



# THE DARK SIDE

Richly nuanced in flavour, elegantly presented, exclusive dark spirits are growing in popularity in Africa.

WORDS BY ANNIE MAKOFF-CLARK

Growing affluence in Africa is paving the way for a burgeoning luxury dark spirits market among the continent's elite. It's why prestigious brands, such as Johnnie Walker, The Macallan and The Dalmore, are flocking to Nigeria and South Africa where they know their products will be enjoyed in surroundings befitting the brand.

Indeed, speaking at this year's Africa Luxury Forum, Diageo's Jane Birkin who heads up Diageo Reserve told delegates that during 2015, Africa saw the second fastest growth of ultra-high-net-worth individuals.

"We passionately believe that our Reserve brands can lead the way in luxury drinking experience across the continent and shape the future of the luxury spirits industry in Africa," she told the conference.

Diageo Reserve, the luxury division of Diageo which also includes Johnnie Walker, Ciroc and Don Julio in its stable, experienced a 26 per cent growth in the African region in 2015, while the spirits market overall, particularly in



Nigeria, has increased by six per cent every year since 2007, according to the *International Business Review*. It is a testament to the growing demand among wealthy Africans and their thirst for premium-range spirits.

A far cry from modestly priced, bland liquids presented in old-fashioned decanters, these refined, top-of-the-range dark spirits can only be found on the top shelves of the world's most exclusive outlets. They are the spirits enjoyed by those in the know: triple-aged cognacs matured in virgin French oaks or fruity, full-bodied whiskies presented in decadent, yellow gold decanters.

Such is the nature of these exclusive spirits, the bottle's design is as much part of the experience as the liquid itself, and no price is too high. Take the \$2million Henri IV Dugnon Heritage Cognac Grande Champagne, dubbed the "DNA of cognac". First produced in 1776 to honour King Henri IV, the crystal bottle coated in 24-carat gold and sterling platinum is encrusted with 6,500 diamonds and holds one of the rarest, most expensive drinks in the world, having been barrel-aged for more than 100 years.

Mendis Coconut Brandy too, a 100 per cent all-clear brandy distilled from the essence of coconut flower and matured for two years in Hamilla wood casks, was sold initially for \$1 million in 2007. It is now available as part of a luxury private >





JOHN WALKER & SONS  
PRIVATE COLLECTION  
BLENDED SCOTCH WHISKY  
2015 EDITION  
RARE FRUIT CHARACTER

ONE OF  
8888  
BOTTLES



➤ Mendis Sensory experience including transport by private jet, chauffeur-driven car and luxury yacht.

And then there's The Macallan, synonymous with luxury, who are renowned the world over for their sophisticated, top-end spirits.

"Luxury is being redefined across the globe and a trend towards quiet sophistication and an appreciation of quality and craftsmanship as symbols of luxury is emerging," says Mac Mabidilala, marketing manager for Africa at Edrington who own The Macallan brand. "In Africa, our brand seeks to attract individuals of ultra-high net worth, who are well-travelled, purchase luxury goods and have an interest and affiliation towards super-premium spirits."

Macallan already has a strong presence in the world's leading cities, and its popularity among the

African elite, particularly in Lagos, is growing. The brand's finest offering to date, the Macallan M, is a six-litre single malt whisky presented in a crystal decanter. It is the product of creative director, Fabien Bowen, and crystal masters, Lalique who together, had one simple aim: to create the world's most sophisticated finest malt whisky.

The result is spectacular. The tall, slim design of the hand-crafted crystal decanter challenges the traditional decanter design with sharp, crisp angles reflecting the shape of the 'M'. And when held up to the light, the deep, rich colour of the whisky is brought to life.

The whisky is interwoven with rich, dried fruits, orange citrus and wood notes, and boasts a full flavour. As a limited edition, just 1,750 bottles of the Macallan M were released in 2013, each engraved with an individual number. ➤





➤ Yet it's The Dalmore which has attracted the most attention in recent years when Dalmore 62 was sold at Singapore Airport for \$250,000. And in July last year, The Dalmore released a single, precious bottle of The Dalmore Affinity to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence, priced at \$105,645.

It's no surprise then that the brand is fiercely popular among discerning Africans, the ones who, according to Richard Paterson, master distiller of The Dalmore "demand the finest in all aspects of their lives and value quality and craftsmanship in every product they purchase".

"The Dalmore customer seeks out products with a rich heritage and story," says Paterson. "They relish the opportunity to take time to savour their malts. In a busy world, a moment of quiet is a rare commodity."

The latest top-end release, The Dalmore Constellation Collection, provides exactly this opportunity. Made up of 21 individually released vintages dating from 1964 to 1992, only true whisky connoisseurs will appreciate the subtle

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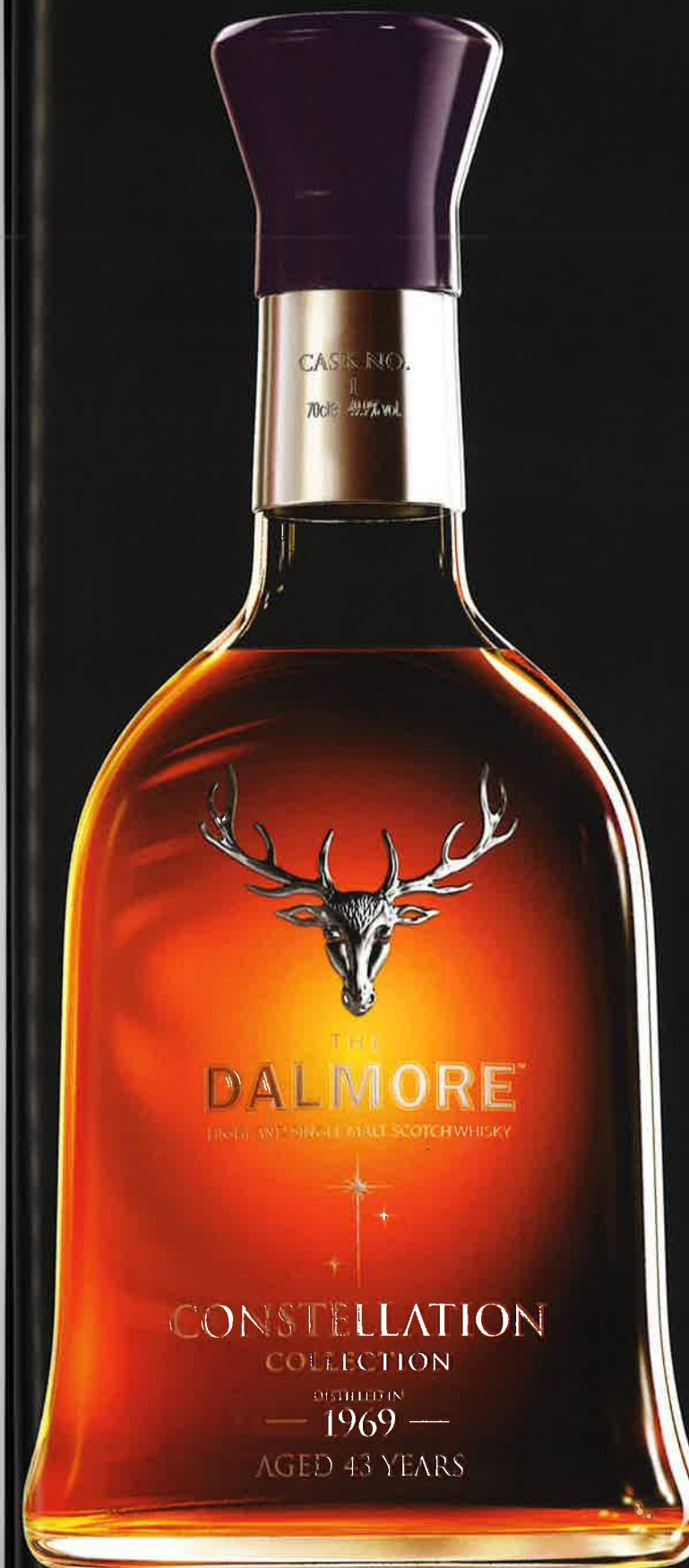
ABOVE: Courvoisier has a well-earned reputation for producing fine cognacs.

spectrum of flavours and aromas which erupt throughout. Nuances of honeyed pear, passion fruit, orange peel, lavender and patchouli emerge from the 1964 release, which boasts flavours of figs, spicy cinnamon and black forest fruits among initial sips. Buttermilk pancakes with whispers of Turkish delight are among the initial scents of the 1971 release, whilst the tastes itself resembles chocolate fudge, nutmeg and banana.

"Having a glass of The Dalmore provides the opportunity to truly take the time to savour the malt," says Paterson. "It commands the drinkers' full attention – only then will the whisky open up and fully reveal its flavours."

For the serious brandy enthusiast, the elegant Courvoisier brand and its newly released artisan edition is the luxurious cognac alternative to the single malt. Internationally renowned for producing the finest cognacs in the world, Courvoisier is a brand immersed in its François heritage.

Its Parisian-inspired celebratory releases were matured in ancient French oaks and aged, as with the XO Ultime, for two years in humid cellars along the Charente River. ➤



These distinctive expressions hark back to the Parisian golden age of arts and architecture, where their cognac was the toast of choice at the 1889 grand opening of the Eiffel Tower in Paris 127 years ago.

There are three choices in the Courvoisier range that are proving popular with sophisticated drinkers – Courvoisier VS, with its aroma of spring flowers and fresh fruits and delicate, fruity taste, Courvoisier VSOP, with ripe peach and hint of jasmine scent with sweet caramelised flavours, and finally the Courvoisier XO: an intensely aromatic, velvety texture, laced with crème brûlée, candied orange and iris flowers.

And in our world of top-end dark spirits where experience is everything and price is nothing, let's not forget Johnnie Walker, who released their limited edition Private Collection 2015 edition in January.

Just 8,888 individually numbered bottles are available at exclusive outlets across Nigeria, although due to high demand among Nigeria's elite, it is likely this number is now significantly less.

Described by whisky writer Charles MacLean as "Flawless", the 29 bespoke, experimental casks capture the brand's signature smoky character amid top notes of rare fruit and hints of honey with a distinct Highland aroma of stewed apples and flora notes.

And let us not forget Glenfiddich. Enter any of the world's most exclusive bars and you're likely to find this Scottish favourite being enjoyed by the most ardent of top-end spirit drinkers.

"We attract ambitious socials with high incomes who are the new entrants to the middle class," says Robert Vupora, head of marketing for sub-Saharan Africa at William Grant & Sons, the owners of the famous Glenfiddich distillery, which is in the Scottish town of Dufftown, Banffshire.

"Our higher range products, like the 21-year-old Gran Reserva attracts discerning men aged 40 and over, who have reached the stage in their life where they can afford and enjoy such luxuries."

It's easy to see why. This whisky is the only malt in the world to undergo finishing in Gran Reserva casks which once contained premium Caribbean rum. The result is rich, sweet and exotic with a touch of oak, lime and ginger. Glenfiddich recommends enjoying with a few squares of dark chocolate or bread and butter pudding to bring out the signature soft and sweet flavours.

So, as they say in France, *à la vôtre!* ♦