and would call on their customers in elegant cars: an Isotta Fraschini and an Itala. This





ITALIAN STYLE
 GENNARO
 FABBRI'S SONS:
 ALDO AND
 ROMEO, IN THEIR
 REP VEHICLES.
 BELOW,
 GENNARO AND
 RACHELE WITH
 "MARENA CON
 FRUTTO".

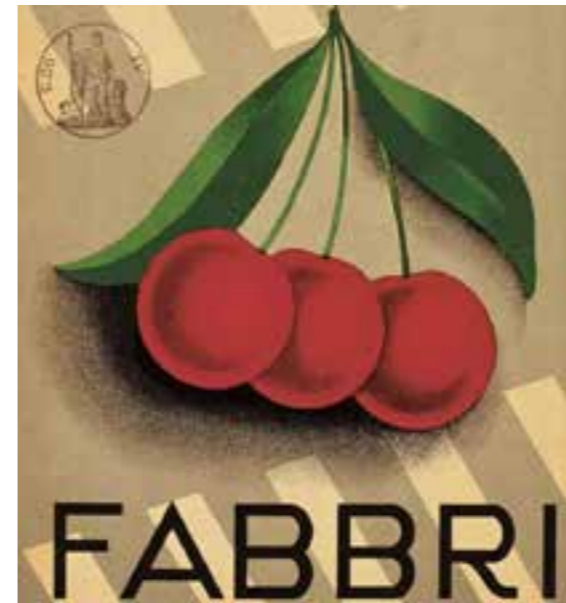


practice became a routine that immediately generated interest, since in those years many had never even seen a car.

Gennaro and his sons tried to understand the opportunities offered by the market, in order to meet their customers'

wishes and improve the distribution channel. Gennaro Fabbri realised that creating a good product was no longer enough – effective advertising was needed to counter increasingly fierce competition.

In 1919, Fabbri introduced an invig-



orating zabaglione with Marsala known as Virov. However, the product's success attracted the attention of competitor, Pezziol, producer of the renowned Vov, which sued Fabbri. The case was won by the latter. Virov was a product with unusual and impressive packaging. The bottle came with a full porcelain serving set, consisting of six cups and saucers and a carafe, all plated in 24-carat gold and made by a historic Tuscan manufacturer.

After the slowdown caused by the First





FABBRI
THE CURRENT PREMISES OF THE DISTILLERY WITH A MURAL PAINTED USING ECO-FRIENDLY PAINT.

World War, in 1920 Gennaro bought a piece of land measuring ten thousand square meters next to the Bologna building to build new warehouses. In the meantime, the historic Portomaggiore distillery was closed. After about ten years, thanks to the fame of the brand, production of spirits increased with products such as pomace brandy, rum, gin, whisky and cognac.

The cognac was sold under the name of Senior Vecchio Brandy, (which would later become Gran Senior) following a legal agreement between France and Italy and it became one of the best-selling cognacs in the country. Other liqueurs and bitters were added, creating a wide range. Its vast number of variants were aimed at local customers who, for medium and

low turnover liqueurs, did not have to resort to multiple suppliers. At that time the cost of transporting goods was high and there was a risk of theft and damage during travel. As a result, only top-selling products were transported and marketed.

After the Second World War, the market was full of international brandies and distillates. Fabbri therefore decided to trim production and concentrate its advertising budgets on the most popular products. From the 1970s, as a result a progressive general reduction in the demand for spirits, the third generation of the Bolognese company decided to discontinue them in favour of ice cream formulations intended for the artisanal sector. With the birth of advertising, the new production challenge once again

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FABBRI
THE COMPANY
IS STILL TODAY
RUN BY THE
FABBRI FAMILY.

proved successful and Fabbri distribution crossed national borders.

Between the 1970s and 1980s the factory was still one of the leading distributors of Scotch whisky in Italy with the White Cat, Black House and Black Jack brands. Among other imported products, there was Pampero rum and Wodka.

Judging from history, it could be suggested that one of Fabbri's strengths is constant diversification aimed at satisfying the needs of consumers, while paying careful attention to changes in the market.

In 2017, Fabbri resumed spirits production with the historic Marendry dry liqueur, initially born as a black cherry brandy. It has now become a bitters with a bright red colour and unique aroma.

Today, managed by the fifth generation of Fabbri, the company's founding values such as quality, craftsmanship and tradition remain intact – another business that ably represents 'Made in Italy' excellence in the world.



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PEOPLE
ROMANO LEVI.

THE LORD OF THE LANGHE

The story of the “angelic grappa maker”, the wild artist who hand drew labels of a small ancient world

BY FABIO BACCHI

In western Langhe, between Barbaresco and Castiglione delle Lanze, there is a beautiful medieval village whose oldest part is set on a small hill, while the most recent is found on the plain below. It is Neive, a UNESCO heritage site.

Due to the importance of its trade and the surrounding vineyards, Neive “alta” (or “upper” Neive) was home to the landed aristocracy and the rich bourgeoisie

of the past. Criss-crossed by winding cobbled streets that unravel in rings, the ancient village retains a very suggestive atmosphere.

Arriving in Neive you cross the Langhe and their typical landscape, white hills set with famous vineyards. This is an area of great wines. On the road that leads to this noble Barbaresco village, is an old gate. If it attracts your attention, know that

this gate is the entrance door to a small ancient world, an Eden whose keeper was a timeless dreamer. This is the world of Romano Levi, the “angelic grappa maker”, as Luigi Veronelli liked to call him.

Romano Levi was an undisputed master of distillation, a very sweet man who remained childlike, attached to his childhood memories that testify to a time that never passed. In his modest house, which also served as a laboratory, Romano Levi would sit near a window covered in the cobwebs of a spider, Pippo, and draw his labels using a fountain pen. On those slips of paper, which are now collectors’ items, Romano evoked his memories: herbs and nature that perpetuates the seasons, figures of women with large heads and long legs, and vineyards. These labels have been called emotions.

Levi, an unusual, “wild” character, passed away in May 2008 but nothing has changed since then – time seems to have stood still in this corner of Piedmont. The

house is still the same, the grappas are still made in the same way as they were in the past and some say they are the best in the world. The first handmade label dates to 1963, when a gentleman from Neive, a certain Giorgio Adriano, said “I think you should tear the labels off a sheet of paper, then you write on them by hand like this”.

The first labels were handwritten by Signora Sabina, for a “forgotten black grappa”. The lady tired after the first hundred labels, however, and it was then that Romano began to nurture that which starting as a ritual, would later become a true expression of “wild art”. Pastel blue, red and green were the most common colours used to fill the silhouettes of his “wild women who climb the hills”.

“As a child I used to walk to school, crossing the hills and vineyards. Among the rows there were often “ciabots”, tiny well-stocked shelters where winemakers and farmers took refuge when an evening storm took them by surprise or if they



had to stay in the vineyard before the sun rose. I would walk past in the morning. And sometimes, from these shelters I would see beautiful and dishevelled women emerge. They were a little crazy, lonely, and often lived on the fringes of village society. They were mysterious and had no constraints. They disappeared and then returned, part witches, part fairies. They were free, as all women should be to live the best part of their lives”.

Those labels were a tribute to the women of the Langa, who were accustomed to sacrifice and hard work. This was something Romano knew too well since he lost both parents at the age of seventeen and was left with his younger sister, Lidia, to raise. With his labels, he would become an esteemed exponent of the Art Brut artistic movement, so-called “raw” art, defined as spontaneous art that takes no notice of itself, which does not know its own name,

and is produced through creative intoxication.

The distillery was founded by his father, Serafino Levi, in 1925. In 1945, Romano and his sister Lidia, by then orphans, took over the reins of the family business: “I didn’t choose distillation, it chose me,” said Romano Levi. He learned to use the “lambicco”, or still that he inherited from his father Serafino very well. Today, as then, the discontinuous copper still used over an open flame is still the same, one of just a few still operational in the world.

In one of his rare interviews, he defined that still as follows: “A little jewel, a toy, that if you give it what it wants, what it needs, and you don’t push it and adapt to it, will work miracles”.

In the seventies, the weekly magazine Epoca, edited by Luigi Veronelli, spoke of Romano Levi’s grappas describing them as “rough, straightforward and without frills, strongly anchored in the peasant tradition,

without softness and not sweetened, and that do not give in to the smoothness of the ‘modernist’ mould”.

Once inherited, what was supposed to be a temporary business turned into the mission of a lifetime, a saving grace, a magical place to live in and tell the story of one’s solitude. He hosted famous, indeed very famous, people such as Marcello Mastroianni, former German chancellor Helmut Kohl, Cesare Romiti and many others, who were drawn by this man from the Langhe. Romano did not travel the world, it was he who made the world travel. People from all over came to Neive to get to know him and buy grappa from the Levi Serafino distillery.

For Romano, visitors to the distillery did not need to feel obliged to buy his grappa, but it was essential that they taste it. When schoolchildren went to visit him, he poured a little of his grappa on his hand to let them at least savour the fragrance.



Every last Saturday in October, when the pomace arrived, the flame that fed the still was lit and it would burn continuously from October to April. In truth, Romano Levi never left his distillery home; his land was enough for him, and it was everything to him, the place where everything had to take place. Romano could not tolerate the thought of missing a single sunrise or sunset in his Neive. When he took leave of

his visitors, he always repeated a phrase: “I’m grateful that we met.” And he stayed by his fireplace, in his office full of cobwebs, travelling with his mind among the wild-looking hills – because that is how he felt, wild and oblivious.

Romano Levi was the antithesis of technicalities. He did not know how to measure the alcohol content of grappa, but he knew its roughness and true aromas,



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DISTILLERY
SOME
INTERIORS AND
THE CELLAR.



those traits that define the personality of the spirit. Romano's first distillation was "a marc brandy" which later became "a moscato brandy", Piedmont's famous sweet grape. Then other grape varieties arrived, but since Romano Levi's death, production has expanded and now every grape variety in the Langhe region has its own grappa. Among these is Grappa di Arneis, in memory of Romano and his decision to always have some young and fresh grappa

PLACES
LEVI'S DESK
AND THE
BARRELS.



on hand for the railway workers of Neive's train station.

Distillation starts off with the "Lighting of the Match", proof of the craftsmanship of Levi grappas. Nothing is wasted in the production process. Once pressed, the used pomace becomes fuel for fire, and the ashes are turned into fertiliser for the

vineyards. A sort of circular economy that Romano Levi understood well and which for him was equal to "the cost of a match", the one used to light the still when starting distillation.

A few years after Romano's passing, his sister Lidia also died. There were no heirs and there was a risk that the story

At the roots of the italian liqueur making art



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of the historic distillery would end there. Production continued for another 14 years thanks to Fabrizio Sobrero, a helper and distiller who worked with Romano, one of the “oblivious”, a term Romano Levi used to define himself and those who worked with him.

The distillery was then acquired by the Scaratti and Schiacciapietra families who today continue running it with the same philosophical and social spirit of Romano Levi, rich in tradition and craftsmanship. Distillation is still done using the still from

1925, over an open flame. Only two batches of 25 litres each are made per day, and each bottle is filled and labelled by hand. The labels still used today are copies of those created by Romano Levi; they are coloured, torn and applied by hand as he did. They all show the year the grappa was distilled and when it was bottled.

In 2018 the Consortium of the Langhe, Roero and Monferrato officially recognised the Serafino Levi distillery as “Home to the memory and traditions of the region”. The still itself and the whole area have been

marked by the municipality of Neive as a “working museum”.

The real innovation in the history of the Serafino Levi Distillery was its distribution. Romano had no distribution – he sold his grappas to those who visited him, creating the label on the spot and wrapping the bottle in newspaper. These days, Romano Levi’s grappas are distributed by Sagna, which has embraced the cause and is able to convey the history and values of

the product. In 1987, the New York Times defined Romano Levi as a “living national treasure, the uncrowned king of Piedmontese distillation”. Romano is no longer with us, but his story of passion continues thanks to other passionate people.

GRAPPA DI ARNEIS (42% ABV)

Romano Levi always kept a young and fresh grappa available for the railway workers of the local Neive train station. They



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needed it, he said, to work through the cold Langhe nights. The warmth of grappa and its intense, pleasant scent, gave the drinker renewed strength and vigour.

Type: Aged white grappa.

Grape varieties: Arneis DOCG.

Origin and storage of the pomace: the grapes come from producers of Roero Arneis DOCG, on the left bank of the Tanaro river. The pomace, selected fresh and still dripping with must, is fermented according to Serafino Levi's ancient recipe.

Still: discontinuous distillation, in copper, over an open flame

Ageing: in barriques of about 220 litres, in wood with different essences, stored in a room with the right humidity and at a constant temperature of between 14°C and 19°C.

Serving temperature: 14°C

Tasting notes: yellow straw colour with golden reflections, the nose releases hints of ripe white fruits – pear, peach and pineapple. On the palate it has a fresh, smooth and intense flavour.



GRAPPA GENTILE ALLA CAMOMILLA (40% ABV)

Type: with chamomile, slightly aged in acacia wood.

Grape varieties: Nebbiolo Barbaresco DOCG, Dolcetto d'Alba DOC and Barbera d'Alba DOC according to an ancient recipe by Romano Levi found in his diaries.

Origin and storage of the pomace: Neive, Barbaresco, Trezzo, Treiso and Alba. The pomace, selected to be fresh and still dripping with must, mixed according to an ancient recipe by Serafino Levi, is immediately compressed in underground pits in order to obtain a natural tanning that extracts all the aromas and flavours of the grapes.

Still: discontinuous distillation, in copper, over an open flame

Ageing: in wood for six months in classic 700-litre Piedmontese barrels at a constant temperature of between 14°C and 19°C.

Tasting notes: light straw colour with rich and clean aromas and the typical, aromatic notes of chamomile. Engaging on the palate with delicate and persistent floral notes on the finish.

GRAPPA DI MOSCATO (42% ABV)

Type: with moscato, wood-aged.

Grape varieties: Moscato d'Asti DOCG.

Origin and storage of the pomace:



GRAPPA BIANCA (42% ABV)

Grape varieties: Nebbiolo Barbaresco DOCG, Dolcetto d'Alba DOC and Barbera d'Alba DOC.

Origin and storage of the pomace: Neive, Barbaresco, Trezzo, Treiso and Alba. The pomace, selected to be fresh and still dripping with must, mixed according to an ancient recipe by Serafino Levi, is immediately compressed in underground pits in order to obtain a natural tanning that extracts all the aromas and flavours of the grapes.

Still: discontinuous distillation, in copper, over an open flame

Aging: for three years in classic 700-litre Piedmontese barrels, in wood of different essences, stored in a room with the right amount of humidity and a constant temperature of between 14°C and 19°C.

Tasting notes: light straw colour with rich and clean aromas and the typical, aromatic notes of the grape varieties. Engaging on the palate with delicate and persistent notes of white flowers on the finish.

Neive, Trezzo, Treiso; DOCG areas. The pomace, selected fresh and still dripping with must, is fermented according to Serafino Levi's ancient recipe.

Still: discontinuous distillation, in copper, over an open flame

Aging: in barriques of about 220 litres, in wood with different essences, stored in a room with the right humidity and at a constant temperature of between 14°C and 19°C.

Tasting notes: light straw colour with rich and clean aromas and the typical, aromatic notes of the grape varieties. Engaging on the palate with delicate and persistent notes of white flowers on the finish.

GRAPPA PAGLIERINA (42% ABV)

Grape varieties: Nebbiolo Barbaresco DOCG, Dolcetto d'Alba DOC and Barbera d'Alba DOC.

Origin and storage of the pomace: Neive, Barbaresco, Trezzo, Treiso and Alba. The pomace, selected to be fresh and still dripping with must, mixed according to an ancient recipe by Serafino Levi, is immediately compressed in underground pits in order to obtain a natural tanning that extracts all the aromas and flavours of the grapes.

Still: discontinuous distillation, in copper, over an open flame

Ageing: for five years in classic 700-litre Piedmontese barrels in wood of different



essences, stored in a room with the right amount of humidity and at a constant temperature of between 14°C and 19°C.

Tasting notes: light straw colour with rich and clean aromas with typical, aromatic notes of the grape varieties. Engaging on the palate with delicate and persistent notes of white flowers on the finish.

GRAPPA DI BARBARESCO (42% ABV)

Grape varieties: Nebbiolo Barbaresco DOCG.

Origin and storage of the pomace: Neive, Barbaresco, Trezzo, Treiso and Alba. The pomace, selected to be fresh and still dripping with must, is immediately compressed in underground pits in order to

obtain a natural tanning that extracts all the aromas and flavours of the Nebbiolo grapes.

Still: discontinuous distillation, in copper, over an open flame

Ageing: at least 36 months in classic 700-litre Piedmontese oak barrels, stored in a room with the right amount of humidity and at a constant temperature of between 14°C and 19°C.

GRAPPA AL BAROLO (42% ABV)

Origin and storage of the pomace: Barolo, Serralunga, La Morra, Grinzane Cavour. The pomace, selected to be fresh and still dripping with must, mixed according to an ancient recipe by Serafino Levi, is imme-



Still: discontinuous distillation, in copper, over an open flame

Ageing: at least 38 months in classic 700-litre Piedmontese oak barrels, stored in a room with the right amount of humidity and at a constant temperature of between 14°C and 19°C.

GRAPPA AMBRATA (50% ABV)

Grape varieties: Nebbiolo Barbaresco DOCG, Dolcetto d'Alba DOC and Barbera d'Alba DOC.

Origin and storage of the pomace: Neive, Barbaresco, Trezzo, Treiso and Alba. The pomace, selected to be fresh and still dripping with must, mixed according to an ancient recipe by Serafino Levi, is immediately compressed in underground pits in order to obtain a natural tanning that extracts all the aromas and flavours of the grapes.

Still: discontinuous distillation, in copper, over an open flame

Aging: for five years in classic 700-litre Piedmontese barrels, in wood of different essences, stored in a room with the right amount of humidity and at a constant temperature of between 14°C and 19°C.

diately compressed in underground pits in order to obtain a natural tanning that extracts all the aromas and flavours of the Nebbiolo grapes.



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MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

The ancient Zibibbo brandy recognised as a Bolivian national spirit

BY FABIO BACCHI

After a long and complicated bureaucratic process, US authorities have completed the regulatory procedure by which singani has been recognised as a Bolivian national distillate. In January 2020, the United States and Bolivia signed an initial agreement where each agreed to recognise bourbon and Tennessee whiskey as American products on the one hand, and singani as a

Bolivian spirit on the other.

In August 2021, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) recognised singani as a Bolivian brandy. In February, definitive clearance was received from all US federal agencies (Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, Food and Drug Administration), thus allowing promotional and information campaigns aimed at US consumers.



The matter was raised in 2014 by Steven Soderbergh, director of the film Ocean's Eleven and a producer of singani with his Singani 63 brand together with Casa Real, a major Bolivian singani producer which has been in business for a century. The director was introduced to singani in 2008 while working in Bolivia on a film about Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Soderbergh was struck by an unexpected electrifying effect: "I had never tasted anything like it." The director started a "Recognise Singani" campaign and a petition was launched in the USA.



In 2018, the Bolivian government officially supported this campaign by becoming its co-sponsor and the result of the petition was presented to the TTB. The result represents a very important milestone in the long history of the Bolivian national distillate.

But what is singani? This ancient brandy is obtained by distilling one of the oldest known grape varieties, the white Muscat of Alexandria, also known as Zibibbo. It is more rarely made from Mollar grapes, grown at altitudes no lower than 1,600





LEADING ROLES
 ABOVE,
 DIRECTOR
 STEVEN
 SODERBERGH.
 RIGHT, THE
 MUSCAT OF
 ALEXANDRIA.



meters in the southern departments of Chuquisaca, La Paz, Tarija and Potosí.

The Muscat of Alexandria gives the spirit an intense floral aroma that is sensed as soon as the bottle is opened. This grape has ancient roots, and its area of origin is the region of the great city of Alexandria, at the western end of the Nile delta, in Egypt. The ancient Egyptians also called it “bee

grape” because of its floral aroma which attracted bees. Less famous than Muscat Blanc, Muscat of Alexandria is widely used to make sweet or fortified wines.

It seems that the name “singani” comes from one of the first estates to grow vines around Potosí, the highest city in the world and a UNESCO heritage site (at over 4,000 meters). At the time, it was farmed



by Spanish Jesuit monks who followed the Spanish colonialists. In fact, the birth of this un-aged wine distillate is attributed to the Spaniards who at the time spread the farming of vines.

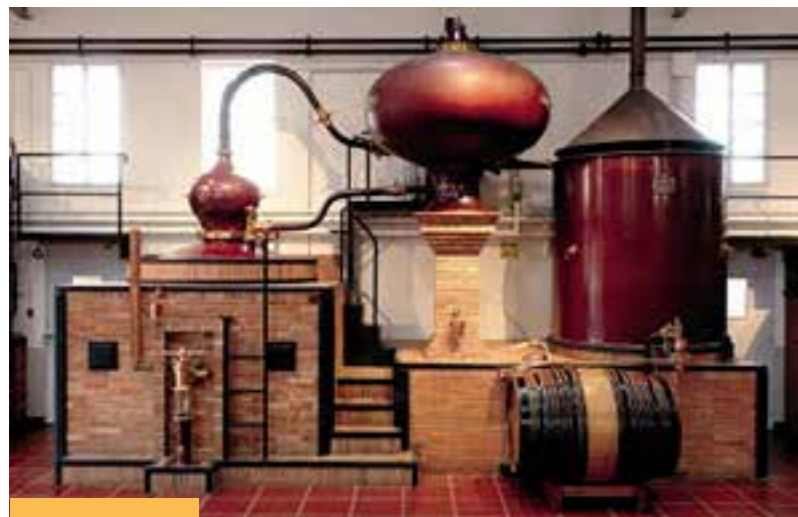
Deeply rooted in the local culture, singani was produced by tradition and for domestic use for centuries. Inaccurately, we tend to think that singani is similar to pisco but there is a significant difference. To make pisco, different grapes – white and red – are used, while in singani only the white Muscat of Alexandria is used. Thanks to techniques that have increased the yield and the quality of the grapes, over the last sixty years production has been upscaled to industrial levels.

An important date is 1925, the year when the Sociedad Agricola Ganadera e Industrial de Cinti and the Casa Real distillery were founded. The latter is managed by the fourth generation of the Granier family and is the largest winery in Bolivia. The distillery is in the Santa Ana region, 18km from the city of Tarija at an altitude of 1,850 meters.

Another important year was 1992, the year in which the Bolivian government instituted a Singani Denomination of Origin,



through which production areas were also defined. Singani production begins with harvesting of the grapes which are then separated from their stalks. Fermentation with local yeasts lasts about a week. The aromas are preserved in the thick skin of the grapes which protects them from the heat of the sun at high altitude. During



PRODUCTION
TOP, THE CASA REAL DISTILLERY. ABOVE, THE CHARENTAIS STILL. RIGHT, LUIS GRANIER.

fermentation, the pomace is separated out and the liquid is decanted for natural clarification, which precedes double distillation using the Charentais method. The must is never allowed to exceed 20°C to preserve the volatile aroma and freshness.

A very aromatic spirit is obtained with an alcohol content of between 70% and

Sociedad Agrícola, Ganadera Industrial Cinti
S. A. G. I. C.
PROPIEDADES: CULPINA, SAN PEDRO, INCAHUASI.

Vista panorámica de la Hacienda y Fábricas de Culpina
VINOS "SAN PEDRO"
SINGANI "SAN PEDRO"
ALCOHOLES "TORO"
AGRICULTURA - GANADERIA



PRODUCTION
ALONGSIDE, THE VINEYARDS OF CASA REAL.

74%, which is diluted to 40% with pure, calcium-free water, before being bottled. At this stage, the distillate rests between eight and nine months in inert containers and during this period the singani acquires an oxidative maturity thanks to which aromas and flavours blend with each other. A limited amount of singani is rested in

oak barrels.

Currently, the singani produced is consumed almost entirely in Bolivia but the future brings hope for new prospects in extending the product's reach. Singani has a smooth, very floral and fruity character, with a non-invasive alcoholic note and is very versatile in mixing. In Bolivia, singani



COCKTAIL
ABOVE,
A CHUFLAY.
RIGHT,
A YUNGUENO.



is drunk mixed into Bolivia's national cocktail, the Chufly.

Between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century in Bolivia, the Bolivia Railway Co was developing the country's railway network, employing the skills of many Englishmen. The English technicians and engineers drank a gin-based drink that they had brought with them. This drink was called Gin & Gin, made by mixing gin and ginger ale in a very refreshing drink. Once stocks ran out, it was hard to find gin in Bolivia, but the solution was easy: the gin was replaced with a local brandy, singani. Now it just needed a name. In railway jargon, the term "short-fly" is used to indicate a temporary track, usually built around a flooded area, fault or other obstacle as a detour.

This term was quickly associated with the drink, meaning that singani was the

temporary drink that would temporarily replace gin. The local population would later make the drink their own, and the term "short-fly" changed into the more Bolivian sounding Chufly, giving rise to the "Trago Emblem de Bolivia" (the iconic drink of Bolivia).

How is a Chufly made? Quite simply, in a highball by mixing singani, ginger ale and lime juice, on the rocks. When mixing singani with orange juice, you get Yungueno. For a Sucumbè, a hot drink, add singani to hot milk flavoured with spices such as cinnamon and cloves.

"We trust that sooner or later singani, the proud "spirit of the Bolivian highlands", will cross national borders. Because we believe that a product with such a long history and strong identity, that is impossible to replicate elsewhere, deserves to have a place in bars around the world."



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SINGAPORE MIX

A seductress of bartenders, the Asian island confirms its place as a cocktail capital

BY **BASTIAN CONTRARIO**

It is clear to everyone these days that Singapore, the city-state of Southeast Asia, is not just about Singapore Slings. In fact, it seems the Singapore Sling was not invented by Ngiam Tong Boon, let alone at the Raffles Hotel, at least not in its original version. Truth be told, it seems that the wonderful Asian hotel is no longer even the best place to drink it. As I always say, never ask Google for a good drink or even its history.

Today, after New York and London, Singapore is considered the new cocktail

capital of the world. Is it, really? And how come? Unlike the two historic cocktail Meccas, the Asian island does not have a strong mixing tradition behind it, no history that intertwines with that of major spirits or iconic cocktails. So, what has led it to be defined today as one of the most sought-after destinations by bartenders from all over the world? To find out, I had Gregory Camillò make me an excellent cocktail. He knows drinks, never mind Google!

Gregory, who returned from Singapore

just a few months ago, is a young bartender of not even thirty years of age. However, he has a savoir faire and a “seniority of service” which already make him a seasoned professional. Passionate about mixing and cooking, proudly Calabrian by birth, he loves to keep busy and being more than about appearance, at a time when it seems more important to talk about bartending on social media than to practice it.

Gregory worked in Dubai, then in London with Tony Conigliaro’s team at Bar Termini. He was also head bartender of the Jerry Thomas Speakeasy in Rome, before flying to Singapore to manage the Gibson Bar of the Jigger & Pony Group. Now he is back in Rome for an innovative project, once again with the Jerry Thomas Project.

Singapore seems to be an irresistible seductress for bartenders, a lively market with a very strong demand for professionals which in recent years has managed to

attract well-established barmen from all over Europe and beyond. So, I asked him straight: why are you all going to Singapore? Gregory confirmed that over the last decade the island state has managed to establish itself as one of the cocktail capitals of the world and that today it boasts a long list of internationally recognised bars. He also adds that it does not surprise him in the least. Considering the local culinary culture, one which certainly was created recently, “you realise that it is peculiar and interesting, because it unites different cultures of Southeast Asia in a small city-state. Added to this are the higher levels of income enjoyed by its inhabitants.” A cultural melting pot, then, that is combining various Asian but also Western cultures (and at the end of this article I will tell you how the Singapore Sling is also the result of this incredible mix). A city where you can find everything and where, above all,



PEOPLE
GREGORY
CAMILLO.

enough money circulates to afford almost everything.

Salaries in Singapore are high, but the cost of living is also high, so it is not the lure of easy money that drives so many bartenders to Singapore. Gregory explains, “At a certain point in my professional and personal life I felt the need to experience customs and traditions that were far removed from mine. I’ve always challenged my comfort zone and wanted to take on new points of view. Travelling already helps you to think outside the box, to live while travelling and to travel while living, continuously assembling and reassembling the same box.”

Gregory, like other new ‘Marco Polos’ of the bar world I have had the pleasure of speaking to, was also particularly impressed by the extremely corporate and modern management of Singapore bars, which is very different to the often poorly organised and visionless Italian management. In Asia, he tells me, “managers are managers and the skills required and expected are always the same, whether you

are managing a company that produces cars or a bar.”

What immediately struck him about Singaporean food & beverage management in particular is the utmost care for the customer. “Working in Singapore we find ourselves constantly reflecting on how to optimise, personalise and enhance the consumer experience in an environment that is always very friendly, but at the same time professional. Co-workers are considered fundamental assets of the bar business. They become a single point of reference in which to continuously invest.” Singapore is a safe and peaceful city, and this is reflected in working environments that are always “very peaceful and friendly. In Singapore, the human value is prioritised.”

To work as a bartender in a country so distant and different from Europe, you also need to re-examine certainties that you take for granted about your customers’ tastes. It was clear to Gregory from his first day on the job in the great South-Eastern metropolis that the European palate is

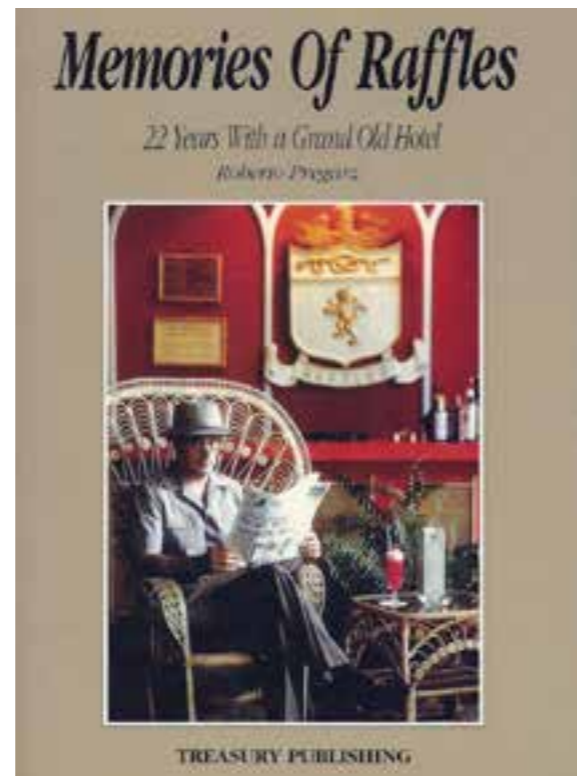


sweeter than the local one. Gregory had to “realign” with his new clientèle. Desserts, for example, are often less sweet than ours.

There is a general preference for drinks with a medium to high alcohol content, where the spirit is the hero. This is certainly a countertrend to what is happening today from London to Paris and Milan, where the trendiest bars offer low-alcohol drinks where tasting the main spirit is al-

most considered a fault. Attention paid to spirits has given us a monumental bar like Atlas, with its vast collection of gins.

The Singapore Sling was inspired by European tastes. The custom of drinking a Gin Sling with a splash of cherry brandy has been attested in Singapore since the beginning of the twentieth century, especially in places frequented by the British. Much later than what Google tells us, in 1967 to be exact, Trieste-born manager



RAFFLES
TOP, THE
ATLAS BAR.
ABOVE,
ROBERTO
PREGARZ.
(CREDIT
TODAYONLINE.
COM).

Roberto Pregarz arrived at Raffles and created a version of the classic drink dedicated to the Raffles hotel. It was he who used the iconic glass that we all know today and added pineapple juice, orange juice and a little Cointreau to gin, lime, cherry brandy and Bénédictine, the classic cocktail recipe. The recipe was therefore sweetened,

made to be more “tropical” and suitable for a foreign clientèle who was more interested in the idea of the exotic than in true local customs.

All this is related by Pregarz himself in his memoirs, and by the accurate research of Professor David Wondrich, with which any Google certainly cannot compete.

Shaking perspectives



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DORA GROSSA

Liqueurs, vermouths and distillates can tell ancient stories seasoned with tradition, artisanal savoir faire and culture. They can take enthusiasts on a stroll through time, to rediscover flavours that were thought to be lost forever.

Doragrossa is a journey to the origins of a Piedmontese story, a delicious taste of that noble Turinese art which masterfully blends herbs and spices and “directs the still” with a mastery recognised throughout Europe.

This heritage of knowledge and tradition has been preserved and handed down over the years, to reach us today. Here we find the roots, the values, the production philosophy and the recipes of the Dora-

grossa liqueurs of Turin.

Turin’s liqueur tradition dates to the 16th century. King Emmanuel Philibert of Savoy moved his kingdom’s capital to the city and, thanks to his foresight and a strong passion for alchemy, he supported the establishment of apothecaries, confectioners and distillers in the district of St. Expeditus (the patron saint of merchants).

The people renamed the ancient road dedicated to the Saint “Dora Grossa”, which in the meantime had become the centre of the art of liqueur making.

The mastery of Turin’s liqueur makers in medicinal elixirs and sumptuous beverages quickly became known throughout Europe. Vibrant trading with distant lands



favoured the arrival of exotic spices which blended with the already rich availability of local ingredients.

The port of Genoa became the hub for trade that passed through the Mediterranean Sea. Turin, surrounded by vast agricultural areas that were rich in herbs, flowers and fruits, including vines, saw rare and, as such, prized spices flow into its squares thanks to the city’s proximity to the port of Genoa. Cooks of the Royal Court, alchemists, pharmacists, liqueurists and distillers gradually developed increasingly refined techniques and businesses, which flourished in the Dora

Grossa district especially. Today this rich and varied range of spices is found in Doragrossa liqueurs.

Through constant and passionate research into liqueur culture, Doragrossa reworks ancient recipes to recreate their sensorial characteristics and reinvent ancient flavours with a modern twist. The Jerry Thomas Speakeasy in Rome, which is part of the project, participates in technical and mixing experimentation. Only carefully selected natural ingredients are used and processed using strictly artisanal processes. The result is a family of products of the highest quality, fruit of



the most advanced practices in the art of mixing that transform certain agricultural excellences of the Mediterranean basin, while carefully observing local food and wine traditions.

Doragrossa includes a family of speciality spirits presented in three distinct ranges. In the Torino range we have Amaro di Torino, Rosolio di Torino, Elixir Rabarbaro, Menta, Menta di Pancalieri and Vermouth di Torino Rosso, spirits that respect recipes and traditions rooted in Piedmont.

A rich variety of spices can be found in Doragrossa Mediterranea, with the Bergamotto, Caffè, Rabarbaro, Chinotto, Violetta and Curaçao Mediterraneo liqueurs, a family of products of the highest quality and the result of the most advanced practices in the art of mixing.

The recipes of Doragrossa Selezioni, Vermouth Bianco and Rosso, Bitters and London Dry Gin express classic sensorial profiles, ideal in mixing, but never boring, even when enjoyed neat. The packaging and design of the bottles were developed to optimise handling and user functionality, ideal for those who work at a cocktail bar counter.

A pinnacle of excellence, Vermouth di Torino is a great ambassador of Piedmontese tradition. Vermouth di Torino Rosso Doragrossa (18% ABV) is a rich, full-bodied vermouth with great complexity and a distinctive example of the forerunner of premixed cocktails par excellence, based on centuries of Piedmontese tradition, culture and craftsmanship.

The noble combination of a carefully dosed selection of spices, wine and other traditional ingredients leads to a sensory profile that is unique in elegance and structure. It offers balanced and pleasantly bitter sensations of cinchona bark, rhubarb, gentian and chamomile, citrus notes of orange peel, spicy hints of coriander, cinnamon and other balsamic woods, floral and fresh aromas of marjoram, sage and mint. The main botanicals of the aromatic structure are wormwood, cinchona, rhubarb, orange, cinnamon, mint, gentian and chamomile.

It is an excellent vermouth, to be enjoyed neat, chilled, with lemon zest, in a coupette or in a small wine glass. It is also perfect as an ingredient in premium cocktails.

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LOVE, PATIENCE AND CUBAN RUM

The story of a special distillate
Between mysticism and perfection

BY ALEC SUTHERLAND

In Falla, a heat-soaked town in central Cuba, three women draw on long traditions to make one of the finest rums in the world. Their key ingredients? Love and patience.

At 7am a gunshot would break the hazy morning air in the sunbaked central Cuban town of Falla. On the steps of the Central Adelaida sugar mill Miguel 'Miguelito' Falla would stand holding a still smoking pistol.

"Anyone who arrived after that shot wouldn't work that day," says Aurora Elgis Villares Núñez, whose husband Ernesto began work as the mill's accountant in 1953.

She remembers those early days as

she gazes from her low-slung, elegant plantation house, one of around 20 that line a wide avenue leading to the entrance of the mill. Beyond the factory lies La Progresiva distillery where, these days, the finest Cuban rums are produced.

It is the zafra, the sugar harvest, and cane is arriving from fields that spread out in all directions. A side product of sugar making is molasses, which is then distilled and aged in American oak until it becomes La Progresiva, among the greatest rums in all Cuba, and therefore the world.

On the avenue other gardens are now overgrown, royal palms skewering the sky, vast ceiba shading all else. But Aurora's



is well tended, full of agave, verbena and other useful herbs.

In her sitting room, the paint on the walls has faded but the memories hanging there are powerful. They show personal moments in an island history full of poetry and heroism, struggle and triumph.

There is Aurora and Ernesto on their wedding day, proud and handsome. There is Ernesto in baseball gear. He had been offered a contract to play in the United States, but chose not to take it up. "He felt working here was more stable," Aurora says.

It is Ernesto, frail now, who tells the story of the women of Falla wanting a bigger part in the town's industry 70 years

before. "In 1953, there was a delegation of women who went to see Miguelito to ask, 'why don't you employ any women?'"

Back then the Falla family owned the mill and the town that carried their name. Miguelito was opinionated and quick to anger. "He said that the reason they don't employ women is because if any of the family get ill - a brother, a father, a child - the woman has to go and attend to them."

Miguelito was swept away by revolution, but Aurora and Ernesto remain. Now, early each morning, Yaibexy Marrero Alverez cycles past their house to her work as general manager of the distillery and vice president of La Progresiva's parent, Ron Vigia, a joint venture between the Cuban



government and the Island Rum Company.

That represents progress in a landscape tattooed by history. She passes simple houses topped out in corrugated iron on roads where wagons are drawn by oxen, overtaken by horse-drawn traps, or 'spiders'.

Yaibexy was born and bred in Falla, to a family aged in the workings of the sugar mill. "My grandfather Teodoro was a carpenter, uncle Alegro was a mechanic, and my mother was a teacher at a school within the complex," she laughs.

The rum master, or maestra de ron, the woman who creates the 'liquids', as rum makers like to call their creations, is Maily Acosta Molina. The chemical engineer, the maestra's right hand, is Dolores de Corte Castellonos.



Rum mastery is mystical work. Promising candidates for the job are appraised without knowing they are auditioning. An appreciation of flavour is essential, but so is an intimate knowledge of the treasures that lie in the thousands of barrels in the distillery's bodega. In La Progresiva distillery, Maily is the third woman to fill her role, a unique situation in Cuba.

The small bottling plant, the stills, and the offices feel like a campus of calm under the shadow of the sugar mill's huge towers. The gold that is La Progresiva fills squat bottles with elegantly drawn labels that pop with viridescence. Pick one up and it fits the hand like a grenade, full of explosive possibilities.

The cork pulls with a pleasing pop, and as the viscous liquid pours it offers scents as complex as Cuba itself. Sitting back and sipping, La Progresiva's sophistication spreads its warmth after the ini-



tial hit of the alcohol.

The texture of well-aged aguardiente leads the rum by the hand into a wonderful forest filled with all the island's astonishing, sometimes mysterious, fruits, but soaked in a warmth and spice. Many



other flavours are in there too, figs and nuttiness, cinnamon and orange. It feels comfortable and serene, like a dream of Christmas.

In the mill, men lathe heavy bits of metal in their effort to keep the great machines running. But in the distillery, there's an atmosphere of artistic, crafted endeavour. Maily is surrounded by crystal beakers and tubes above shelves of bottles, lesser rums from across the Caribbean.

As Yaibexy looks on, a young man walks into Maily's sunny room, holding a jug of clear liquid which the maestra takes, testing the new spirit's ABV with her long, syringe-like hydrometer. "With women, it's calmer and there is more love and patience," says Yaibexy. "And that's the best way to make rum."

Perhaps Miguelito, firing his gun, was only a blip in the story. Archaeologists use the term 'dark earth' to describe signs of human history as they dig. Dark earth runs deep under La Progresiva's stills.

It's hard to spot in late November when the sugarcane stands 10ft tall, topped off by feathery flowers that sway in the

breeze - but close by was the original Nauyú, a Taino village. As a people the Taino go back to the movement of the continents. Arawak speakers, they emerged from the Andes to move up the chain of the Antilles before reaching Cuba.

They created rancherías - family compounds - that would be handed down the matrilineal line. "In our culture women are important," Rosa, an Arawak speaking Wayuu woman, once told me in a different part of the Caribbean.

"Nauyú would be the name of the first rum produced by the distillery," said Meily Olivarez Pérez, a local historian. That was after Miguelito left. The cane that made it arrives on La Linea del Norte, one of Cuba's august old railways. There are 120 varieties of cane, and it is unloaded and fed upwards through a series of terraces in the mill.

First it is crushed and the guarapo, the juice, is strained out. Guarapo is found in stalls - tiny versions of the mills - along Cuba's roadsides. It is nectar: there is no energy drink as powerful, but it is little known abroad as it sours fast and cannot travel.

In the mill, the guarapo enters super-

heated ovens where it crystallises into sugar that is then sold around the world. The sticky by-product is molasses, a honey that Miguelito would have used to feed cattle, while the workers reserved a small part for their little pot-still.

The Fallas didn't need to make money from rum; sugar made them rich. Across Cuba there are towns built on sugar. They present broad, once prosperous streets to visitors, ornate facades under which country people would hitch their horses.

Aurora takes a walk up the avenue outside the mill, pointing out where the managers used to live. The foliage's endless shades of green are broken by the dusty blue or yellows of colonial era doors and shutters.

"That is where the mill manager was, that was the chief engineer's house." The Falla's own mansion is long gone, a vertiginous palm the only marker. She points in another direction to where Ernesto ruled the baseball diamond, a famous first baseman.

Aurora says she met Ernesto at one of the dances organised by the company when the zafra was complete. It turns

out that their long marriage isn't the only treasure she has kept alive.

We reach a church - the Capilla San Laureano - its white facade hidden behind a vast hibiscus. Inside the heat of the day, the cries of the cockerels, the roar of vehicles, is dulled. Motes of dust barely move in the spiritual air. It is rare to find a church in such pristine condition in Cuba, Catholicism didn't mix with early revolutionary fervour.

"It was looked after by the women who lived here," Aurora says. "During difficult times in our history, the love that everyone has for each other maintains this community."

Each of the church windows contains stained glass that shows the one-time assets of the Falla family, the mill, a Havana bank, a Havana church, an impressive office building, the country house.

It turns out that it would take the departure of the Fallas to create rums that were new and beautiful. After Miguelito had gone, the molasses created by the Central Adelaida sugar mill - soon renamed the Central Enrique Verona - became works of art.



Between the distillery and the mill stands a vast bodega, encased in an exoskeleton of drains the width of a man's shoulders to take the tropical rains from the roof. It was once used to store cane but now it stores treasures.

Walking between the towering doors, the air grows scented and filled with spirits from the past. It feels like a cathedral and is full of ancient barrels.

It was Facundo Bacardi who developed the method behind a perfect Cuban rum. A shopkeeper in the southern Cuban city of Santiago in the mid 19th century, he moved from pot to lateral stills, isolating aguardiente, the powerfully flavoured spirits found in the spectral edges of the best alcohols that emerge from the molasses.

It is a liquid that Maily and the Island Rum Company now make, selling it successfully as part of La Progresiva's sister range, Black Tears. And in the perfectly aged rum that is La Progresiva, it leaves its traces in the warmth of spice and marmalade.

But Dolores, the distillery's chemical engineer, says that although this raw

product is vitally important, it is "the ageing that is crucial."

Many years have passed since Miguelito's departure. For 60 years great rums have been emerging from the La Progresiva distillery's stills, first the eponymous Nauyú, but then others such as Santero, Mulata and Varadero. They were taken to the vast bodega in American oak barrels, creating the maze that now leads back into this history.

This is the resource that Maily knows intimately. As she, Yaibexy and Dolores moved into senior roles, they drew on the history, traditions and atmosphere of Falla, the love of the community that Aurora represents, to create La Progresiva. "To make a good rum, you have to help it grow," says Maily. "It's like a child."

No gunshots now trouble Falla's early morning. Instead these women pass Aurora as she tends to her arden or the church. They step onto land where Taino women lived and loved 1,000 years before them. And then they create the finest rum ever made in Cuba.

That's La Progresiva.

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