



Spiritueux

« Le duty free est un marché de prédilection pour nos cognacs »



Propos recueillis par Laura Fort | 22/01/2013, 17:01 - 1147 mots

La maison de cognac Camus fête cette année ses 150 ans et se bonifie avec l'âge : devenue une ETI (Entreprise de taille intermédiaire) l'an dernier, elle compte bien se développer davantage en Asie, en Russie et aux Etats-Unis. La vente en "duty free" est également un canal de distribution particulièrement porteur. Entretien avec son président, Cyril Camus.

Créée en 1863, la maison de cognac familiale Camus creuse son sillon. A tel point qu'elle est passée du statut de PME à celui d'ETI (Entreprise de taille intermédiaire) l'an dernier. Cette année, elle souffle ses 150 bougies et n'a pas asséchée toutes ses opportunités de développement. Encore loin de leur faire de l'ombre, la maison Camus s'est néanmoins hissée au 5ème rang derrière les « grandes » : Hennessy, Rémy Martin, Martell et Courvoisier. Entretien avec son président, Cyril Camus.

La Tribune - Vous êtes passé du statut de PME à celui d'ETI. Qu'est-ce que cela change pour votre société ?

Cyril Camus - Nous sommes passés de 50 millions d'euros de chiffre d'affaires en 2009 à 149 millions d'euros en 2012, et de 200 employés à un peu plus de 500. Nous avons essentiellement recruté pour les fonctions commerciales, marketing, administratives et de production. La majorité du personnel étant basée à l'étranger, le principal challenge réside dans le fait de maintenir une cohésion et des valeurs qui lient nos employés.

Spirits

“The Duty Free market is a preferential one for our cognacs”

Laura Fort | 22/01/2013, 17:01 - 1147 words

The Camus cognac house celebrates its 150th anniversary this year and continues to improve with age, having become an ETI (intermediate size company) last year. The company intends to develop further in Asia, Russia and the US. Duty Free sales are also a flourishing area of distribution.

Established in 1863, the Camus cognac family firm has steadily continued to grow, to such an extent that last year their status of PME (small/medium company) was upgraded to that of ETI (intermediate size company). This year they may be blowing out 150 birthday candles but they have not run out of breath as far as future development opportunities are concerned. Although they are not likely to overshadow the “major” cognac houses yet, Camus is now fifth in rank behind Hennessy, Rémy Martin, Martell and Courvoisier. Interview with the company’s president, Cyril Camus.

La Tribune – Your company’s status has changed from a PME to an ETI. How does this change things for the company?

Cyril Camus – Our turnover increased from 50 million euros in 2009 to 149 million euros in 2012, and our workforce from 200 employees to a little over 500. The main recruitment has been in sales, marketing, administration and production. Since the majority of our personnel are based abroad, the main challenge is to maintain cohesion and values which link our employees.

In the context of flourishing and sustained demand, are you paying your winemakers more for your *eaux-de-vie*?

We have 200 partner winemakers as well as our own production. We own 180 hectares of vines in Borderies, one of the six Cognac crus (behind La Grande and La Petite Champagne, Ed.) which represents about 5% of production.

Our policy is one of sustaining our relationship with our partner winemakers and our prices reflect more our own commercial performance than that of the market. We have increased our buying price by about 5%. The difference is noticeable during times of crisis as our prices hardly change.

Like all the great cognac names, you are establishing yourselves more and more in China. Are you not worried that the trend might fade?

In China, growth is spurred by two types of consumers: those who have incorporated cognac as part of their cultural life and those who buy it as a gift. The second type is not permanent as it depends on a healthy economy.

On the other hand, regular cognac consumers consider it to be a staple product and this type of consumption is steady.

In the US, for example, cognac drinking started out as a trend but is nowadays just a regular habit. Besides, the 2008 crisis has only produced a small decline in consumption.

Your firm was the official supplier to the Czar’s court in Russia in 1910. What are your present plans in this country?

Each generation has been back there. And when the USSR broke up we were very much present but then there was a period of uncertainty which is now gradually coming to an end. This is why we opened a representative office in Moscow in January 2012.

The size of the country makes distribution very complex. 70% of our sales are in Moscow and St Petersburg.

Do you have any other international projects?

Our representative office in Vietnam is in the process of becoming a subsidiary. In Vietnam, cognac drinking is more popular among the young, between the ages of 25 and 35. And there is already a cognac culture there which is equally entrenched. It’s a market with great potential.

Europe is a fairly mature market and now accounts for a third of global production. Sales generally are stable, increasing in Scandinavia and the Baltic states. But it’s a fragmented market because it’s accessible to all producers, whereas only a handful of brands are active on the wider market.

How could French consumption be revived?

We need to bring back some interest in the product itself, not just in the packaging, and make people think differently about cognac, in a less revered way.

In France, sales of our brand “Ile de Ré” are increasing in double figures. This brand has also boosted our sales in Japan, after a few years of downturn.

Is the Duty Free sector still a growing one for you?

Duty Free sales represent more than 40% of our turnover. More than half of this business is based on our top brands and Duty Free lends itself to sales of this type. It's a great market!

Since we have a strong presence in this market, we use it to distribute other brands such as Canadian Pinnacle ice cider or the star of Chinese spirits, Moutai.

This is a business which brings a certain stability to a family firm like ours. Having a geographical balance is important but a balanced distribution network is equally important. Even more so in the cognac industry because it is so cyclical.

What are your current ambitions for your firm?

We are the fifth largest cognac house, with growth being led by China. The priority for us is to bring stability to our turnover and to make the most of this favorable period to increase our volume in the US. It's the top export market for cognac but the price of entry is very high and access is difficult for an independent producer. To get established in the US means setting up a large infrastructure before any sales even start.

Today, for us, getting into the US requires much greater investment than when we first set foot in China a few years ago.

How do you differentiate yourselves from the “major houses”?

Our position is one which they cannot or do not want to have.

We already have a place slightly apart from them in the industry. We are the smallest of the big boys. In terms of publicity, we place less emphasis on the glamour side and more on the authenticity, the artisan side of our product.

In China we are the only company to have opened its own stores and a Club Lounge.

Have you ever had a proposal to buy out your company?

Yes, several times but we have always declined.

What sort of innovative projects are you working on (e.g. packaging, carafes, *eaux-de-vie* blends)?

The product as it stands is the most essential thing. It's important for the consumer to understand what they are drinking. This is why the taste and the style of the Ile de Ré and Borderies XO brands (minimum six years aging, Ed.) are so well received.

Instead of making a very good cognac with hundreds of blended *eaux-de-vies*, over and over every year, we make something exceptional. This means that our top brand cognacs are only sold in limited vintages, between 900 and 1500 bottles. We blend between two and five different *eaux-de-vie* for each vintage and they are labeled on the bottle. So the consumer learns about our product.

As an example, for our 150th anniversary our “5.150” vintage has been produced using 5 *eaux-de-vie* selected to correspond to the personalities of each of the members of my family which have managed the company.

