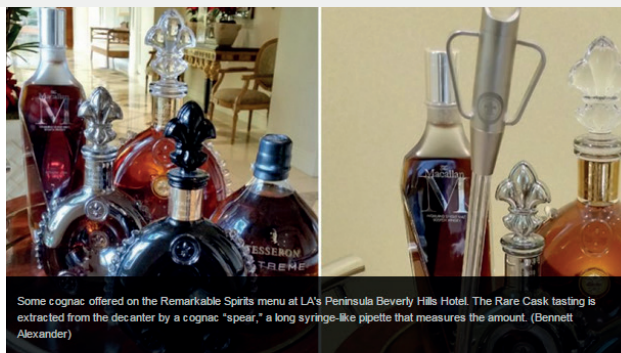




SPIRITS

Get your own pour of a \$90,000 bottle of cognac



Some cognac offered on the Remarkable Spirits menu at LA's Peninsula Beverly Hills Hotel. The Rare Cask tasting is extracted from the decanter by a cognac "spear," a long syringe-like pipette that measures the amount. (Bennett Alexander)

No one would fault you for your look of shock upon reading the "Remarkable Spirits" menu at the bar at the [Peninsula Hotel in Beverly Hills](#). After all, how often do you see \$800 as the price listed for a cognac, even a very fine one. Then, by the time you've gotten to the bottom of the menu, you see that the "pricing is per half ounce, poured tableside." Half ounce? As in by weight? Exactly.

The yield of this Rare Cask yielded only enough to fill 738 Baccarat black crystal decanters with 22-carat rose gold on the necks.

On a recent evening, I had the opportunity to meet Michael Ploetz, the Peninsula's director of food and beverage and the mad genius behind my new adventure with the twice-distilled French nectar. It's an honor Ploetz himself has not yet enjoyed.

"I want the best spirits, the best cocktails, for this bar," Ploetz explained. "So, I collected special bottles that you can't get anywhere else."

The Club Bar at Peninsula has one of only two collections of Remy Martin, Louis XIII Rare Cask 42, 6 (that's a reference to the 42.6% alcohol by volume), the \$800 pour; Louis XIII, Black Pearl Limited Edition, listed at \$630 for that half-ounce pour; and Louis XIII at \$115. The other similar assortment is to be found at London's Dorchester Hotel.

"The sum of the parts," Ploetz regaled, "create a magical experience. It helps that they're very rare." Well, yes, they're kept under lock and key at the hotel. The Rare Cask, perhaps the most "magical," is thought to be available now only from a private seller and the bottle price has been estimated as high as \$90,000, though you might get it for half that at the Peninsula. Each decanter contains nearly 24 ounces by volume. Tasting at the Club Bar is your chance to "test-drive" the cognac for considerably less.

Bottles of cognac are generally blended from different casks, each of which contains different cognacs. The final cognac in the bottle of Rare Cask, however, comes from just one cask that contains more than 1,200 components and is more than 100 years old. This was the second bottling of single-cask cognac for Remy Martin in more than 140 years. The yield of this Rare Cask yielded only enough to fill 738 Baccarat black crystal decanters with 22-carat rose gold on the necks. Each carries its own number and is boxed behind sliding doors. Open them and the case lights up behind the bottle.

Bottles of cognac are generally blended from different casks, each of which contains different cognacs. The final cognac in the bottle of Rare Cask, however, comes from just one cask that contains more than 1,200 components and is more than 100 years old. This was the second bottling of single-cask cognac for Remy Martin in more than 140 years. The yield of this Rare Cask yielded only enough to fill 738 Baccarat black crystal decanters with 22-carat rose gold on the necks. Each carries its own number and is boxed behind sliding doors. Open them and the case lights up behind the bottle.

The Rare Cask tasting is extracted from the decanter by a cognac "spear," a long syringe-like pipette that measures the amount. That is then pushed into a special glass and weighed. A half-ounce. Hold the glass at your waist and dip your head so that the aroma is intercepted before you actually take a sip. Caramel, warmth, plums. The first sip is not harsh, as some cognac can be. Rare Cask is simultaneously intense and silky. There is an herbal quality at the end that some have likened to tobacco.

The Black Pearl Limited Edition (\$630), also from a single barrel with cognac no less than 40 years old, was more floral and a little spicy, but light as a feather on the palate, though possessing many of the same characteristics as the Rare Cask. Only 786 bottles of the Black Pearl Limited Edition were produced.

The final tasting from Remy Martin is the Louis XIII (\$115). I found this more familiar, detecting citrus, cedar and a more notable tobacco spiciness. Ploetz is surprised when I tell him this is the one I like the most. Perhaps it's because I've had Louis XIII on several occasions and have always enjoyed it, though I have also always found that I taste something different every time.

Remy Martin has been around since 1724. In addition to the trio from Remy, I also was able to sample two pours from Cognac Tesseron, the Extreme and Lot 90. These two were almost as different in style to Remy Martin as they were to each other. Tesseron's origins date back to 1905.

The Tesseron Extreme, Ploetz explained is his favorite of those he's sampled because it has a nuttiness and oakiness that evoke Spanish brandies. I found it started smoothly and gained strength as it played on the palate, finally finishing softly, but lingering. I certainly noted the oak.

The Tesseron Lot 90 was, by comparison with all the others, a much simpler cognac. One could say it was young, but it might be more accurate to say it was fresh and forward. Okay, it was young. There was a very recognizable fruity and herbal force that one finds in less expensive cognac, the kind that sometimes give your tongue a little bite at the beginning. Not bad, but I'm grateful this came last.

In all, I've just had about two-and-a-half ounces of cognac priced at \$1,700. It was a unique experience. I will remember it fondly, though I'm not sure how to value it. Of course, that's something you can decide for yourself next time you're in Beverly Hills.