Slovenian monks feeling brandy

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It's no secret that Carthusian monks are renowned for producing exquisite liqueurs, including the famous green variety made by the Grand Chartreuse in France.

Now their brother monks in Slovenia are hoping to expand the market for their own unique apéritif.

The Charterhouse Monastery in Pleterje, in the foothills of the Gorjanci mountains in Slovenia, has been producing a very special pear brandy for the past 60 years. The clear, crisp spirit with a pear inside the bottle is now available in the UK for the first time. The nine-strong community, assisted by nine lay workers, makes the brandy using fruit from the monastery's orchards.

"The southern side of the wall surrounding Pleterje Carthusian Monastery is planted with pear trees," explains Father Francisek, a monk at the monastery. "When the fruit reaches hazelnut size, bottles are fixed to the trees so that the delicious pears grown and ripen inside the glass. After the pears are picked inside their bottles, the bottles are topped up with four-times distilled pear brandy."

The Pleterje Charterhouse Monastery was founded in 1403 and is one of twenty-five extant Carthusian monasteries throughout the world. The launch of the Pleterje Charterhouse Pear Brandy with Williams Pear is timed to coincide with the bicentenary of the naming of the Williams pear, which was first cultivated in Chiswick, West London by Richard Williams, a teacher and botanist. "We thought it would be a nice touch for the Williams pear to be brought back to where it all started," Father Francisek explains, "but with a monastic twist for Christmas".

The Pleterje Charterhouse Pear Brandy with Williams Pear is now available at an introductory price of GBP 44.99. Due to the labour intensiveness of the production process, stocks are limited to 4,000 bottles for the UK per year.

As well as producing a range of wines and liqueurs, the monks grow fruit, raise sheep and make honey.

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