

Not Just for Sipping

The Mixability of Courvoisier Exclusif Expands Cognac's Reach

By Alia Akkam

This October, Courvoisier set its sights on New York, Atlanta and Chicago. The luxury Cognac brand targeted these three metropolitan centers to present Le Nez de Courvoisier, an exclusive multi-sensorial tasting experience open to both trade and consumers. "It's an educational program, an evolution of the concept we launched last year to help people learn about Courvoisier," explains Stacey Simmons, senior brand manager, luxury spirits, Beam Global Spirits & Wine.

Throughout the evening guests sipped XO neat, enjoyed Courvoisier cocktails and then were led through a blindfolded tasting with brand ambassador Stephanie Mills, where they listened to music specially composed for the aroma found in each marque. It is events like these, building awareness of Cognac's versatility in general and Courvoisier's aromatic nuances specifically, that can help push along a category so often pigeonholed.

Cocktail Appeal

"We want to make sure we initiate programming that caters to the urban consumer, but we are also seeing a different audience attracted to Courvoisier now," says Simmons. "It is more of a physiographic; it's not about ethnicity, it's about their state of mind." This Courvoisier drinker is typically a new adult male who has a career as opposed to a job. He might be engaged, have new responsibilities, yet he holds on to the fun, youthful side of his life. In the past, when people 'grew up', it meant a complete lifestyle change. Today they realize that doesn't have to be the case; they just might be hanging out in a lounge instead of a loud club where they can still enjoy their lives and drink Cognac."



One way of attracting this savvy new drinker is through cocktails and Courvoisier's Exclusif, launched softly in 2008, and created primarily for mixing in cocktails. At this summer's Tales of the Cocktail, one of the drinks served up was Beam Global master mixologist Philip Raimondo's Apricot Sidecar. "In theory you can mix any Cognac, but some have a tendency to lose their flavor when they are in a cocktail. With Exclusif the flavor of Cognac still comes through," Simmons points out. Its long, slender bottle reminiscent of wine cues of Cognac's tradition during the Napoleonic era while at the same time provides an eye-catching, portable alternative for today's bartenders. "It's a product that bartenders gravitate towards because it's fun, mixes well and it's easy to handle," says Simmons. "We're not trying to force this cocktail culture; we're leveraging an emerging trend and Exclusif is a step towards the future."

Economic Impact

Overall, the economy has been tough on Cognac. As we've seen with other categories, the on-premise has taken a hit in favor of the off-premise. Simmons says that volume sales are down. "Throughout the Cognac category of luxury." If you look across the different marques, there's more of a decline in



The Apricot Sidecar, a cocktail featuring Courvoisier Exclusif

COURVOISIER EXCLUSIF APRICOT SIDECAR

2 parts Courvoisier Exclusif
1 part fresh lemon sour
1 heaping bar spoon of quality
apricot preserves

*Shake well and serve up. Garnish
with a dried apricot or lemon twist.*

the middle at the VSOP level. VS is seeing the least effects," she continues, attesting that Cognac remains an affordable luxury.

With that sentiment in mind, Courvoisier is capitalizing on the holiday season with distinct VAPs that are "very premium with attractive price points so consumers can take advantage." The premium VS edition includes a leather-wrapped flask; the VSOP is accompanied by snifter glasses; and the super premium XO features an elegant bottle with a glass stopper.

In the coming months, along with promoting Exclusif and its value and mixability, Simmons says Courvoisier is also putting its premium VS front and center: "Moving into 2010 we're going to focus on VS. It's a large percentage of our volume and we want to take care of our consumers." ■