



SHERRY

Overview

Sherry is a wine produced in the small area of land along the sea in southwest Spain known as Jerez. This region is part of the Andalusia province of Spain. It is the region of Spain known for flamenco, prized horses, bullfighting, white-washed villages and perhaps the world's most mouthwatering array of shellfish.

Sherry is most often cast as the libation of old ladies, an idea that strikes southern Spanish men—known for their machismo, love of bullfights and predilection for cigars—as quite amusing; Sherry is their daily drink.

Sherry is Spain's most complex and labor intensive wine and ranges from bone dry to extremely sweet. Dry Sherries, like white wines, should be consumed within a few days of being opened. The Sherry vineyards spread in a triangular fashion from the town of Jerez de la Frontera to the town of Puerto de Santa Maria of the Bay of Cadiz and Sanlucar de Barrameda on the Atlantic shore.

Ninety-five percent of Sherry is made from the Palomino grape, which is disease resistant and vigorous. But in terms of aroma, flavor and character, Palomino is greatly lacking. The individuality of a Sherry comes from the *albariza* soil in which the grapes are grown and the solera in which the Sherry is made. Moscatel and Pedro Ximenez are two other minor grapes used for Sherry for imparting sweetness.

Sherry Production

Each style of Sherry has its own separate solera. The solera is a system for blending and aging Sherry. As with normal white wine production, White Palomino grapes are crushed and the juice is fermented in stainless steel or cement tanks. Grape spirits are added after fermentation and the wine is poured into barrels and set aside for a year or more. In the barrels the wine is referred to as anada (wine of the current year). In a months time a yellow-white matter called flor forms on the surface and completely blankets the wine. This is a yeast that can grow only in this area due to the climate conditions. The flor protects the wine from oxidation and gives it a slight taste of the sea and aromas of sea air. The slow progress of the wine through the solera barrel system gives it a distinct nutty flavor as well.

A solera is a series of 600-liter old American oak barrels arranged in rows and the rows stacked on top of each other. The stack may be four or five barrels high and the solera may contain as many as fourteen rows. The barrels at the bottom of the stack contain the oldest Sherry. When Sherry is ordered, it is drawn from these barrels. By law, only 30 percent of a solera can be drawn off in any one year. The Sherry removed from the bottom barrels for bottling is replaced by wine from the barrels in the second row above the bottom. The wine used from the second row is replaced by the wine from the third row of barrels and so on to the top of the stack of barrels. The anada is used to top-off the barrels at the top of the stack.

As a result of the constant fractional blending of younger wines into older wines, Sherry is not the product of any one year. By law, it never carries a vintage date, although a Sherry label may designate the year the solera was formed.

Categories of Sherry

There are two broad categories of Sherry: Fino and Oloroso. Fino Sherry is generally light dry and crisp. Oloroso is typically fuller bodied, darker in color, nutty and sometimes sweet. The most notable difference between the two is the use of flor when producing Fino Sherries and the lack of flor when processing Olorosos.

Fino-type sherries

Manzanilla—pale, straw colored, light and tangy. Best served within six months of bottling.

Fino—This is an aged fino. Delicately dry cocktail Sherry with a pleasant nutty taste.

Amontillado—This is a well aged Fino that is usually dry or semi-dry. It is deeper in color and richer and nuttier than Fino.

Palo Cortado—A type of Amontillado that is aged an especially long time that border on being Oloroso.

Oloroso-type Sherries

Oloroso—A long aged Sherry that has not been influenced by flor. A dry sherry that is very aromatic with a pronounced nutty flavor.

Cream—This is an Oloroso that has been substantially sweetened with Pedro Ximenez-grape wine.

Pedro Ximenez—A sweet sherry that is dark and dense like blackstrap molasses and made from the Pedro Ximenez grape.