



A load of McIntosh apples is transported from the orchard during harvest time at Cidrerie Michel Jodoin in Rougemont, southeast of Montreal. TYREL FEATHERSTONE, GAZETTE FILES

# PURELY CIDER

ROCHELLE LASH

Purity is the key word when talking about Quebec cider.

The province has strict regulations about how the golden elixir can be made, ensuring that Quebec produces a highly respected product.

“Our cider is made with 100 per cent pure apple juice,” said Catherine St-Georges, director of Les Producteurs de cidre du Québec, which represents 88 producers. “We do not use concentrated or reconstituted juices as a base.”

As well, to be licensed as craft cider makers, artisan producers (compared to commercial producers) must use 100 per cent apples from their own fields. Now, *that’s* authentically homegrown.

“If producers manage their own orchards instead of buying fruit, they can exercise more quality control and they can refine the taste and bouquet,” said Marc-Antoine Lasnier, president of Les Producteurs and also president of Cidrerie Milton in Ste-Cécile-de-

Milton near Granby.

“At the end of the harvest, the sugar and aroma get more intense and the acidity dips, so we are seeking the perfect harvest day for the perfect balance.”

Apples are part of Lasnier’s DNA. His is the fourth generation of a family who nurtured the orchard Les Vergers de la Colline, a leader in “pomiculture” for 90 years. Inspired to make the noble apple an even bigger star attraction, Lasnier rebranded in 2017 to Cidrerie Milton, and now is marketing cider products as far away as Europe.

Whether you are new to cider, or you’re a connoisseur who wants to sip, sample and share the latest products, the annual Mondial des cidres SAQ will be held March 2-4 at Complexe Desjardins and is worth marking on your 2018 calendar. More than 10,000 visitors are expected at this event, where they will have a chance to try ciders from Quebec and beyond.

**APPLE TERROIR** — Quebec is strong on cider because the prov-

ince has fruitful apple-growing regions, particularly in the southwest, near Rougemont and Hemmingford in Montérégie.

There is evidence that early settlers of the 1600s planted orchards on Mount Royal, but we don’t know if they graduated to cider making. This refreshing, lightly alcoholic libation is one of the world’s oldest drinks. The ancient Greeks and Romans made cider and when Romans invaded England around 55 BC, they found locals enjoying the apple beverage.

Just as in wine production, the influence of the terroir — or environment — is critical, and orchards deal with heat, frost, sun, rain, drainage and soil quality.

About 11 per cent of the apples produced for processing (cider, juice, sauce, jellies) in Quebec are transformed into cider. The mighty McIntosh is used for 60 per cent of cider, but Spartan, Empire, and mature Cortlands are also in the mix, and Geneva and Russet are emerging as truly ideal because of their tartness and colour.



An energetic mixologist works his magic with cider at the annual Mondial des cidres SAQ at Complexe Desjardins.

**CIDER PAIRINGS** — Lasnier gave me a primer into the three types of cider:

- **Still Cider** (no bubbles) is a fruity, crisp beverage with the fragrance of green apples and flowers. It livens up sangria and also pairs well with sushi, soft cheese, white meat or fish. Its alcohol content can range widely, from one to 15 per cent.
- **Ice Cider** is more intense. It has a residual sugar content of about 130 grams per litre, similar to ice wine or a dessert wine such as Sauternes (the amounts can vary). Ice cider has nine to 13 per cent alcohol, and a seductive bouquet of apple, caramel, candied fruits, spices or honey. Ice cider pairs beautifully with full-bodied and blue cheeses, foie gras, chocolate and fruity desserts.
- **Sparkling Cider**, which can be naturally or artificially carbonated, is fruity and either sweet or



Marc-Antoine Lasnier, president of Les Producteurs de cidre du Québec and owner of Cidrerie Milton in Ste-Cécile-de-Milton, near Granby. PHOTOS (2): COURTESY OF LES PRODUCTEURS DE CIDRE DU QUÉBEC

dry, with an alcohol content of two to 12 per cent.

“The market for sparkling cider is growing fast; it’s seen as a fun aperitif, like Champagne.” It is ideal for celebrating an occasion or as the base for a kir cocktail. Light and effervescent, sparkling cider pairs well with pâté, cheese, crêpes, fruit and dessert.

Still ciders and ice ciders should

be chilled to between six and 10 degrees C, and sparkling cider is best when it’s colder, between four and eight Celsius.

**CIDER TRENDS** — The newest trend is flavoured cider, accented with maple or fruits such as pears or raspberries. Another new product is a dry hop cider, which is inspired by beer.

Cider also is trending toward smaller bottles — again, like beer — to be portable for barbecues and picnics.

Vermouth cider is gaining popularity, playing on the current fashion of retro cocktails. You can sip vermouth cider on the rocks, in a spritzer, sparkling water, straight up with garnishes like sliced oranges, or added to a martini-style drink with vodka or gin.

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