

combine the 27 herbs and spices into various mixtures; how long each concoction must macerate in 96 percent alcohol; and at what temperatures to distill the lots to create Bénédictine D.O.M. (A copy of the liqueur's recipe is locked in a vault in Geneva.)

The Bénédictine company, however, is open about most of the liqueur's ingredients, displaying 20 of the 27 herbs and spices in the palace's museum next to bottles of failed counterfeits. But a shopping list is not a recipe. Ras and his fellow workers blend several distillations of the herbs and spices, redistill the blends, and combine them with acacia honey and infusions of lemon peel and vanilla bean. Somewhere along the way, they add a saffron distillate before adjusting the alcohol level and aging the final product in French oak. Start to finish,



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the process to produce Bénédictine D.O.M.—as well as the limited-edition single-cask version sold only at the distillery—takes about two years.

In the basement at the Palais Bénédictine, Ras invites me to peer into a large copper pot still that has just been disassembled. The matted substance coating the bottom of the alembic smells like a lemony hay bale, with overtones of pumpkin pie. Ras says this particular distillation—one of four that go into the final blend—combines

lemon balm, cinnamon, cardamom, and angelica with a great deal of hysop. A mélange of myrrh and aloe emanates from another alembic, which a worker opens to remove the sodden remains through a clean-out door. “Compost,” says Ras.

The still's muddy waste stands in contrast to the amber purity of the Bénédictine I sampled on my first night in Fécamp, a seaside resort and former fishing village located about 20 miles north of the mouth of the



*In the subterranean recesses of the late-19th-century Palais Bénédictine (above) is the distillery that yields the mysterious liqueur.*