

# SHERRY

## 101

BACK TO BASICS

BY JIM CLARKE

Sherry is a case study in premiumization. Volume has been declining (gently), but premium Sherry has never been so diverse and vibrant. In 2015, imports of grandma's sugary tippie, Cream Sherry, were down 45% compared to 2006, but Amontillado, a more premium, dry style, rose 334% over the same time.

Sherry has decided to be a wine again, rather than as a brand-driven, back-bar commodity. Importers are finding success with smaller bodegas, and enthusiastic sommeliers and

bartenders are getting creative about taking apart guest's misconceptions about Sherry, especially the assumption that it's sweet – most premium sherry is quite dry.

If ever a category can benefit from back-to-basics presentation, it is Sherry. The distinct styles—from fresh, dry, nutty/salty fino up through richer Olorosos and the lusciously sweet “PX”—are derived from production techniques that scream authenticity, and they are ready to reward drinkers with food-friendly, unique flavor profiles. A little education goes an especially long way.

## WHERE IS IT MADE?

The southern tip of Spain: Jerez de la Frontera, El Puerto de Santa María, and Sanlúcar de Barrameda. Most of the best vineyards are in albariza, a chalky, white soil that holds water well despite the hot climate.



## HOW IS IT MADE/WHAT IS IT MADE FROM?

### GRAPES:

**Palomino** primarily, but also **Moscatel** and **Pedro Ximénez**, especially for sweet wines.



aromas, and consumes glycerol, making the wine taste drier, less rounded, and lighter-bodied.

### FLOR:

After fermentation, when wine is barreled, space left at the top allows an oxygen-proof layer of **yeast called “flor”** to develop spontaneously on the surface. Flor protects the wine from oxidation, contributes nutty (aldehydic) and saline



### FORTIFICATION:

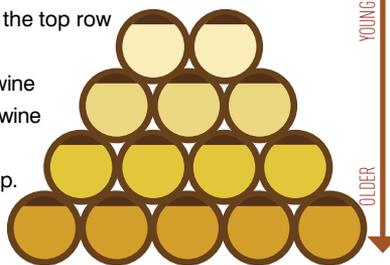
Sherries are fortified based on type. For lighter, paler wines that are to become **Finos or Manzanillas**, neutral grape spirit is added to bring the alcohol up to around 15% and the wines continue to develop under the flor.

Fuller, rounder wines destined to become **Olorosos** are fortified up to around 17%; the higher alcohol prevents the growth of flor and enables slow oxidation in the barrel.

# THE MAGIC OF THE SOLERA

Most Sherry is non-vintage, and the “solera” system ensures a gradual blending of old and younger wine.

- A solera consists of three or four “criaderas” of barrels, the top row holding the youngest wines and the bottom the oldest.
- When Sherry is to be bottled, the cellar master draws the wine from the bottom criadera, then tops those barrels off with wine aging in the second, then tops those off with the criadera above that, and so forth; New wine is only added at the top.
- A maximum of 1/4 of the final criadera can be drawn out at one time.

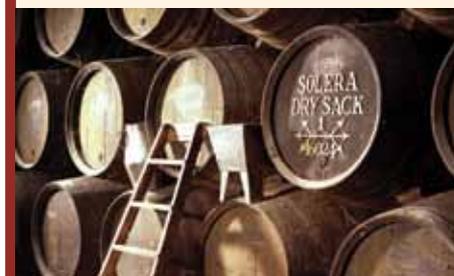


## TYPES OF SHERRY

Types of Sherry are all about style. Dry sherry can be divided into biologically-aged wines (Fino, Manzanilla), which develop in barrel under flor; oxidatively-aged wines (Oloroso), whose exposure to oxygen, without the protective layer of flor, results in richer, rounder, deeper flavors; and intermediate styles that combine both types of aging (Amontillado, Palo Cortado).

STEPS	FINO & MANZANILLA	AMONTILLADO	OLOROSO	PALO CORTADO
<b>FORTIFICATION</b>	To 15-15.5%, which still allows Flor to develop.	To 15-15.5% initially	To 15-15.5% initially	To 17-18%, which prevents flor development
<b>FLOR</b>	YES. Forms and exists throughout the aging process	YES. Ages under flor for 3-8 years	YES, for 1-2 years	No
<b>OXIDATIVE AGENT</b>	NO	YES. Later fortified to 17-18%, killing the flor, then sees additional aging	YES. Later fortified to 17-18%, killing the flor, then sees additional aging	YES
<b>COLOR</b>				
<b>STYLE POINTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Almond, saline, and apple notes from the flor.</li> <li>▪ Light and very dry; a classic aperitif.</li> <li>▪ Manzanillas are from Sanlúcar de Barrameda where greater humidity means more flor and a lighter-bodied wine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Darker in color and medium-bodied,</li> <li>▪ Nut, caramel and umami notes.</li> <li>▪ As of 2012 Amontillados are always dry, the sweetened equivalent now labeled as “Medium Sherry.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not very common, this type was originally the fate of Finos wherein the flor did not develop adequately,</li> <li>▪ Now a Palo Cortado cultivated style. Often described as Amontillado on the nose, Oloroso on the palate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A rich, darker style,</li> <li>▪ Rounded texture is due to a glycerine component other Sherries lack, but still dry.</li> <li>▪ Cream Sherries are made by sweetening Oloroso with must from sun-dried grapes, usually Moscatel or Pedro Ximénez.</li> </ul>

## FEATURED BRAND WILLIAMS & HUMBERT



### ALL IN THE STYLE

Sherry, by nature, represents a spectrum of styles. With an eye on the consumer, it is important to be able to communicate levels of sweetness and usage opportunities.

Bodega Williams & Humbert—founded in 1877 and best-known for Dry Sack—is an excellent example of a supplier with a full stylistic portfolio. The bodega has three separate product lines, defined by age:

- **Heritage Series** (base level)
- **Don Zoilo Collection** (12 years in solera)
- **Rare Aged** (20 and 30 year old expressions)

Each tier offers expressions that range from dry to sweet.

### HERITAGE SERIES

Here is a look at the Sherry spectrum—in style descriptors and usage—as represented by the Williams & Humbert’s Heritage Series.

#### Pando Fino Sherry

**Age of Solera:** 5 years

**ABV:** 15%

**Appearance:** Pale

**Style:** Very dry (< 1 gram sugar per liter)

The perfect chilled aperitif; pair with cheese, nuts, ham, dried fruits, seafood.



#### Dry Sack Medium Sherry

**Age of Solera:** 6 years

**ABV:** 19.5%

**Appearance:** Amber

**Style:** Stronger and slightly sweet; 28 gr./l

Enjoy neat, on the rocks, in contemporary cocktails; Can also pair with pasta or cheeses



#### Canasta Cream Sherry

**Age of Solera:** 6 years

**ABV:** 19.5%

**Appearance:** Mahogany

**Style:** Velvety, raisiny, sweet; 132 gr./l

Before or after dinner, neat, on the rocks, in cocktails; can also pair with rich snacks, dried fruit, vanilla ice cream, desserts.



## SERVING SHERRY:

- Traditionally served in smaller, 2 oz. “copitas” but today even the Sherry Consejo Regulador recommends regular white wine glasses



- Sherry should be stored and served chilled at 45-60°, cooler for the lighter styles and warmer for the richer.
- Sherry does not improve with age once bottled.
- Once opened, finos and manzanillas can last up to a week, and other styles up to two months.
- Unlike other wines, Sherry should be stored standing up to minimize the amount of wine that has contact with air.



## COCKTAIL OPPORTUNITIES

It is difficult to define Sherry as a cocktail ingredient because of its natural variability in sweetness, nuttiness, saltiness, viscosity.... One notable attribute, however, is Sherry's relative ratio of flavor intensity to alcohol, which makes it a favorite especially when mixologists aim for lower-octane cocktails. Here are a few examples where Sherry is in the drink's driver's seat.



**The Cobbler** is built on dry Sherry, a bit of sugar and a slice or two of orange. Obviously a low alcohol relative of the Old Fashioned. The orange and sugar are muddled; then add the Sherry and serve over crushed ice in a highball glass, garnished with mint and berries.



**The Up-To-Date** is also a classic: 1.5 oz rye, 1.5 oz dry Sherry, a teaspoon of Grand Marnier, and two dashes Angostura bitters. Stir with ice and strain into a martini glass.



**The Bamboo** and the **Adonis** are variations on each other. The former combines 1.5 oz Fino, 1.5 oz dry French vermouth and orange bitters. The latter has 1.5 oz Oloroso, 1.5 oz sweet Italian vermouth and Angostura bitters. Both are stirred with ice, strained into a martini glass, and garnished with lemon peel.

## OTHER TERMS:

### EN RAMA:

**Unfiltered** or only **lightly filtered** at bottling.

### VOS:

“Very Old Sherry;” barrels in the solera must have an **average of 20 years or more**, and only 1/20th can be drawn off each year for bottling, to ensure a greater influence of aged wine.

### VORS:

“Very Old Rare Sherry;” the solera must have an **average age of 30 years or more**, and only 1/30th can be drawn off each year for bottling.

## SELLING POINTS:

### WHISKEY LOVERS, TAKE NOTE

Amontillado and Olorosos offer familiar aromas to brown-liquor fans. Many whiskeys are using sherry casks for aging, creating an entry point for conversation.

### COCKTAILS BECKON

Sherry works in many cocktails as a secondary ingredient in lieu of vermouth or other aromatized wines. Finos and Manzanillas can add acidity and intensity; Amontillados and especially Olorosos are valuable for a more rounded, weighty mouthfeel. Sherry also makes a great base for low-alcohol cocktails, particularly in programs where spirits aren't on offer.

### CLASSIC AS APERITIFS

Especially Finos and Manzanillas are great while waiting for a table or looking over the menu

### FOOD FRIENDLY

Finos and Manzanillas are also well-suited to nuts, cured meats, and even fish—much like any other crisp white wine. Amontillados and Olorosos can stand up to richer dishes, even meats; soups are a classic pairing owing to the textural contrast.



## SHERRY FUN FACTS

The first use of the term “Sherry wine” was in the 15th century, soon after the Moorish town of Sherish was conquered by King Alfonso X and renamed Xérés (later Jerez).

Christopher Columbus brought Sherry when he set out from Spain to discover the New World; and the Portuguese explorer Magellan spent more on Sherry than on weapons when he prepared to sail around the world in 1519.



In the 2017 Edition of his *Pocket Wine Book*, Hugh Johnson calls Manzanilla “the world's best-value dry white wine; sip it with almost any food, especially crustaceans.”

## SHERRY RESOURCES

### Vinos de Jerez

(sherry.wine), the official international Sherry website, features info on events, types of Sherry, etc., plus an extensive pairing chart and serving suggestions.

### Andalucia.com

offers not only a detailed history of Sherry and specific properties, but also plenty of background on Andalusian gastronomy and culture.

### Talia Baiocchi's book *Sherry*

has been lauded for bringing "the wine world's best kept secret" to a new generation; she gives readers of all levels a comprehensive buying guide and an array of contemporary cocktail recipes.



## SHERRY BY THE NUMBERS

Recent sales trends support the premiumization of the Sherry category overall. While volume overall has slipped, there has been improved performance of higher-quality, premium Sherries.

From 2011 to 2015...



SOURCE: 2016 IWSR US BEVERAGE ALCOHOL REVIEW

## FEATURED BRAND DON ZOILO

### DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

A famous saying holds that "great wine is made in the vineyard." Great Sherry, on the other hand, is definitely shaped in the cellar. (Indeed, its primary grape, Palomino, is remarkable for its neutrality!)

At Williams & Humbert, the Don Zoilo Collection (named in honor of the brother of Jose Medina, owner of the firm, who created this range) comprises Sherries, dry to sweet, which benefit from specific decisions resulting in distinctive qualities.

### TO FLOR, OR NOT TO FLOR?

**Manzanilla** – After fermentation, paler, lighter wines are selected to age under flor, the oxygen-proof layer of yeast that develops on the surface; these are fortified to 15% and become Fino or, in this case because of the location in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Manzanilla. Aged at least 5 years, the result is dry and fresh yet full-flavored, with complex yeasty aromas and lip-smacking acidity.



### MEET THE TWO-TIMER

**Amontillado** undergoes a unique dual aging: first under the veil of flor for 8 years, then it joins the solera's third criadera and is exposed to oxidation for 4 more years. This fusion of processes renders Don Zoilo Amontillado dry and reminiscent of a Fino but extraordinarily complex.



### GETTING RICHER NOW

**Oloroso** – After fermentation, fuller-bodied barrels are fortified to at least 17%, with the higher alcohol content preventing the growth of flor and resulting in richer Oloroso Sherries. In the case of Don Zoilo Oloroso, the character is further enhanced by its grapes being from Jerez Superior and the ABV being boosted to 19%.



### SWEET GRAND FINALE

**Pedro Ximénez** – The decision-making for this luscious, rich Sherry begins with the grape variety. The naturally sweet "PX" grapes for Don Zoilo come from Jerez Superior; 12 years in the solera bring depth and concentration to the wine's fig-raisin character.



## SHERRY QUOTES

“ If penicillin can cure those that are ill, Spanish Sherry can bring the dead back to life. ”

– Alexander Fleming

“ Sherry, the civilized drink. ”

– W. Somerset Maugham

“ Sherry, Niles? ”

– Frasier Crane

“ We are away to the region of your nutty, full-flavored Amontillado sherry, the golden juice I have so often held up to the light. ”

– Charles Dickens

Legally, only Sherries from Jerez are permitted to be labeled "Sherry." Yes, some is produced in the U.S., but it's required by law to bear a label identifying it as "California sherry" or "American Sherry."



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