

Living

"Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet"
—Jean-Jacques Rousseau, writer of *Pygmalion*



FRUITS AU JUS

By Margaret Swaine

EAUX-DE-VIE, the “waters of life” produced from distilling fruits, berries, flowers, tree buds and very rare botanicals, are the Cinderellas of the spirit world. Hard to find but beautiful, waiting for their moment to shine. I search them out whenever I travel. The treasure hunt is always worth it.

There are the tree fruit- and wild berry-based eaux-de-vie of Switzerland, France, Austria and other European countries, the apple-based Calvados from Normandy in France, the kirsch (morello cherries) of German-speaking regions, the slivovitz (plum) of the Slavic regions. These eaux-de-vie are the very essence of the plant from whence they come – no need for added “natural flavour,” lab-made aromatics or the cloak of sugar. They are dry, not sweet, on the palate and should have pure aromas and tastes of their botanical.

Alsace in the northeast corner of France produces some of the highest quality and varied of all the eaux-de-vie. Getting there is simple now with a high-speed TGV train that goes directly from Paris-Charles de Gaulle airport to Strasbourg in about two-and-a-half hours. The region boasts the Route des Eaux-de-Vie around Vallée de Villé, which takes in ►

Distillerie Massenez, Distillerie Jos. Nusbaumer, Distillerie Au Feu de Bois and Distillerie Meyer.

I visited Distillerie Meyer, established in 1958 in the tiny town of Hohwarth, for my insight and tasting of what can and will be distilled in Alsace. The Meyer family makes more than 30 varieties of distillates including those from rarities such as elderberry, rose hips, pine tips, holly berry and bilberry. On an annual basis, the distillery goes through more than 600 to 700 tons of fruit.

Tree fruits are fermented for an average of three to five weeks and then distilled. Small wild berries are macerated in alcohol. The top of the line, such as its Poire Williams Grande Réserve (pear), which has won many gold medals, are aged four years before release. The fruit flavour becomes more pronounced with time, while the spirit remains crystal clear and colourless.

Other Alsace producers such as Distillerie Miclo make a Poire Williams Grande Réserve, which has a true clean pear nose and distinct pear flavours throughout. Coeur ►



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Drinks

SPARKLING EAUX

Just about any fruit eau-de-vie can be added to bubbly to jazz it up. Use champagne if you have deep pockets. However, Prosecco, Spanish Cava or a Crémant de Loire will do fine.

- 1 oz Poire William (or your choice of another fruit- or berry-based eau-de-vie)
- Sparkling wine

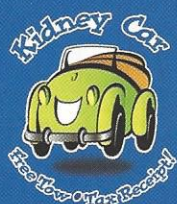
Pour the chilled eau-de-vie into a flute glass. Top with chilled sparkling wine. Garnish with a slice of whatever fruit you are favouring. If you like a little sweetness, a sugar cube with a dash of bitters in the bottom of the flute before you add the liquids will do the trick.

▲ CORPSE REVIVER (#2)

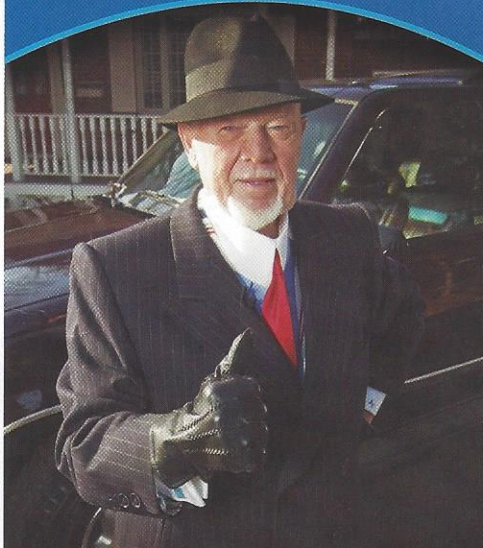
From Angostura's Professional Mixing Guide comes this apple-focused drink.

- 1½ oz brandy
- 1 oz Calvados or apple eau-de-vie
- ½ oz sweet vermouth
- Dash Angostura orange bitters
- Thin slice apple
- Lemon twist

In a mixing glass, muddle brandy, Calvados, vermouth and bitters. Fill with ice and stir until the glass becomes frosted. Strain into a cocktail glass and garnish with a thin slice of apple floated on the surface with a lemon twist.



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de Chauffe Framboise Sauvage is the very essence of wild raspberries. Massenez Vieux Calvados, which has a real apple imprisoned in the bottle, has truly fantastic cider apple flavours that linger intensely.

Closer to home, Dillon's Distillers in Beamsville recently came out with a pear eau-de-vie. It's a natural. Dillon's uses local ingredients such as rose hips and petals to make rose gin, a pinkish coloured sweetened gin that's Canada's answer to the famous sloe gin in England. The pear eau-de-vie is made from 100 per cent Niagara Bartlett (Williams) pears. www.dillons.ca

Sixty-Six Gilead Distillery in Prince Edward County makes hand-

crafted spirits produced entirely on site in small batches from the bounty of nearby farms – including its own. Canadian Pine Vodka was created by distilling fresh pine needles into vodka distilled from whole wheat (as the United Empire Loyalists may have done), capturing an aroma of our forests. This spirit straddles between gin and vodka in flavour profile with a delicate aroma of pine and fresh citrus and floral notes on the palate. www.66gileaddistillery.com

My favourite way to drink eaux-de-vie is chilled and served neat in a small liqueur-type glass. Eaux-de-vie also add a fine stroke of fruitiness to cocktails. It's an elegant way to add fruit, not sweetness, to a drink. ☑



THE MAPLE LEAF

(From Sixty-Six Gilead)

- 1 oz Sixty-Six Gilead Canadian Pine Vodka
- 1 oz fresh lemon juice
- ½ oz maple syrup
- Twist of lemon peel

In an ice-filled shaker, stir vodka, lemon juice and maple syrup. Strain into a cocktail glass and serve with a twist of lemon peel.

BLACK FOREST COCKTAIL

Kirsch is an essential ingredient in a properly made Black Forest cake recipe. Here's a drink version that's a substitute for dessert.

- 1 oz crème de cacao
- 1 oz cherry liqueur
- 1 oz kirsch
- 1 oz cream
- Cherry

In cocktail shaker, shake crème de cacao, liqueur, kirsch and cream. Pour into glass and add a little more cream as a floater. Garnish with a cherry.

THE LUMBERJACK

(From Sixty-Six Gilead)

- ½ oz Sixty-Six Gilead Canadian Pine Vodka
- 1 oz cranberry or pomegranate juice
- 1 tsp Aperol bitters
- Twist of lemon peel
- Sprig of pine

In an ice-filled shaker, stir vodka, juice and Aperol together. Strain into a cocktail glass. Garnish with a twist of lemon and a sprig of pine.