

and his complex could not be more medieval-revival if suits of armor stood sentry at every stairwell. Just as Impressionism was gaining a toehold in France (Claude Monet famously painted the cliffs at Etretat, just a few miles from Fécamp), half the country was actively trying to resurrect the ancien régime. With his vast collection of Gothic art, Le Grand did his part for the old guard.

Many of the larger rooms at the Palais Bénédicte—now the most-visited tourist attraction in Normandy—serve as galleries for Le Grand's sculptures and paintings, which once adorned medieval churches and monasteries. The greatest treasures are ivory sculptures, many from nearby Dieppe, representing Biblical scenes. Presiding over the palace's courtyard is a bronze of Le Grand himself, seated in an armchair and holding a book—representing the mysterious recipe for Bénédicte D.O.M.—in his lap.

Bénédicte today sells about 200,000 cases worldwide of Bénédicte D.O.M. and its offshoot, B&B, a mix of the ancient liqueur and brandy. B&B dates only to the 1930s, when a barman at the 21 Club in New York began floating a shot of brandy on top of a glass of the liqueur. The "B&B" drink became so popular that the company began bottling it for the American market, where it now outsells Bénédicte D.O.M. by nine to one.

The original Bénédicte remains an essential ingredient in such cocktails as the Singapore Sling and the Vieux Carré. On the Normandy coast, the liqueur is often drunk as an aperitif or a digestif—either with water and a lemon twist over ice, or more festively as a shot in a flute topped up with Champagne. But "most of the locals prefer a cocktail," says Didier Deschamps, barman at the Hotel Le Grand Pavois in Fécamp, while serving me a drink that he presented in the French bartenders' national championship. The cocktail—comprising a shot of Crème de Fraise des Bois (a liqueur of alpine strawberries), a shot of Bénédicte D.O.M., Champagne, and a fresh strawberry—is a little like going to church on a feast day.

Later that evening, I join Ludovic Miazga, a London-based French bartender who serves as Bénédicte's global brand

ambassador, for a dinner of Normandy shellfish at Dormy House in Etretat. Before our feast, we sample the house-specialty cocktail, which is made with Bénédicte D.O.M., orange juice, and the ubiquitous Champagne. It is classic French bourgeois—round, sweet, and as comfortable and idiosyncratic as an old Citroën.

Back at the Palais, Miazga mixes me a series of simple Bénédicte drinks, including the B Pamplemousse (with grapefruit juice), the Bobby Burns (with Scotch and sweet vermouth), and the Big Ben (fresh lime and tonic water, with the Bénédicte sitting on the bottom like a bell's clapper). "It has so many subtle flavors that you can choose which one to accent by what you mix with it," he says.

---

*The original  
Bénédicte remains an  
essential ingredient in  
the Singapore Sling and  
the Vieux Carré.*

---

In anticipation of the 500th anniversary, Miazga spent much of 2009 visiting bars across the United States looking for a new classic cocktail. In December he found it, selecting the Monte Cassino and crowning its creator, Damon Dyer (a bartender at Louis 649 in New York's East Village), the "Alchemist for Our Age." The creation—equal parts Bénédicte, yellow Chartreuse, rye whiskey, and lemon juice—won Miazga over for its simplicity, which he deems essential when creating a cocktail recipe with Bénédicte.

To celebrate further the demimillennium, the Palais Bénédicte is mounting a contemporary-art exhibition on modern-day alchemy. As for rumors of an anniversary product at year's end, that is a secret as well kept as Dom Bernardo's recipe. ☐