

CLAIRIN

The Spirit of Haiti

Michel Sajous



www.thespiritofhaiti.com

WHAT IS CLAIRIN TRADITIONNEL?

Clairin Traditionnel represents an unwavering commitment to ancestral production methods and the dedicated producers who uphold them.



This standard begins in the fields with the cultivation of non-hybridized, heirloom sugarcane varieties grown through chemical-free agriculture and sustainable organic farming practices that eschew synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. The transformation from juice to spirit relies exclusively on spontaneous fermentation via wild, ambient yeasts without any industrial intervention. Finally, the process is completed through traditional distillation, utilizing batch stills and centuries-old techniques to ensure the liquid remains a pure reflection of its heritage.

Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye

A SHORT HISTORY

HISTORY

Originally established in the 18th century during the French colonial era, Saint-Michel-de-l'Attalaye was founded in 1768 as a strategic interior parish. Its name, "l'Attalaye," is derived from the Spanish word *atalaya*, meaning "watchtower" or "lookout," reflecting its elevated geographic position which allowed for oversight of the surrounding Artibonite and Northern departments. Following the Haitian Revolution, the village became a vital agricultural hub, notably during the 19th-century reign of King Henri Christophe, who prioritized the development of the northern highlands. Throughout its history, the area has served as a resilient center for rural autonomy, maintaining its significance as one of Haiti's largest territorial communities by area and acting as a bridge between the northern mountains and the fertile central plains.



LAND

Located about four hours north of Port-au-Prince, Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye is often heralded as the "Grand Cru" region of Clairin. This northern highland area is defined by its unique microclimate and mineral-rich soils, which impart a sophisticated, structural elegance to the spirits produced here. Unlike the lush, tropical lowlands, the elevation and specific geography of Saint-Michel foster a profile that is famously vibrant, grassy, and floral.



Top: Town center, Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye.

Bottom: Highland plains, Saint-Michel.

Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye

THE TERROIR



SOIL

The soil in this region is remarkably distinct from the sandy coastal plains of Southern Haiti or the volcanic ash of other Caribbean islands. This area is rich in limestone and clay, which provides a mineral backbone to the local Clairin.

Because Michel Sajous practices polyculture, the soil here is a living ecosystem. The fallen leaves from mango and banana trees, combined with the lack of synthetic fertilizers, create a nutrient-dense humus. This healthy soil biology lends itself to the health of the area's microbiome, including the wild yeasts that live on the cane stalks.

ELEVATION

The increased altitude provides a significant diurnal temperature swing (warm days and cool nights). This slows the maturation of the cane, allowing it to develop a higher concentration of complex sugars and aromatic precursors compared to the rapidly growing cane of the coast. The undulating, hilly terrain ensures excellent water drainage. Sugarcane that isn't waterlogged tends to produce a more concentrated, flavorful juice.



Top: Riverbed, Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye.

Bottom: Highland valley, Saint-Michel.

Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye

BON CLAIRIN

BEGINS

IN THE FIELDS



Cane Fields: While much of Haiti's sugar cane is grown in the humid, tropical lowlands, Saint-Michel is situated in the Northcentral Highlands.

Elevation: The increased altitude provides a significant diurnal temperature swing (warm days and cool nights). This slows the maturation of the cane, allowing it to develop a higher concentration of complex sugars and aromatic precursors compared to the rapidly growing cane of the coast.

Drainage: The undulating, hilly terrain ensures excellent water drainage. Sugarcane that isn't "waterlogged" tends to produce a more concentrated, flavorful juice.



Ancestral Cane: Unlike "modern" industrial sugarcane, which is bred for high sugar yield and machine-harvesting, **Cristalline** is a heritage variety. It has a thinner stalk and a lower yield, but its juice is extraordinarily aromatic. These heirloom varieties tend to have deeper root systems than industrial hybrids, allowing them to pull more mineral character from the subsoil.

Top: Sugarcane fields, Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye.
Bottom: Cristalline cane, a heritage variety.

The Farmer Distiller

MICHEL SAJOUS



Michel Sajous is a third-generation distiller whose personal history is inextricably linked to the land of Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye. Growing up in a family that had produced Clairin for decades, he inherited an intimate understanding of the region's agricultural rhythms and the specific nuances of heritage sugarcane.

In 2004, Michel made the pivotal decision to honor this legacy by building Distillerie Chelo on the very site where his family's original distillery once stood. Rather than modernizing toward industrial efficiency, he focused on refining the ancestral style, meticulously organizing his production to showcase the purity of the Canne Cristalline variety.

Michel Sajous began working with The Spirit of Haiti in 2012, which allowed him to share his Clairin on the global market. This collaboration transformed Michel from a local artisan into an international icon of the "slow spirits" movement, effectively proving to the world that traditional Haitian distillation could achieve a level of sophistication comparable to the finest spirits on earth.

The Farmer Distiller

MICHEL SAJOUS



RAW MATERIAL

Michel Sajous manages his 30 hectares of land with the mindset of a steward rather than a commodity farmer, focusing exclusively on the cultivation of Canne Cristalline. This non-hybridized heritage variety, known for its thin, burgundy-colored stalks and intense aromatic potential, is grown in a vibrant polyculture alongside mango, banana, and citrus trees. This biodiversity serves as a natural defense system, allowing Michel to maintain a strictly chemical-free environment where synthetic pesticides and fertilizers are never used. The harvest, which typically runs from December to August, is performed entirely by hand using machetes.

THE RATOON METHOD

Michel's commitment to manual harvesting with machetes is a deliberate rejection of industrial clear-cutting in favor of long-term soil health and flavor development. By skillfully cutting the stalks while leaving the rootstalk intact, he utilizes the Ratoon method, allowing the Canne Cristalline to regrow naturally for six to eight seasons.

This longevity stands in stark contrast to commercial operations that require disruptive annual replanting. Over these many years, the established root systems penetrate deep into the region's calcareous clay subsoil, extracting the specific mineral nuances that define the Grand Cru terroir of Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye.



From Field to Spirit

THE GROWING SEASON



DECEMBER

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

JUNE

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

December to February

CRUSH BEGINS

The dry season starts. Cane is hand-cut at peak sugar concentration. Higher brix (sugar) levels lead to a cleaner, more floral and high-alcohol fermentation.

March to May

PEAK HARVEST

Ideal weather for manual harvesting. Fields are clear and accessible. Consistent ambient temperatures provide stable, steady wild fermentations.

June to August

LATE HARVEST

The rainy season approaches. Humidity rises; the remaining cane grows rapidly. Increased humidity introduces different wild yeast strains, often adding more intensity and vegetal depth.

September to November

REGROWTH

Heavy rains. The ratoon (rootstalk) regenerates for next year's crop. No distilling occurs; the soil is replenished by the organic matter of the polyculture.

From Field to Spirit

FERMENTATION

PROCESS

At Distillerie Chelo, the fermentation process is the bridge between the raw agriculture of Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye and the sophisticated spirit in the glass. It is a slow, biological transformation that relies entirely on the indigenous microbiology of the estate, rejecting industrial short-cuts in favor of aromatic depth. The process begins with immediacy. To prevent premature oxidation or the development of acetic off-flavors, the hand-cut Canne Cristalline is transported to the mill and pressed almost instantly. This fresh, lime-green juice is never diluted with water, which ensures that the resulting ferment is a 100% pure expression of the sugarcane's sucrose and mineral content.

Unlike modern distilleries that use laboratory-isolated yeast strains for speed and predictability, Michel Sajous practices spontaneous fermentation.



Unlike modern distilleries that use laboratory-isolated yeast strains (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*) for speed and predictability, Michel Sajous practices spontaneous fermentation.

While industrial fermentation can be completed in as little as 24 hours, the process at Distillerie Chelo typically lasts between 120 and 150 hours (5 to 6 days).

From Field to Spirit

FERMENTATION (CONT.)



The Inoculum

The fermentation is triggered by wild yeasts and bacteria naturally present on the waxy bloom of the cane stalks and suspended in the air of the distillery.

Biodiversity in the Vat

Because the fields are farmed in polyculture (alongside mango and citrus), the ambient yeast at Chelo is incredibly diverse. This poly-microbial environment creates a wider array of esters and congeners than a single-strain ferment ever could.

Phase 1 (The Rise)

The wild yeasts begin to convert sugars into alcohol, creating a cap of foam and a vibrant, grassy aroma.

Phase 2 (The Development)

As the sugar levels drop, secondary bacterial fermentations take over. This is where the complex flavors of Clairin Sajous is born—developing the bright, herbaceous, and vegetal notes that define the region.

Temperature Control

There is no refrigeration. The fermentation moves at the pace of the ambient highland air, allowing the wash to reach its natural peak of complexity.

The Result - The "Wash"

By the end of this cycle, the sugarcane juice has been transformed into a cane wine or wash. This liquid is low in alcohol but incredibly dense with flavor precursors. It is this high-ester, biologically complex wash that is gravity-fed into Michel's traditional copper pot stills, ready to be concentrated into Clairin.

From Field to Spirit

DISTILLATION



PROCESS

Michel utilizes small, batch-operated copper pot stills. Copper is essential to the process because it acts as a catalyst, stripping away unwanted sulfur compounds that can develop during the long, five-day fermentation. This results in a cleaner and more floral spirit without losing the raw power of the sugarcane.

Discontinuous distillation is a "batch" process. The still is filled, heated, emptied, and cleaned before the next run. This allows Michel to have total control over the cut of the spirit, ensuring only the highest quality liquid makes it into the bottle.

The still at Chelo is heated by direct fire. Because the highland air in Saint-Michel is cooler than the coast, the temperature inside the still rises more gradually. This slow heating prevents the scorching of the wash and allows for a more delicate extraction of the volatile aromatic compounds—those bright citrus and grassy notes that define Sajous.

The distillation at Distillerie Chelo utilizes a sophisticated, French-influenced setup comprising a copper pot still, a small external rectifying column, and a chauffe-vin (wine heater). This configuration allows Michel Sajous to refine the heavy, wild-fermented wash into a spirit of elegance, maximizing fuel efficiency while precisely shaping the final texture and aromatic clarity.

From Field to Spirit **DISTILLATION** (CONT.)



The Pot Still: The Heart of Character

The traditional copper pot still is a batch-process vessel designed to retain the essential oils and esters developed during the long fermentation. Unlike industrial columns that strip away character, this method preserves the heavy congeners responsible for the rich mouthfeel of Clairin Sajous. Additionally, the copper surfaces remove sulfurous off-notes, ensuring a clean, vibrant, and aromatically pure finish.

The External Rectifying Column: Refining the "Grand Cru"

The short external rectifying column uses a small series of plates for gentle refinement rather than industrial stripping. This process filters out heavy, oily tails while concentrating the bright, floral, and citrus-driven heart of the spirit. It is the key to the balance of Clairin Sajous - providing structural clarity and precision without sacrificing the raw, grassy soul of the Cristalline cane.

The Chauffe-Vin (Wine Heater): Efficiency and Pre-Heating

The chauffe-vin (wine heater) is a traditional heat exchanger that uses hot vapors from the still to pre-heat the next batch of wash. This process conserves precious fuel in the remote highlands of Saint-Michel and protects the spirit's integrity by preventing thermal shock. By warming the wash gently before it enters the still, Michel ensures that delicate floral precursors are never scorched, preserving the refined aromatic profile of the Cristalline cane.

A LIVING SPIRIT



THE RESULT: A LIVING SPIRIT

This configuration—pot still for flavor, column for clarity, and chauffe-vin for thermal control—allows for a single distillation that reaches a naturally high proof (50–56% ABV). Bottled and enjoyed at still strength, Clairin requires zero dilution, ensuring every drop of water in the bottle originates solely from the Canne Cristalline juice and the mountain air of Saint-Michel.

The resulting spirit is crystal clear yet remarkably dense, concentrating the DNA of the harvest season—wild yeasts, long fermentation, and mineral-rich soil—into a profile that is both rugged and profoundly sophisticated.



BAGASSE

At Distillerie Chelo, the management of bagasse—the fibrous residue remaining after sugarcane is pressed—is the cornerstone of a closed-loop, sustainable ecosystem. This traditional zero-waste model ensures that every element of the harvest is repurposed, minimizing the distillery's environmental footprint.



THE ROLE OF BAGASSE IN THE HARVEST CYCLE

Animal-Powered Logistics: The cycle begins in the fields, where oxen and donkeys are used to transport the hand-cut Canne Cristalline to the mill. Once the juice is extracted, these same animals move the wet bagasse to open-air drying areas. This reliance on animal labor instead of heavy machinery prevents soil compaction and eliminates the need for fossil fuels during transport.

Fuel for the Still: Once sun-dried, the bagasse becomes the primary biomass fuel for the distillery. It is fed into the furnace to heat the pot still, providing the thermal energy necessary for distillation. By using the cane's own fiber to cook its juice, Michel Sajous eliminates the need for external timber or coal.



SUSTAINABILITY

Distillerie Chelo operates as a model of pre-industrial sustainability, where the absence of modern chemicals preserves both the land and the spirit's integrity. Michel Sajous manages his 30 hectares of Canne Cristalline through strictly organic methods, rejecting synthetic pesticides and fertilizers in favor of natural polyculture.

This commitment to purity is mirrored in the distillery, where fermentation remains entirely spontaneous and the resulting spirit is never diluted. From the initial press to the final bottling at still strength, no external water is added, ensuring the liquid remains a 100% pure extraction of the highland terroir.

The estate's heart is a closed-loop sustainable system specifically adapted to the steep, rugged terrain of Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye. Because the hillsides are inaccessible to heavy machinery, Michel utilizes a traditional transport network of bulls and donkeys to haul hand-cut cane to the mill and move wet bagasse to drying fields.

Once sun-dried, this fiber is repurposed as the primary biomass fuel to fire the copper pot stills, eliminating the need for timber or fossil fuels. By returning the nitrogen-rich ash to the fields as fertilizer and utilizing animal power to prevent soil compaction, the distillery functions as a harmonious, zero-waste circle that honors the ancestral rhythms of the land.



SUSTAINABILITY

The rugged, mountainous terrain of Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye makes modern industrial machinery not only impractical but counterproductive. At Distillerie Chelo, the use of bulls and donkeys is a strategic choice that harmonizes with the landscape.



Navigating the Steep Gradient

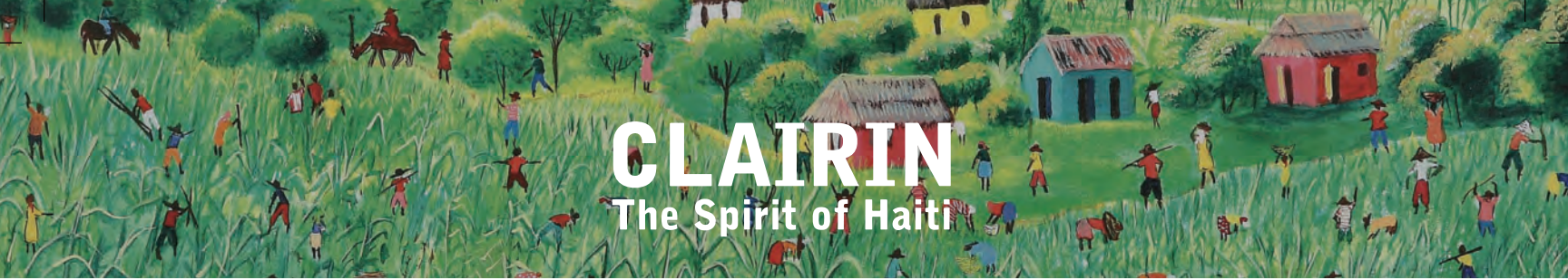
The primary cane fields sit on steep, undulating hillsides where heavy machinery struggles with traction and safety. Donkeys and bulls provide the "four-wheel drive" agility needed to navigate these narrow, rocky paths and vertical inclines. This traditional transport allows Michel to cultivate high-quality cane on remote, rugged plots that would be inaccessible and left fallow in a mechanized system.

Prevention of Soil Compaction

Mechanical harvesters exert massive pressure that crushes soil structure and damages root systems. In contrast, the light, distributed footprint of donkeys and bulls keeps the soil aerated and fertile. This protection is vital for the Ratoon method, as it preserves the mother root of the Canne Cristalline, allowing it to regrow healthily for up to eight seasons without disruptive replanting.

Zero-Carbon Mobility

In the remote highlands, fossil fuels are expensive and difficult to transport, creating a heavy carbon footprint. Animals, however, are powered by the land they work, grazing on local vegetation and farm byproducts. This eliminates the need for external energy during harvest, maintaining a zero-emission, closed-loop logistical operation.



CLAIRIN

The Spirit of Haiti

The Spirit of Haiti is a dedicated collective focused on preserving the ancestral production of Clairin, the traditional agricultural spirit that has defined Haitian village life for centuries. By partnering with small-scale master distillers, the company celebrates the savoir-faire of the producers and their commitment to organic farming of heirloom cane, spontaneous wild-yeast fermentation, and artisanal distillation. This initiative serves as a vital bridge between Haiti's rural agricultural heritage and the global stage, ensuring that each bottle remains an unadulterated, still-strength expression of the island's diverse micro-terroirs and sovereign craftsmanship.

CLAIRIN SAJOUS

Producer Name:	Michel Sajous
Village:	Saint Michel de l'Attalaye
Raw material:	Sugarcane juice
Cane type:	Cristalline
Fermentation:	Natural with ambient yeast
Distillation:	Pot still
Bottling Strength:	55.15% abv

Produced at Distillerie Chelo in the highlands of Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye, Clairin Sajous is the work of third-generation distiller Michel Sajous. Built in 2004 on his family's ancestral land, the distillery is a model of artisanal precision, dedicated to the cultivation of Canne Cristalline—a heritage burgundy variety prized for its aromatic depth.

During the harvest season from December to August, the cane is hand-cut and the juice is fermented spontaneously using only the ambient yeasts of the estate. Regarded as the Grand Cru of Northern Haiti, Clairin Sajous is a sophisticated expression defined by bright citrus notes and vibrant, grassy botanicals. Each bottle is elegantly represented by the artwork of renowned Port-au-Prince artist Simeon Michel.

TASTING NOTES

Nose: An immediate explosion of bright, high-tone aromatics led by fresh-cut grass, green bell pepper, and lime zest. Underneath the initial verdancy, there are deeper notes of ripe mango, white flowers, and a distinct, sharp minerality that mimics wet stones.

Palate: The texture is vibrant and piercingly clean. It opens with an intense sweetness of raw sugarcane juice followed by a complex layer of savory garden herbs—specifically mint and tarragon. Mid-palate, it reveals a concentrated tartness of green apple and unripe pineapple, balanced by a subtle earthy saltiness.

Finish: The finish is exceptionally long and persistent, leaving a cooling sensation of anise and menthol. It tapers off with a lingering echo of peppery spice and a clean, floral honey note that stays on the roof of the mouth long after the spirit is gone.



WATCH DISTILLERY TOUR

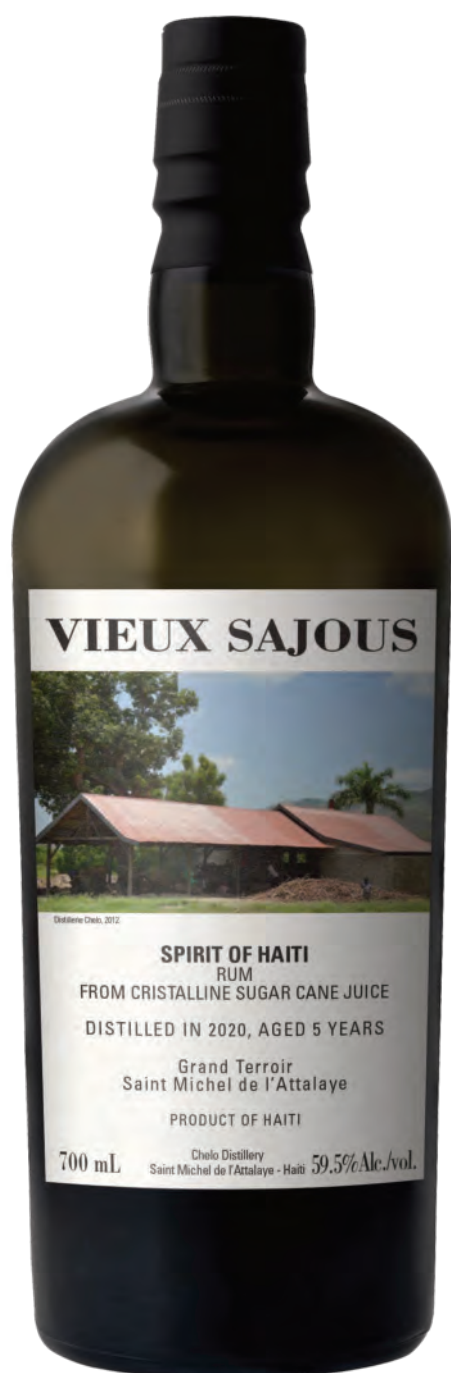
CLAIRIN

The Spirit of Haiti

The Spirit of Haiti "Vieux" bottlings showcase the world-class aging potential of traditional Haitian Clairin, transforming wild, pot-still cane spirits into mature, sophisticated sips. Aged typically 4 to 8 years in high-quality oak (ex-Caroni, Sherry, Cognac), these tropical releases tame the raw intensity of the distillate without sacrificing terroir. The extended maturation evolves Michel Sajous' grassy sharpness into elegant beeswax and fruit, turns Fritz Vaval's maritime brininess into rich salted caramel, and deepens Faubert Casimir's earthy funk into complex notes of tobacco and spice. These bottlings represent the pinnacle of the category, balancing the spirit's authentic "wild" soul with the refined depth of long tropical aging.

VIEUX SAJOUS

Producer Name:	Michel Sajous
Village:	Saint Michel de l'Attalaye
Raw material:	Sugarcane juice
Cane type:	Cristalline
Cask:	Whisky, rhum & bourbon
Aging:	5 years in tropical climate
Fermentation:	Natural with ambient yeast
Distillation:	Pot still
Bottling Strength:	59.5% abv



Michel Sajous honors 50 years of tradition at Distillerie Chelo, located in Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye, Haiti. Using pure, non-hybrid Cristalline cane from his own 30 hectare estate, Sajous creates a truly wild Clairin. Following a week-long natural fermentation and direct-fire distillation, the result is a spirit with total freedom of expression—expect intense notes of medicine, herbs, and vibrant spice.

TASTING NOTES

Nose: Expansive and refined. A complex mix of medicinal herbs, pineapple, and makrut lime meets resinous rosemary and heady florals.

Palate: Energetic and tonic. Starts with a powdery rice texture and fresh ginger spice, evolving into a medicinal mid-palate that opens up into tropical fruit.

Finish: Silky and full-bodied. Earthy notes of gentian and vanilla balance against bright citrus. The final impression is floral and milky (almond/agave), with a lingering scent of fresh cane.

CLAIRIN

The Spirit of Haiti



Haiti's spirit landscape is defined by its deep-rooted artisanal heritage, featuring more than 500 small-scale distilleries—known locally as guildives—scattered throughout the countryside. Traditionally, these producers have crafted Clairin (or Kleren) primarily for the enjoyment of their own local villages, resulting in an extraordinary diversity of styles across the island.

Established in 2012, The Spirit of Haiti was founded to celebrate grower-producers of Clairin Traditionnel and support a route to global market.



US National Manager Kate Perry
k.perry@laisonandvelier.com

CLAIRIN

The Spirit of Haiti

www.thespiritofhaiti.com
Instagram @clairinthepiritofhaiti



Imported by PM SPIRITS
info@pmspirits.com