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Diageo acquires premium aperitif Belsazar, the first company to graduate from Distill Ventures

Today, Diageo announces the acquisition of Belsazar GmbH, a premium aperitif from Germany's Black Forest. Belsazar was launched by entrepreneurs Maximilian Wagner and Sebastian Brack on the Berlin food and drinks scene in 2013. Belsazar is the first company to be acquired by Diageo through Distill Ventures.

Belsazar provides Diageo with an exciting opportunity to strengthen its participation in the aperitif occasion and expand the brand across Europe. As consumers shift towards more casual occasions, demand for lower ABV cocktails and long drinks are increasing and Belsazar fits this occasion perfectly.

The acquisition is also an important milestone for Distill Ventures, the drinks industry's first accelerator for new and growing spirits brands. Since its launch in 2013, Distill Ventures has significantly grown its portfolio and expanded into North America. Independently run, Distill Ventures receives funding from Diageo, and draws on industry expertise and professional networks, to identify, invest in and accelerate aspiring drinks brands.

Belsazar joined Distill Ventures in 2014 and has performed strongly in its key markets, Germany and the UK. The brand's heartland is Germany, where it is available in over 750 on-trade outlets as of summer 2017. These include gastronomy bars, Michelin starred restaurants, biergardens and smaller restaurants where people are looking for light, long drinks with food. In the UK, it is available in a number of on-trade locations including Soho House, Hakkasan and Chiltern Firehouse.

Belsazar is made from selected grapes including Pinot Noir among others from South Baden right at the edge of the Black Forest, infused with herbs to give it a unique natural character, and finished with a dash of fruit brandy. The liquid is then aged for up to three months, allowing it to develop its range of complex aromas. There are four Belsazar varieties: white, red, dry and its signature rosé. Belsazar was created to be enjoyed as an aperitif served with tonic and as part of classic and modern cocktails. It was named one of IWSR's Top Ten brands to watch in the Radius 2018 report.

Belsazar's founders Maximilian Wagner and Sebastian Brack will remain actively involved, working with Diageo to ensure the brand's future success. Belsazar will sit within Diageo's Reserve portfolio and will benefit from this team's marketing and distribution expertise to accelerate the brand's European footprint.

Maximilian Wagner, Co-Founder of Belsazar, said: "Today is the first day of an exciting new chapter for Belsazar as we integrate into Diageo's portfolio of world-class brands. Our ambition right from the beginning in 2013 has been to share our aperitif with as many people as possible and we're excited that this next step will help bring the spirit of Berlin to new consumers."

Sebastian Brack, Co-Founder of Belsazar said: "Working with Distill Ventures these past few years has given us an invaluable base of knowledge and experience that we'll undoubtedly call on as we continue to grow the business with Diageo in Europe."

David Gates, Managing Director of Diageo Futures, said: "We are thrilled that Belsazar is joining our wonderful portfolio of brands. Diageo is the home of many founder-led brands from Johnnie Walker, Tanqueray and Guinness to newer brands like Bulleit. Partnering with entrepreneurs like Max and Sebastian, and nurturing the global drinks brands of the future is core to our strategy. It's been very exciting to follow Belsazar's development and we look forward to working to deliver the next phase of the brand's growth."

Frank Lampen, CEO and Global Head of Distill Ventures added "Belsazar was one of the first Distill Ventures investments and we've worked closely with the founders over the past four years. This first acquisition is therefore a very exciting moment for us, Diageo and the Belsazar team. Diageo have a great new brand and Max and Sebastian can continue to realise their vision for Belsazar with the full resources and expertise of the world's largest drinks company. This success story is proof that venturing adds value to both corporates and entrepreneurs and we look forward to welcoming more great founders to Distill Ventures."

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Enquiries

Media relations:	Michelle Lavipour	+44 (0) 7922 581290
	Jessica Rouleau	+44 (0) 7925 642561
	Bianca Agius	+44 (0) 7950 811109
	press@diageo.com	

About Belsazar

Based in Berlin and rooted in Baden, Belsazar combines traditional craftsmanship with an urban and modern lifestyle. South Baden is the “Tuscany of Germany” due to its sunny valleys and exceptional vineyards. These high quality and regionally produced wines are used as a basis to produce Belsazar.

There are four varieties in the Belsazar range: Belsazar Red, White, Dry and Rosé. Vermouth has always been a staple for classic cocktails, and Belsazar lends itself to easy, light and refreshing drinks that consist of two to three ingredients and are low alcohol by volume. This allows people to create exciting and individual drinks, with a variety of flavours, with Belsazar served in the top bars, hotels and restaurants.

About Distill Ventures

Established in 2013, Distill Ventures is the drinks industry’s first accelerator for new and growing spirits brands whose aim is to support entrepreneurs develop, scale and sell the drinks brands of the future. Through a combination of cash investment, mentoring support and access to a network of experts, Distill Ventures works with founders to help brands go further, faster. Distill Ventures operates across many drinks categories, and invests at all stages, from pre-launch (or “seed” businesses) through to those requiring significant expansion capital. Distill Ventures is operated independently and is a partnership with Diageo, who provide the investment funding, as well as access to their global network of experts.

To date, Distill Ventures has invested in more than 15 different drinks brands including: Seedlip, the world’s first non-alcohol distilled spirits brand; Stauning, one of Europe’s standout new whiskies from Denmark and Starward, a distinctive Australian whisky, exclusively matured in Australian wine barrels.

Further information on Distill Ventures and details on how acceleration works for drinks brands is available at www.distillventures.com.

About Diageo

Diageo is a global leader in beverage alcohol with an outstanding collection of brands across spirits, beer and wine categories. These brands include Johnnie Walker, Crown Royal, J&B, Buchanan’s and Windsor whiskies, Smirnoff, Ciroc and Ketel One vodkas, Captain Morgan, Baileys, Don Julio, Tanqueray and Guinness.

Diageo is a global company, and our products are sold in more than 180 countries around the world. The company is listed on both the London Stock Exchange (DGE) and the New York Stock Exchange (DEO). For more information about Diageo, our people, our brands, and performance, visit us at www.diageo.com. Visit Diageo’s global responsible drinking resource, www.DRINKiQ.com, for information, initiatives, and ways to share best practice.

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