

Van Ryn's: A rich golden treasure

 [Bylise van den Berg](#) 12 Aug 2014

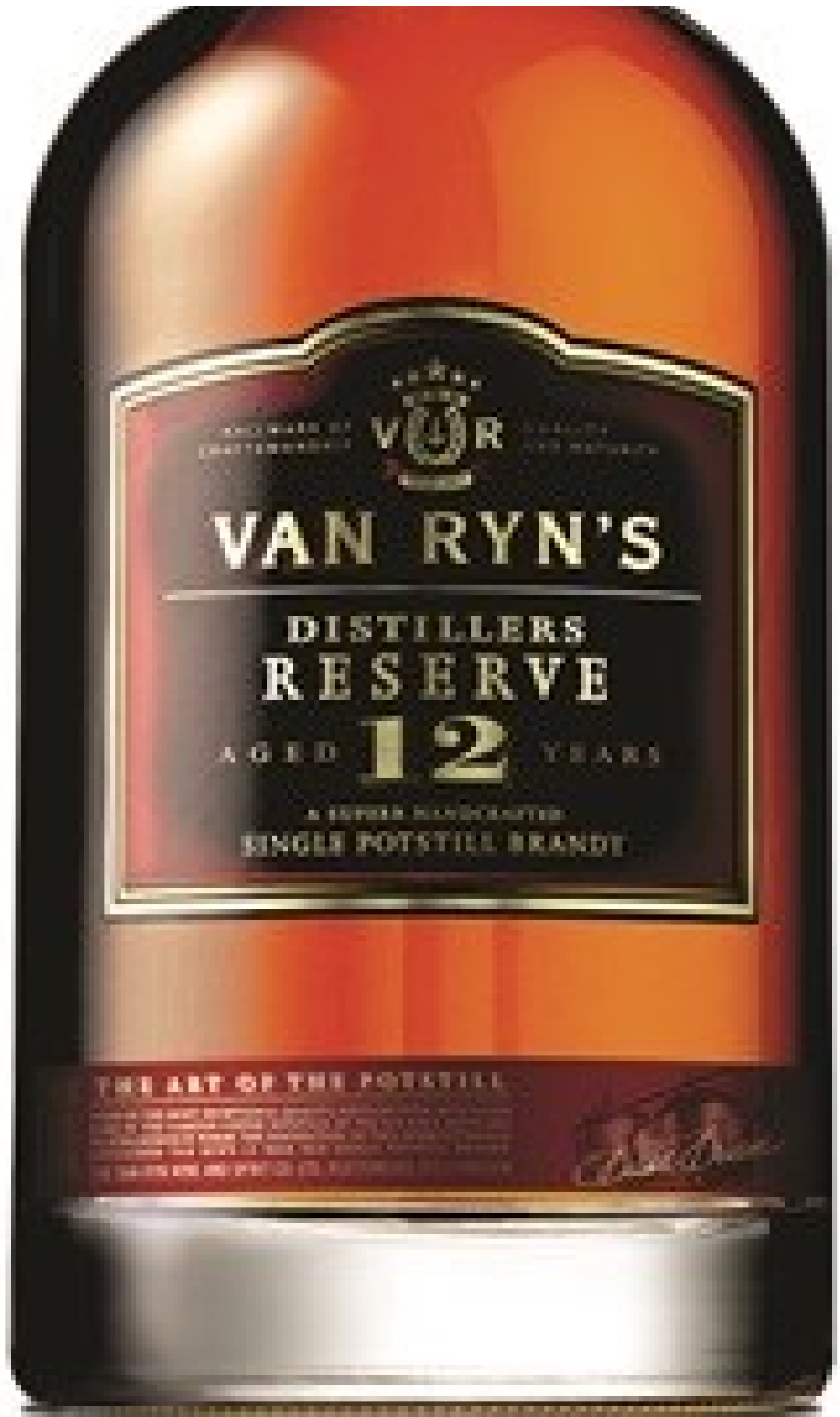
When it comes to chocolate and wine, cheese and wine, chocolate and beer, I'm sure most people by now have a "been there done that" attitude. Pairings have been a hot trend for a while now. My most recent experience was, however, quite unique - a brandy and food pairing at Van Ryn's distillery in Stellies.

Not only were new taste buds awakened, but I actually learnt a *lot*. Few alcoholic beverages have such an interesting history like brandy does. Just a quick history lesson for those who don't know, the discovery of brandy maturation was quite accidental. More than 400 years ago in Fort La Rochelle, France, barrels of distilled wine stood ready and waiting to be exported, but due to a war that broke out, those barrels were forgotten and left to lie, undisturbed, until years later the colourless 'firewater' had transformed into a rich golden treasure.

South African brandies have reportedly earned their top international reputations for their consistent excellent performance in international as well as local competitions.

Van Ryn's has won the International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC) Worldwide Best Brandy title four times and has won the International Spirits Competition (ISC) Best Brandy trophy twice, the most any South African Brandy producer has achieved over the past 8 years. It's therefore quite obvious that I couldn't decline seeing what exactly goes into its process of producing such great award-winning brandies, as well as tasting them.





ESTABLISHED 1825
V R
SPELT WHISKY

VAN RYN'S

**DISTILLERS
RESERVE**

AGED **12** YEARS

A SMOOTH HANDBLENDED
SINGLE POT STILL WHISKY

THE ART OF THE POT STILL

Van Ryn's Distillers Reserve is a smooth, handblended single pot still whisky. It is made from a combination of malted barley and wheat, and is aged for 12 years in oak casks. The result is a whisky with a rich, complex flavor and a smooth finish.







ESTABLISHED 1872
V.O.R. QUALITY
THE HISTORY

VAN RYN'S

FINE CASE
RESERVE

AGED 15 YEARS

A SUPER HANDCRAFTED
SINGLE POT STILL BRANDY

THE WISDOM OF OUR AGING

Our 15-year-old brandy is a true masterpiece of craftsmanship and patience. It is the result of a long and careful aging process, which allows the brandy to develop a rich and complex flavor profile. The result is a brandy that is both smooth and powerful, with a depth of character that is truly remarkable.



The tour

A tour of the distillery is quite insightful and nothing can prepare your nose for the range of different, strong aromas it will encounter. The building in itself is a masterpiece, dating back to 1845, when the Dutch immigrant Jan van Ryn arrived at the Cape.



I was educated about the complete process - from the moment the wine arrives, to where it gets stored, how it's then double distilled in copper potstills after which it's matured for a minimum of three years in barrels of different sizes to give different flavours and tastes.

One of my biggest highlights was meeting Neville, the cooper, and seeing what exactly goes into the of making a barrel - with the hand. I was extremely impressed with his craftsmanship, precision and professionalism and it's really a part of Van Ryn's tour that you *have* to experience!



Neville making a barrel

The tastes

After the tour, I met up with master distiller at Van Ryn, Marlene Bester, for our food and brandy pairing.

We were started off with a fresh green salad with roasted pecan nuts, dried cranberries, biltong, black pepper feta and chevin, topped with balsamic vinaigrette and paired with Van Ryn's 12 year old brandy. This was followed by chicken tagine with couscous and veggies, paired with Van Ryn's 15 year old. I was amazed at the different flavours that was complimented both in the food as well as the brandies through the pairing.



Our meal was perfectly rounded off with Van Ryn's delectable, moist chocolate cake paired with Van Ryn's 20 year old. Even though cake and brandy seemed like the strangest combination, these two really go well together. I personally however still prefer my sweet stuff on its own, with no interference...



Bester also shared the story of the making of [Van Ryn's Au.Ra](#), the oldest potstill brandy produced in South Africa with components aged up to 30 years. Truly a special occasion, only 107 bottles were produced to mark the Distillery's 107 years of operation. They sold for R16,000 each!

At Van Ryn's you actually feel like you are walking into a different era, with some modern touches here and there. It's incredible to see how much of the past two centuries have been preserved here and also, obviously, to experience the making of some of South Africa's best brandies.

Van Ryn's Distillery is located in the heart of the Vlootenburg Valley in Stellenbosch. For more, go to www.vanryns.co.za.

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out [Passing Stories](#)). She is also the editor of [Go & Travel](#), a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work here and here. Contact Ilse through her website here. View my profile and articles...

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