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Cognac Launches New Center to Train Next Generation of Coopers

Facility aims to preserve traditional barrel-making skills while embracing innovation and sustainability in the wine and spirits industry

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On September 9, the first stone was laid for the new “Center for Cooperage Training and Innovation” in Cognac, France. The project is led by the Chamber of Trades and Crafts of Nouvelle-Aquitaine and Charente, with financial support from the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region, which owns the premises. The total investment amounts to 6.2 million

euros. Construction began in June and is scheduled to be completed by July 2026. The center is expected to open its doors to students at the start of the academic year in September 2026.

The new facility aims to modernize training for young coopers, who are essential to the wine and spirits industries in the region. The center will focus on both traditional skills and new techniques, with a particular emphasis on large wooden containers used for aging wines and spirits. This includes not only standard barrels but also larger vessels such as tronconic vats and foudres, which are oversized casks. According to Nicolas Tiquet-Lavandier, president of the Charente Master Coopers' Association, this is a first for formal education in France: "Previously, this know-how was passed down within companies. Thanks to the efforts of the Chamber of Trades and coopers, it will now be preserved through structured training."

Cognac's new center will complement two other cooperage training programs in France: one at the Blanquefort high school near Bordeaux and another with the Compagnons du Devoir in Auxerre, Burgundy. However, Cognac's program stands out for its dedicated workshop for large containers, a skill set that has become increasingly important as producers seek specialized storage solutions for their products.

The cooperage sector in Charente faces challenges due to economic uncertainty in the wine and spirits markets, driven by global geopolitical tensions. Despite these difficulties, industry leaders stress the need to maintain training programs and pass on expertise to younger generations. The average age profile in cooperages makes renewal essential. Each year, about 25 students enroll in Cognac's two-year program, preparing them for careers in cooperages, distilleries, or prestigious wine estates. Repairing barrels is also highlighted as a key skill that supports corporate social responsibility goals by extending the life of valuable wooden containers.

The new building will feature environmentally friendly construction methods. The region's officials say it will use bio-based materials such as wood, straw, and earth, along with double-glazed wooden windows to minimize carbon emissions. The design emphasizes local and sustainable materials, efficient water management, ample natural light, and spaces tailored for hands-on learning.

Technical equipment for the workshops will be supplied by local cooperages. Students will have access to both traditional hand tools—such as stave planes, mallets, and hoop drivers—and modern machinery for bending staves and assembling barrels.

The launch of this center marks a significant step for Cognac’s cooperage industry as it seeks to balance tradition with innovation while ensuring that vital skills are passed on to future generations.