


EYE / LIFESTYLE

Courvoisier Reopens Its Historic Family Abode in the Cognac Region of France

Following a two-year renovation by renowned architects Gilles & Boissier, Maison Courvoisier is sharing its founder Félix Courvoisier's vision of hospitality.

By **JOELLE DIDERICH**  DECEMBER 5, 2024, 7:00AM



The bar lounge at Maison Courvoisier. JEROME GALLAND/COURTESY OF COURVOISIER

At Maison Courvoisier, hospitality now has a home.

The cognac house, which is entering a new era following its acquisition last spring by Campari Group for \$1.2 billion, has reopened its historic family abode in southwestern France after a two-year renovation, and plans to use the space as a platform for its concept of *joie de vivre* as it seeks to conquer new markets.

Built in 1857 by founder Félix Courvoisier, the mansion, located in the town of Jarnac in the heart of the Cognac region, has been fully revamped by architecture and interior design agency Gilles & Boissier, which is known for luxury projects ranging from **Moncler stores** to Hakkasan restaurants and New York's **Baccarat Hotel**.

“Its reawakening symbolizes Courvoisier’s determination to enhance cognac on the global stage,” the house says in a statement.

For Dorothée Boissier, who works in tandem with her partner Patrick Gilles, it was a deep dive into unknown territory. “I don’t drink cognac and I didn’t know the Charente region, so it was a new world to me,” she says.



Maison Courvoisier in Jarnac, France. COURTESY OF COURVOISIER

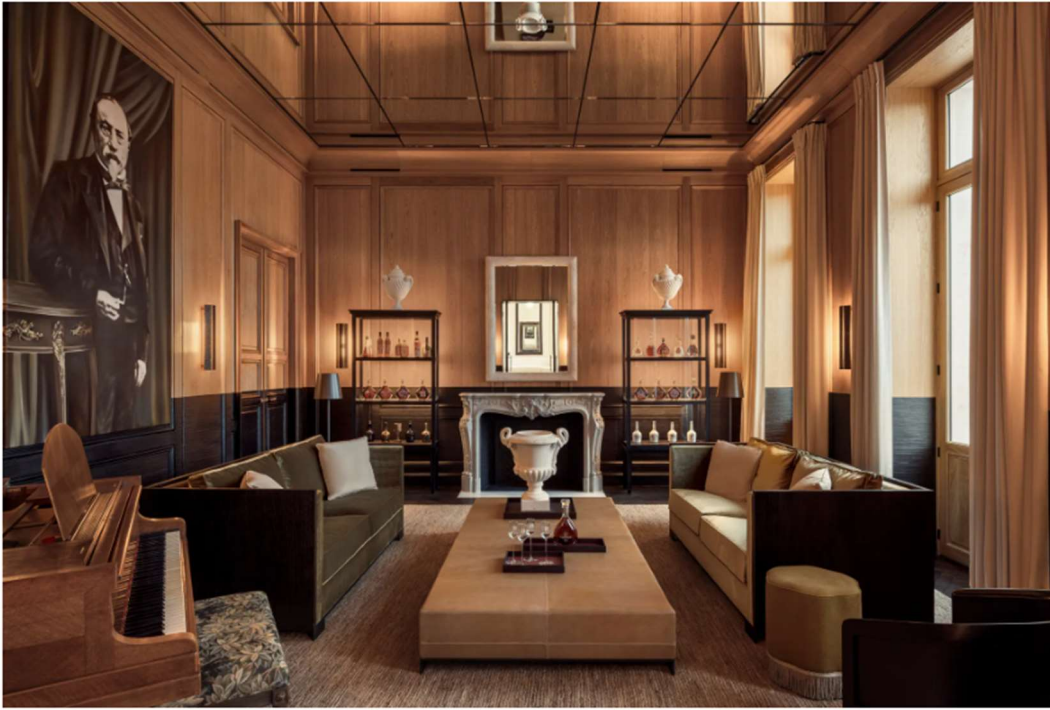
Founded in 1828, Courvoisier is all about celebrating festive moments. Popular with European royal courts in the 19th century, it was served on special occasions, including the inauguration dinner for the Eiffel Tower.

For much of the 20th century, the drink was touted as “the brandy of Napoléon,” since legend has it that the French emperor visited a cellar owned by Félix Courvoisier’s father Emmanuel. Bonaparte’s iconic silhouette became the symbol of the brand, and in 1951 the house introduced a distinctive curvy bottle named after his wife Joséphine.

But as it charts a new course amid challenging market conditions, Courvoisier is ready to turn the page on that identity and return to its origins. The brief for the invitation-only Maison Courvoisier was rooted in the drink’s signature light and bright taste, which it describes as “cognac in blossom.”

“That really piqued my interest. Cognac has a rather masculine image and here, we’re embracing a much broader audience,” Boissier says. “I thought that freedom to redefine your own identity was pretty courageous.”

As a result the duo’s design balances masculine and feminine elements, with the aim of creating a warm, welcoming atmosphere conducive to entertaining guests including distributors, VIPs and the brand’s 600 partner winegrowers.



The Founder's Salon at Maison Courvoisier. JEROME GALLAND/COURTESY OF COURVOISIER

The dichotomy is most evident in the two reception rooms on the first floor.

The Founder’s Salon is clad in wood panels that are painted black at the bottom, in a nod to the dark mold on the region’s chalk-colored buildings, caused by the evaporation of cognac aging in oak casks.

The adjoining Floral Salon is done up in pale pink and white tones, with frothy textures.

“We were interested in expressing these contrasts,” Boissier says. “There’s a back-and-forth between a powerful aesthetic that recalls the amber-colored spirit, and rooms that are much lighter, reflecting a more fanciful and feminine vision of nature.”

Like Courvoisier's adjoining visitor center, the stately home overlooks the Charente River, which is lined with trees. The five-floor house is filled with art works inspired by the surrounding vineyards and rich landscape of the region, with special details including a bench carved from cellar wood.

“We asked ourselves, if Félix Courvoisier were alive today, how would he host his friends?” Boissier says. “The idea was to bring this house back to life with guests who stay over, who come for a meal or stop by in the evening to sip a cognac.”



The Dining Room at Maison Courvoisier. JEROME GALLAND/COURTESY OF COURVOISIER

Inspired by the Pavillon de Flore wing of the Louvre museum in Paris, the château is accessed through an imposing black iron gate. On the ground floor, the Bar Lounge is the heart of the maison, its reddish-brown walls covered in archival documents curated by in-house historian Isabelle Vignon.

Thibaut Hontanx, the house's master blender, vividly recalls rediscovering the space after the renovation.

“I didn't want to come during the works. The first time I returned was in February, when the project was nearing completion,” he says. “I was blown away. The bar lounge was stunning. I spent hours looking at everything and listening to the explanations. It was a wonderful surprise and I thought to myself, ‘We're off! This place is going to live again.’”

Among his personal favorites is a photograph of his predecessor Louis Renard, the creator of the brand's famed Napoléon, VSOP and VS collections, standing on the steps of the house in the early 1900s.

"I'm part of a lineage," notes Hontanx, who is only the seventh chief blender in the history of the house. "My predecessors did a magnificent job in bringing the Courvoisier brand to this level and it's my duty to do the same and leave a stock of eau-de-vie to the next generations."



A bedroom at Maison Courvoisier. JEROME GALLAND/COURTESY OF COURVOISIER

He regularly hosts tastings in a dedicated room decorated with landscapes designed by French printmaker François Houtin. Hontanx has also worked with local chefs on pairing dinners, served on a monumental Palissandro marble table in the dining room, where the walls are decorated with Zoé Ouvrier's engravings of trees.

Dishes include regional specialties such as Barbezieux chicken and trout from Gensac, where caviar is also produced. "The house is really the place for me to entertain," Hontanx says.

Courvoisier also plans to use the location as a hub for training and education, as well as a center for content creation. While access remains limited, it will host tours and tastings throughout the year, with exclusive overnight stays arranged at select times in the second- and third-floor rooms, which have all been individually decorated.

While Hontanx declines to comment on the **headwinds** facing the cognac industry – from high inventories in the U.S. to faltering demand in **China**, not to mention provisional Chinese tariffs on European Union brandy imports – this new stage clearly gives Courvoisier an edge.

“Having a good time with our visitors and making them ambassadors of our brand is clearly a win-win,” he says.