



**SPIRITS  
SELECTION**

**PRESS  
KIT**

**Guizhou – Renhuai – China**  
From the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> September 2024

@spiritsselection



[www.spiritsselection.com](http://www.spiritsselection.com)



**26<sup>th</sup>**

**EDITION**



**MORE THAN**

**2 800**

**SAMPLES**



**A TOURING  
COMPETITION**



**130**

**INTERNATIONAL  
JUDGES**



**PRE- AND POST-  
EVENT CHECKS  
TO GUARANTEE  
THE RELIABILITY  
OF THE RESULTS**

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## PRESENTATION

### About the Spirits Selection

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The Spirits Selection is an international competition where more than 2.800 spirits are entered by producers to be tasted and evaluated by a panel of experts. Our seasoned judges from across the globe assess the spirits entered. Their sole ambition is to select spirits of irreproachable quality, irrespective of their labels or an appellation's prestige. The competition is one of the foremost international events in its category.





# 2024

## Welcome to Guizhou · Renhuai

# Guizhou · Renhuai 2024

## Enjoying the scenery of Maotai Town

Renhuai City is situated the northwest of the Guizhou Province in China and boasts a long and rich history and culture. The foundations of the city dates back more than 900 years ago, during the third year of the Daguan period of the Northern Song Dynasty (around 1109 AD), and its name poetically translates as «benevolence for the world and reconciliation for the border people».

In 2004, Renhuai was awarded the title of «China's Baijiu City» and was recognized as the primary production area of sauce-aroma baijiu in 2021. by 2022, its total economic output reached RMB 170.67 billion (€21.86 billions), ranking 12th among the top 100 counties and cities in China.



## Welcome to Sauce Aroma Liquor Core Region

As the birthplace of China's prominent sauce-aroma baijiu, Renhuai has an established history for wines and spirits, some of them dating as far back as 3000 years ago. During the Han dynasty, it acquired a reputation for excellence because of its local goji berry infused spirit (*Lycium chinense*), which was described by the then Emperor Wu, as «sweet, pure and beautiful».

As the city grew in importance during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Chishui river became an invaluable salt trading route for most of China, enriching all the cities on its bank in the process and helped pushing the notoriety of the local Baijiu nationwide. This economic boom especially benefited the spirits distilleries, which were asked to quench the thirst of a seemingly endless throng of sailors from all over the country and helped transforming the little-known village of Maotai on the bank of the river into a thriving and vibrant city. Until this day, the city has kept its reputation as a place where "thousands of people do business in the daytime, and thousands of lamps lit up at night».

## Outstanding product quality

As we already mentioned, Renhuai is the main producing area of sauce-aroma Baijiu in China -and therefore the world! The sheer number of production facilities is staggering, with over 1000 of them concentrated in an area of approximately 1800 km<sup>2</sup>! Needless to say, this industry plays a very significant role in the local economic development. As such the region has recently invested heavily to protect and codify their Baijiu in an effort to increase its local and international reach and promote their products as one of a kind, with objective to achieve a geographical indication (GI) for their Sauce Aroma Baijius recognized globally.



## Mountains and waters

Renhuai has a unique climate and terroir for baijiu production, nestled between the Wuling Mountains and the Chishui River. The Chishui River is of paramount importance to the baijiu industry in both Guizhou and Sichuan, and as such is largely untouched as well as the only free-flowing river in China. Its name literally translates as the 'Red River' due to the color it takes on as it flows through the purple sandstone of its riverbed. Geographically, the

river has an average altitude of 400 meters, is very rich in minerals and sediments as it flows through a subtropical monsoon climate and has a relatively stable pH throughout the year, making it ideal for the production of Baijiu.

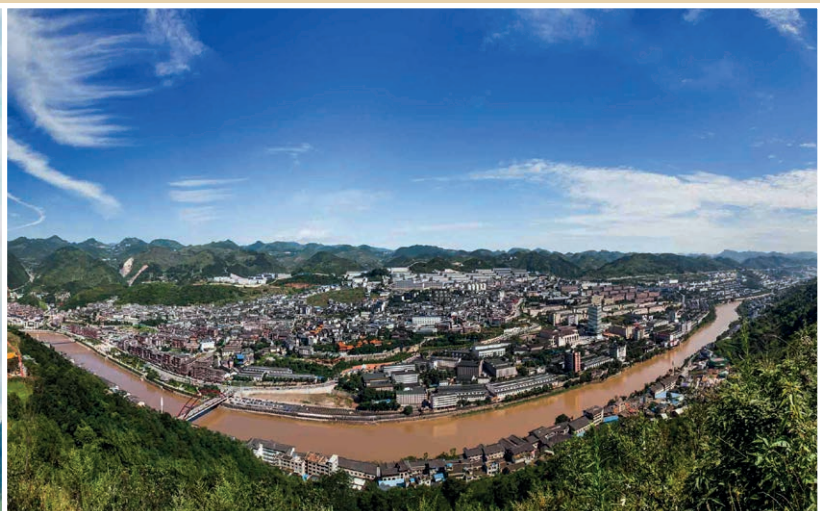
All the fine spirits and wines of the world have their own unique production techniques, and Sauce Aroma Baijiu is no exception: It is highly dependent on its geographical location, climate tradition and its people. We have a word for this in English: "Terroir"!

For thousands of years, the distillers in Renhuai have been following techniques handed down from generations to generations. Today, and in true Chinese style, this process has acquired the "12987" nickname: 1 production cycle per year, 2 batches of Sorghum used in the production, 9 steaming cycles to break down the starch and start the gelatinization processes, 8 cycles of parallel fermentations and 7 separate distillations. After which the spirits will be stored for ageing, blended, inspected, and finally packaged for consumption! Each "Sauce Aroma" Baijiu undergoes a similar production cycles, with the main difference coming from the fermentation starter, The "Qu".

"Qu" – pronounced "chew" is a bacterial bomb that is used to kickstart fermentation once the starch has been broken down. It is a solid mass of crushed grains (in Sauce Aroma Baijiu, usually wheat, barley and sometimes pea) stored for an exceptionally long time to encourage bacterial growth... Some Qu

bricks have been analyzed to reveal more than 2000 bacteria and micro-organisms! Each distillery has its own proprietary "qu" (usually a very closely guarded secret), raised in their unique environment and climate. "Qu" is the soul of the Baijiu and the signature of the distillery. More importantly, "Qu" is unique to each region, as it is heavily influenced by its surroundings... Basically "Qu" is the expression of Chinese "Terroir" in Baijiu production.

Heritage, provenance and terroir and become increasingly important in the world of spirits: They have become a critical factor in adoption by the consumers: Tequilas, mezcals, gins and new world whiskies have all been able to capitalize on this trend but few are aware that Sauce Aroma Baijiu also have a place on that playing field!





# The tastings

## THE TASTING SESSIONS

The tasting sessions are held over three mornings, behind closed doors. Every care is taken to ensure the best possible conditions: light, strictly controlled humidity levels and air temperature (between 18 and 22°C), observance of a monastic silence in the tasting rooms, impeccable glasses and service.

Before each tasting session, a palate preparation exercise is conducted to harmonize and calibrate marks given by judges.



## THE FLIGHTS

Samples to be tasted are grouped in consistent flights based on the characteristics stated by the producer and analysis certificates, after checks ensuring they have been entered in the right category.

The samples are presented to the juries in ascending order of alcohol content and descending order of residual sugar content. Each spirit is tasted individually and not comparatively.

Each panel is given a list of 4 to 5 flights which will be tasted in the order set out by the organisers, with a maximum of 35 samples per morning.

## Blind tastings

All series of spirits proposed for tasting to the international jury are of course served blind. The organization of the Competition guarantees the total anonymity of the samples.

The filling of glasses is done in the preparation hall out of the judges' sight. The tasters do not know the origin, the price and the possible marks and awards obtained by these samples. Only the category to which each sample belongs is mentioned on the tasting form to be filled in.



## The panel members

Each panel is placed under the authority of a chair person appointed by the organization, who is responsible for the smooth running of the tastings and checks the quality of spirits served and the score sheets and allocation of points. On a more general level, the panel chair is expected to be attentive and ensure the tastings run smoothly. The chair sets the tempo for the tastings and is responsible for a certain consistency in the way marks are awarded within the panel. Under no circumstances will the chair influence the tasters' judgment but will be sure to guide panel members in an unbiased, objective manner. The chair also protects the secrecy of a spirits' identity and will use his/her discretion to order a second tasting of the sample should it be deemed useful. At the end of a flight, all the information is collected directly by members of staff for a final check before the results are processed.



## The criteria

Competing products are tasted and marked using the tasting sheet developed by the Spirits Selection technical management. Selected criteria involve :

- **Appearance** : Cleanliness
- **Nose** : Expressiveness, Aromatic complexity, Authenticity
- **Palate** : Intensity, Flavour Complexity, Texture, Persistence & Finish Quality, Authenticity
- **Overall Impressions** : Alcohol Integration, Balance, Character, Typicity

Marks for each criterion determine the overall weighted score for each sample. A «winzorized» mean of all jury members is then calculated for each sample. This prevents dominance of any one person.



## The spirits sensory guidelines

The huge array of spirits available makes comparative tastings complex. It is impossible for a taster to be fully proficient in every category. With input from panel members, Spirits Selection has developed a guide - «Spirits Sensory Guidelines» - which describes the specific characteristics of each category and sub-category : typicity, a-typicity and main flaws. The competition holds master classes prior to the event to present and discuss the evolving document. This allows the judges to refine their judging for the categories they are less familiar with.

SPIRITS SELECTION BY CONCOURS MONDIAL DE BRUXELLES also awards additional revelation trophies for products scoring the highest marks, which are distinguished for their high quality, innovative character, and which underline the market trends. In addition, the jury awards a trophy for the best «certified organic» spirit.

The sum of all medals awarded to entries scoring the most points cannot exceed 30% of the total of entries in the competition. In the event of an overrun, entries receiving the least points will be eliminated.

In addition, the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles is the first international competition to have implemented a post-event control of medal-winning wines and spirits to guarantee the legitimacy of its results. After the competition, randomly purchased spirits bearing the competition medal are analyzed by an accredited laboratory and tasted in order to compare these samples with the second bottle provided by the producer at the time of registration.

## Excellence and rigour

Compliance with current regulations is guaranteed on the competition's official recognition by the European Union (cf. Official Journal C96/1 dated 23.4.2003).

At the end of the tastings, each entry is awarded a score out of one hundred by applying the computation formula. Only spirits that have achieved the highest scores are eligible for the precious medals:

- Grand Gold Medal
- Gold Medal
- Silver Medal

«Being on the jury, you get a lot of information that you have to digest. The methodology of tasting is also very interesting, and since then I have been organizing more tastings internally with my team. We also notice that some producers consult us for our opinion on recognized independent competitions. In Belgium of course, the Spirits Selection medal has a good reputation among consumers.»

Stephan De Bolle, Director of spirits  
– Cinoco, Belgium



«The winners of this competition are true standouts because there were no «participation» awards. Everyone's point of view is heard out. »

Robin Robinson, Founder of Robin Robinson LLC, USA



# SPIRITS SELECTION

## MORE INFORMATIONS

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