

from Bordeaux, Burgundy and the Loire, his sparkling wines and champagnes, now has two families of products: premium brandy marketed under the Robert Loston label and Denis Charpentier cognac. The latest big project on Denis's agenda, scheduled to go ahead in 1997, is to form another company to market his own brand of blended scotch whisky. Like his Charpentier cognac, Denis sets his sights high for his new whisky – he wants it to be 'the Rolls-Royce of whiskies'.

"We want to create a pool of the best spirits in each category," says Denis, "the most elegant decanters with the best quality and the best packaging."

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### Running the company like a family

Denis runs a tightly-knit team, which he treats like an extended family, responsible for his key markets. His wife and managing director, Mika, is in charge of the Japanese market and customer relations. Taipei-based Michael Chien, marketing general manager—Far East Asia, is in charge of Taiwan market development – a market which consumed 12,000 cases of Denis Charpentier cognac and

brandy in 1995.

Michael also looks after marketing for all Chinese consumer markets in the region. Denis himself is an intuitive strategist. He created and designed his own products and he is responsible also for overall strategy and sales. Last but not least, Frederic Martin is production manager – a key role in the Charpentier operation

where so much emphasis is placed on the quality of products and packaging. "I always select a distributor on human values, I don't look at their size," says Denis. "Then I see if we share the same philosophy." His business philosophy is based on friendship, mutual respect and understanding, and a great affinity with oriental people.

"Our group is still private. We are like a big family. All our staff, suppliers and distributors are like-minded. As long as I am the boss of this group, these relationships will never change. We are very careful before we add any staff. We don't make any forecasts. We do as we feel." The company retains the spirit of its founder.

Denis likens his operational strategy to that of a commando or guerrilla unit – a small group of committed and able people capable of achieving results out of all proportion to their size. "We are a top commando unit because we move very quickly and we do our job very efficiently," says Denis. "Life is only a matter of philosophy."

"I believe in commandos, not the army," says Denis. "Because



who wins the war these days? It's commandos, not the army.

"We have 40 distributors worldwide. We supply airport and downtown duty free, railway and cruise ship duty free, and we also supply domestic markets."

Denis doesn't lose any sleep over what the competition is doing. "I don't have any competitors," he insists. "I'm too busy doing my own thing to worry about what my competitors are doing."



### China market

"We were among the first to get duty free distribution rights in China three years ago," according to Denis, "so we have achieved a lot for a company without any money." He recalls how he then set off on a marathon journey from city to city and province to province – cognac in hand – to market his products, and what an impression it made on his potential customers to be visited by the president of Denis Charpentier himself rather than by a China market specialist acting on the company's behalf. Time and again during the company's development, the importance of this personal touch, actively fostered by Denis, is evident.

"I sold 3,500 cases of cognac and brandy on my first sales trip to China in May 1994. I visited two cities per day; altogether I visited 30 cities in nine provinces. It wasn't easy, carrying the products myself. I lost six kilos in three weeks. But the personal touch is very important."

"Last year, we sold a lot of wine; we exported about 800,000 bottles. This year we plan to export over a million – that's excluding the China market. If we include the China market, we can sell much more. The wine market is really taking off in China."

"Packaging gives us a competitive edge. We try to make our packaging more beautiful than the others, that's very important. Also, because I'm the founder and owner of the group, I put my heart into it. My team is the key. If you take one person away from my team, I lose all my power; you need two legs to walk."

