

Cognac Croizet Dinner Experience 2013

Food by Aria Restaurant and Bar, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Auckland

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Cognac Croizet 'Cuvée Léonie'

Most of us haven't heard of this cognac house, such is the strength of the major brands. But like other beverages, wine and beer, there is certainly a world beyond the big names.

Founded in 1805, Croizet is one of the oldest cognac houses and holds the honour of the most expensive cognac ever sold at an auction. A bottle of 1858 'Cuvée Léonie', pre-phylloxera and from a comet vintage (Comet Donati), sold in Shanghai on 24th September 2011 for approximately NZ\$190,000. This sky-high price tag may be out of reach for us mortals, but Croizet do offer a range of exceptional cognacs at prices closer to earth. They have also proved at this delightful dinner that cognacs can be partnered with food, not just a cigar and a leather chair.

Amuse-Bouche

'The Winston' Cocktail



The original 'Winston', made by mixologist Joel Heffernam at Crown's Club 23 in Melbourne, fetched A\$12,500 and holds the Guinness World Record for the most expensive cocktail. It was made using two shots of Croizet 1858 'Cuvée Léonie', Grand Marnier Quintessence, Chartreuse Vieillessement Exceptionnellement Prolongé and a dash of Angostura bitters.

Today's version was made using slightly more affordable versions of Cognac Croizet, Grand Marnier, Chartreuse and Angostura bitters. The herbal Chartreuse influence was noticeable with a nutty cognac undertone and the orange liqueur adding an elegant sweetness. Lovely intensity of flavours, finished with a pleasingly alcoholic warmth. It tasted luxurious.

It was served with a whitebait fritter which was soft, creamy and perfectly seasoned. Probably not the best food and drink match, but it was a wonderful entry to a fabulous evening.

Duck leg and foie gras terrine infused with Croizet Cognac VSOP and Provençal herbs served with toasted brioche and a spiced cherry compote

Croizet VSOP Gold

Croizet VSOP Gold (NZ\$90): A superb drink. Elegant fragrance of citrus, floral and roasted nuts. Excellent focus and silky texture. Intense yet very smooth. It combines delicate fruit intensity with nutty complexity. Beautifully done.



The Dish: The rich, gamey terrine was terrific – densely textured and loaded with meaty, savoury flavours. The accompanying toast and cherry compote added texture and sweetness to this gorgeous chunky terrine. And the cognac matched it very well, highlighting the fruity characters of the drink while contrasting with the savoury notes.

Crayfish, snapper and scampi pot-au-feu with tomato, saffron & Croizet XO broth

Croizet XO Gold

Croizet XO Gold (NZ\$250): Outstanding. Rich, complex aromas of roasted nuts, citrus peel, smoke and floral. It's concentrated and powerful with an expansive mouthfeel, leading to an extremely long, generous finish. Graceful and opulent.



The Dish: The broth provided a wonderful heady fragrance of the shellfish. And the meat, succulent and delicious. Tomato worked brilliantly adding bright notes. Delicate yet richly flavoured. The cognac's flavours matched seamlessly with the dish, although the immense power of the cognac dominated. It's indeed a stunning rendition of cognac.

Braised free-range pork cheek wrapped in savoy cabbage with Granny Smith, Croizet VSOP and cream sauce with *Croizet Single Vintage 1975*

Croizet Single Vintage 1975 (NZ\$1,300): A vintage cognac is a rare treat. This nearly 40-year-old delivered complete gratification. Almost peaty on the nose with roasted nuts, dried apricot, citrus peel, potpourri and a hint of vanilla. Intense and persistent on the palate with a velvety mouthfeel. Superbly long and lingering. A magnificent cognac that needs to be taken very slowly.



The Dish: It was meaty and porky, chewy in the most agreeable way. Flavourful and beautifully seasoned, the meat was the hero. It was perfect with the vintage cognac and the cognac-infused cream sauce. Each mouthful, each sip delivered satisfaction and contentment, and then some.

Angus eye fillet Beef Wellington, with potato gratin, sous-vide baby vegetables and Croizet, veal and garlic jus with *Croizet Special Blend 100-Year-Old*

Croizet Special Blend 100-Year-Old (P.O.A.): This is drinking history. Grapes for this special bottling came from the early 1900s (the youngest component is 100 years old) and it was bottled (only 24 units) for the launch of the Rolls Royce Wraith. The bouquet exhibits beautiful aromas of perfect maturity – roasted nuts, floral, dried fruits, mixed spice and smoke. The palate delivers power and intensity, elegantly framed by soothing texture and sensuous mouthfeel. Multi-layered and very plush; thought-provoking.



The Dish: Meltingly delicious. Perfectly cooked beef wrapped in spinach and chicken liver pâté and crispy pastry, wonderfully enhanced by a gorgeous jus which was so good you could just about drink it straight from the gravy boat. Tender, firm-to-the-bite spring vegetables and creamy potatoes all added to the overall sumptuousness. The dish of the night. And the match with the dramatic cognac was sublime. One of the most delectable experiences I have ever had.

Strawberry and vanilla bean crème brûlée, honey gelato, strawberry sauce and almond biscotti with *Croizet Alexander*

The retro cocktail, ‘Brandy Alexander’, was very ‘80s with its over-the-top richness. This stylish version made with Cognac Croizet still delivered sweet creamy flavours, and partnered the unctuous brûlée and gelato effortlessly. The strawberry sauce countered the sweetness very refreshingly. We then finished the evening with tea/coffee and Christmas cake infused with Croizet VSOP.

Croizet cognacs are indeed special. The overall balance, the persistence of flavour, the complexity of delicate yet powerful flavours all contribute to gratify the senses. Beautiful to drink - on their own or with stylish food.

Exclusive NZ Distributor: www.brandhouse.co.nz

Dinner at Aria Restaurant & Bar: www.crowneplazaauuckland.co.nz

Disclosure: *I am a wine specialist not a cognac expert, although I do thoroughly enjoy this hedonistic drink. And I have attended the dinner as a guest of Brand House, the exclusive distributor of Cognac Croizet, but as always, opinions are mine.*