

October 2018 Update: Anatomy of a Brandy Distillery Germain-Robin

An article describing a visit to Germain Robin, a world class brandy distillery, located in Redwood Valley, Mendocino County, can be found elsewhere on this website under the Services section¹.



The Germain Robin brandy operation began in the 1980s and is operated as a craft distillery using the methods Mr. Robin learned growing up in Cognac, France. Germain Robin is a hands-on batch operation whose success was highly dependent on the skill of the master distiller. A picture of the alembic (pot) still is shown to the left, a full description is given on the "Sources" page. The large tank on the right is the condenser where the

product is cooled and delivered. The pot still method is not high throughput process which is usually reflected in the cost of the finished product.

The original article ended with the report that the Germain Robin distillery survived the October 2017 Redwood Valley fire in Mendocino County. Most of the fire damages were concentrated on the east side of Highway 101, the main north-south artery. Fortunately for Germain Robin it is located on the west side of the highway so escaped any major damage.

The Sale of Germain Robin to E & J Gallo

The sale of Germain Robin to E & J Gallo of Modesto was noted in the original article posted on this website. A



more detailed account of the sale of Germain Robin to Gallo was given in August of 2017 in a Wine Enthusiast article by Virginie Boone². This article noted that "Gallo acquired the brand, its inventory of aged and aging brandies, and other finished goods. Some of the brandies date back three decades and are made from a

wide variety of grapes". One can get a feel for the size of this inventory from the picture of the aging warehouse, above.

The spirits trade is showing renewed interest around brandy as a product and are heavily promoting it as the "new" spirit for mixed drinks. The leading producers in the US with the top three brandies are Gallo's E&J, Constellation's Paul Masson. And

¹ <http://norvellnelson.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Anatomy-of-a-Brandy-Distillery-1.pdf>

² <https://www.winemag.com/2017/08/17/gallo-buys-california-brandy-distiller-germain-robin/>

Heaven Hill's Christian Brothers. Another smaller brand is that of Korbel in Sonoma County. The use of brandy as a mixer appears, at present, to be centered in Wisconsin and Gallo is trying to expand this market with the introduction of a "dedicated" product for this trade with a new brand, "Saloon Strength Argonaut" brandy³. The Argonaut comes in at 45.5% ABV vs 40% for the usual product.

The production of this brandy is planned to be accomplished using twenty pot stills made by Pruhlo of Cognac, France, as is the still at Germain Robin, shown at the top of this article. This facility is one previously owned by Suntory. I expect that there is probably some guidance for this operation coming from Ansley Cole and Joe Corley of Germain Robin. A stated goal of this operation is to produce a product that is lighter, fresher and fruitier compared to the big three noted above.

October 30, 2018 Update

An email from Ansley Cole was received today noting that there was a bit of uncertainty in the distribution of some of Germain Robin's product brandies as none have been sold on the wholesale market since August of 2017. However, it appears that Caddell & Williams, the original Germain Robin distributor in Ukiah, California, still (sorry) has the full line of Germain Robin products available for sale⁴.

Norvell Nelson
Lakewood CO
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³ <https://www.nightclub.com/industry-news/new-brandy-town-old-brandy-style>

⁴ <https://caddellwilliams.com/cognac-germain-robin/>