THE SPIRIT OF HAITI

Year Founded: 2012

Region: Haiti

Importer: Le Maison & Velier

Producer(s): Various

Fun Fact: **In terms of both flavor diversity and ethos, clairin is closer to mezcal than any cane spirit and the producers are similar to the mezcaleros, gathering the surrounding wild sugar cane instead of agave and then pressing it using animal power before fermenting with indigenous yeasts and distilling in a fire-fueled pot still.**

-Organic-

Haiti is the last frontier of rum and the Clairin are the rums of Haiti.
In exploring the island, Velier was shocked to find the unthinkable: while in all the Caribbean combined there are only 50 operating distilleries, in Haiti there are over 500! Haiti is the only area of the Caribbean yet untouched by industrial Western modernization so the Clairin is still wonderfully pure: heritage, non-hybrid varieties of sugar cane, chemical- free agriculture, spontaneous fermentation with wild yeast, distillation and production methods of a time passed. The Haitian distilleries are almost always in the middle of sugar cane fields, growing in polyculture with mango and banana trees and other local vegetation. The cane is cut by hand and carried to the distillery on the back of mules or in carts pulled by oxen. Here, it is pressed with small mills and the juice is usually fermented in vats made of local wood. The boiler is fueled by dried cane fiber, bagasse and the alembic is ancestral: a discontinuous pot still usually powered by direct fire and often with a small rectification column of up to six plates and a wooden chauffe vin is used to preheat the wash: a structure similar to that brought by the French in the second half of the 18th century. To preserve the typical character of Clairin and prevent possible future confusion, a description of traditional production methods was drawn up together with producers and agreed as protocol for Clairin Traditionnelle. The Spirit of Haiti bottlings comply with these methods with respect to Triple “A” protocol (agriculturists, artisans, artists). The biodiversity in Haiti is incredible. Each region has its own production traditions and specific varieties of sugar cane so each Clairin has a distinctive aromatic characteristic. Clairin selected and bottled by Spirit of Haiti reflect this diversity as much for the varieties of cane used as for the different fermentation and distillation techniques.

The Presidium

Velier and Slow Food established the first Haitian Presidium in 2018 to protect the traditional rum of Clairin. The aim is to identify, network together and promote the Clairin producers who respect traditional production methods. The purpose of this project is to protect and celebrate the Haitian agricultural system, still relatively uncontaminated by synthetic chemicals. It recognizes the Clairin producers’ role as “defenders of the territory”, whose production choices will have an influence on the future of Haiti.

The Spirit of Haiti Clairin ‘Sajous’ 6/.750L

Drink of the Week - Imbibe Magazine 2019

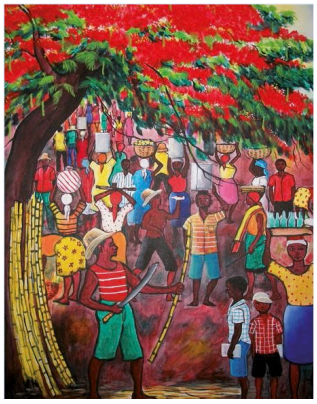
Clairin Sajous is produced at the distillery of Michel Sajous in the countryside of St Michel de l’ Attalaye, about four hours north of Port au Prince. Distillerie Chelo is a small, well-organized distillery which exclusively uses the pure cane juice of Canne Cristalline, an old heritage variety of beautiful burgundy cane. Clairin Sajous is produced with spontaneous fermentation and distillation methods typical of northern Haiti. Clairin Sajous is represented by the painting of the famous Port-au-Prince based artist, Simeon Michel.

Profile: Bright, Green & Grassy.
Top: Fresh cut grass, lime zest, dried coconut husk.
Heart: Green peppercorn, lime oil, unripe melon.
Base: Citrus zest, ash, fresh cream.

The Spirit of Haiti Clairin 'Vaval' 6/.750L

Clairin Vaval is produced in the coastal village of Cavaillon in the south of Haiti. Here, Fritz Vaval runs the Distillerie Arawaks which has been owned by his family since 1947. Fritz owns 20 hectares of land planted with the Madame Meuze cane variety, cultivated absolutely naturally. Clairin Vaval is produced from pure sugar cane juice fermented spontaneously with wild yeasts and distilled in a decidedly "homemade" still powered by the steam engine of an old locomotive.

Profile: Mineral driven with salty botanicals.
Top: Lily, honey, mint, fresh papaya.
Heart: Coriander seed, ripe plum, green olive, rosemary.
Base: Cooked pumpkin, salt air, beach sand.



The Spirit of Haiti Clairin 'Casimir' 6/.750L

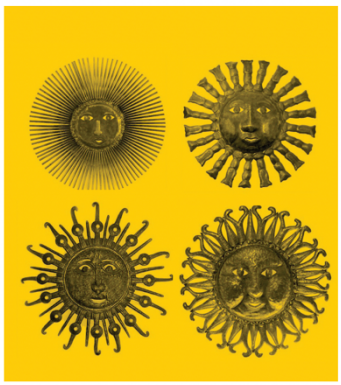
Clairin Casimir is produced on the north side of the southern peninsula in the village of Barraderes: the last frontier of coffee, cocoa and Clairin. Barraderes is a small fishing village, quite isolated but with a fairly large population and many small distilleries. Faubert Casimir, an elegant, placid man, lives in a time and place we find difficult to imagine. He produces his Clairin using Hawaii Rouge and Hawaii Blanc, relatives of the O'Tahiti cane from Polynesia. His cane is pressed and the pure juice goes through a very long, wild fermentation in wooden vats made from local chestnut trees. In the style of Barraderes, Faubert adds local citrus and herbs to his fermenting wash. Clairin Casimir is represented by the painting of the famous Port-au-Prince based artist, Simeon Michel.

Profile: Intensely fruity and savory.
Top: Passionfruit, guava, pineapple, forest earth, burnt caramel.
Heart: Ripe tropical fruit, leather, smoked meat.
Base: Truffle, almond skin, crème brûlée.

The Spirit of Haiti Clairin 'Le Rocher' 6/.750L

Clairin Le Rocher is produced by Romulus Bethel in Pignon from syrup, not pure juice. The syrup is made from juice that has been boiled in order to preserve it and maintain the distinctive features of the raw material intact. Three different sugar cane varieties are used to produce the syrup. The other unique feature of Le Rocher is that the syrup undergoes fermentation similar to that of Grand Arome rhums, meaning that the residual material left in the pot after distillation is added back to the fermenting wash. This addition allows much more intense aromas to develop during fermentation, which are then also revealed in the finished spirit. Le Rocher is represented by a painting found on the walls of the famous Hotel Florita in Jacmel, Haiti.

Profile: Richness of body and concentration.
Top: Citrus peel, tangy barbeque, fresh pine, smoke.
Heart: Ripe papaya, chewing gum, earth.
Base: Buttercream, burnt caramel, roasted meat.



The Spirit of Haiti Clairin Communal 6/.750L

Clairin Communal brings together the traditional sugarcane spirits from Sajous, Vaval, Casimir and Le Rocher. Each of these Clairin producers have their very own distinctive character, thanks to the use of wild indigenous yeast, native cane varieties, and traditional distillation methods, all of them shine through. Boiled sweets and candied fruit lead on the palate, followed by treacle tart, tarte tatin and creamy caramel sauce. The label of the four suns represents the four villages that create this blend united by Haiti's national motto "L'union fait la force" (Strength through unity).

Profile: Bright, lifted and spice-driven
Top: Fresh grass, pear blossom, warm beach sand.
Heart: Green peppercorn, cinnamon bark, sliced pear.
Base: Cut hay, fresh mint leaf, butterscotch.