

Revisions to definitions of brandy legislated

The South African Wine and Spirits Board recently legislated revisions to the definitions of premium brandy.



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The changes in the law seek to protect brandy's position in the local market by enforcing stricter requirements on how two styles of brandy - vintage and potstill - are made.

Potstill brandies, which previously could include a maximum of 10% unmatured wine spirit, must now contain 100% potstill brandy. Vintage brandy must now be aged in oak casks no larger than 340 litres for a full eight years at least. This applies to the potstill and non-potstill contents.

"The revision of the SA brandy definitions was put forward to The Wine and Spirits Board after discussions with key players in the industry," said SA Brandy Foundation director, Christelle Reade-Jahn.

Direct competition

"Top-end potstill brandy competes directly with single malt whiskies and cognac. Single malts must be 100% malt spirit and cognacs must be 100% pot distilled. The local brandy industry wanted similarly stringent parameters for what constitutes a pot still brandy to reflect the already extremely high standard of our offerings," Reade-Jahn said.

She said the new legislation provided a greater differentiation in the characters of vintage brandy and potstill brandy.

"Vintage brandy should have a distinctive wood maturation characters, while pot stills are fuller bodied on the palate."

"These changes, which the industry has been adhering to since 2009, take an already excellent product to new levels," Reade-Jahn said. This theory was proven twice in July, when the Stellenbosch-based Van Ryn's Distillery 15 year old Fine

Cask Reserve won the 2014 International Spirits Challenge trophy for Best Worldwide Brandy for the second time since 2010, and the KWV 12 year old won the Best Brandy Trophy at the International Wine and Spirits Competition.

New brandies

Chairman of the SA Brandy Foundation and Distell's Luxury Brands director, Caroline Snyman, said the premiumisation of spirits was a global phenomenon also experienced in the South African market. "This has resulted in the introduction of a number of new potstill and vintage brandies of excellent quality to the South African market," she said.

The total value of the brandy industry last year was estimated at some R3.5bn. The brandy industry is key to the country's grape-growing and wine-making industries - for every one litre of brandy made, five litres of wine is required.

Peadar Hegarty, vice-chairman of the SA Brandy Foundation and strategic director at KWV said the latest changes were a positive development, giving a clear indication to consumers about the brandy styles and quality. "This will benefit South African brandy only if we apply the same strict controls to spurious imported products. It is now important that the industry develops awareness and education about the exacting standards to which our South African brandies are produced."

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