



## **APERITIF SHERRY**

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This is an introduction to an amazing wine and why we should be drinking more of it. There is no other wine that is as versatile, as utterly unique in its range and production methods—and, unfortunately, as misunderstood—as sherry. For centuries, sherry was considered one of the world's great wines, spoken about in the same reverential terms as the finest Bordeaux and Burgundies. But in the last few decades, sherry lost its way—and cheap, cloyingly sweet blends ruined the reputation of what remains one of Spain's oldest and greatest winemaking traditions. Because of sherry's former reputation as a sweet and cloying old-lady drink, it has been striped of its complexity and range in the public mind. As you may recall, the numerous comments resulting from last year's session echo's that of the public. To rectify this, as wine judges let's be objective and get to know and appreciate sherry. Sherry's popularity peaked in the late 1970's, and after a painful contraction, is now bouncing back, largely because of the consistently high quality of the wines that are now made, and the fact that they offer great value for money. Most sherries are made from the Palomino grape, which produces an uninspiring still wine but is transformed into something absolutely magical when fortified and put through the complicated, time-consuming process of maturing, cask-aging, and blending (from the "solera" system, which essentially means combining wine from different barrels) that makes the drink special, definitely not a "spoiled wine" as sometimes referred to by those with predetermined opinions or lack of knowledge.

### ***Class A Aperitif Sherry (BCAWA Competition Handbook)***

*This class is intended for dry and not-so-sweet Sherry, Madeira and related wine types. The very sweet wines of these classes belong to the after dinner class.*

<b>Alcohol:</b>	15.5% - 20%
<b>Colour:</b>	No restrictions
<b>Sugar:</b>	0% - 10%
<b>SG:</b>	0.980 - 1.007
<b>Acid:</b>	4.0 g/l - 5.5 g/l
<b>pH:</b>	2.9 - 3.3

Harvesting in Spain is almost always done by hand. There are three grape varieties authorized for the production of Sherry: Palomino, Muscat of Alexandria (also known as Moscatel) and Pedro Ximénez. The latter two grapes are mainly used for sweetening purposes, and Palomino is by far the dominant grape in southern Spain. It's a relatively heavy cropper, producing large bunches of pale green grapes, which are harvested at a potential alcohol level of 11–12.5 degrees. The resulting base wines are crisp with a neutral character. It's the production process that transforms these into the compelling, diverse wines that sherry is known for.

Essential to the production of sherry is the growth of a layer of film-forming yeasts on the top of the developing wine. This is known as the flor, and it forms spontaneously from yeasts that are abundant in the winery environment when the sherry casks are left incompletely filled. Sherry butts (as the barrels are known) are made of American oak and usually have a capacity of 600 litres, but are only filled to 500 litres, leaving a large air space. In combination with various species of yeast. A growth of the flor forms that protects the developing wine from oxidation. The flor contributes a distinctive flavour to the wine by metabolizing alcohol to the nutty “apple” compound acetaldehyde. To keep the flor healthy, casks are periodically topped up with fresh wine, to maintain the nutrients that the yeasts need to survive.

At the end of the year when fermentation is complete and the wine is still on its lees, it is classified and then fortified. This classification determines the destiny of the wine. The cellar master will taste through the casks with a view to separating out the lighter, more elegant wines to become fino, and the heavier, darker wines to become Olorosos.

### **Fino**

Crisp, dry, yeasty, nutty and tangy, fino is the freshest and most delicate of sherry styles, weighing in at around 15% alcohol. Protected from oxygen during its development by the flor, fino needs to be treated like white wine once it has been opened. It's a versatile food companion, and should be drunk chilled.

### **Manzanilla**

This is a fino-style sherry from the coastal town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda. Because the more humid environment in the bodegas here encourages a thicker flor layer, these wines are typically lighter and even fresher than fino, often with a distinctive salty tang.

### **Amontillado**

Aged fino that has lost its flor and then gone on to develop oxidatively, amontillado is an amber-coloured sherry that is nutty and complex, with a long finish. It is fortified to around 17.5 ° alcohol to protect it during its development, and because it has been aged oxidatively it will last for longer once opened.

### **Palo Cortado**

A sort of halfway house between a fino and an amontillado, Palo Cortado is the result of a fino sherry losing its flor. Nutty, fresh and complex, this is now a popular style.

### **Oloroso**

Complex brown-coloured Sherries, Olorosos develop in barrel without the protective flor layer, often for many years. The result is a complex, rich, nutty style of sherry with aromas of old furniture and raisins. These wines are dry. Because they have seen so much oxidation during development, they are pretty stable and stay in good condition for a while once the bottle is opened.

### **Pedro Ximénez**

Made from air-dried grapes, with fermentation stopped early by the addition of spirit, Pedro Ximénez is a remarkable wine. Viscous and amazingly sweet, it tastes like liquid Christmas cake.

## Cream

Cream Sherries are more commercial products that have been sweetened by the addition of Moscatel or Pedro Ximénez.

Typically, a single chalk slash on the face of the cask will indicate that a wine is to become a fino; two slashes will indicate it is to become an Olorosos. Fino wines will then be fortified to 15 ° alcohol, and Olorosos to 17 or 18 °. At this latter level of alcohol, the flor dies, and so Olorosos are not protected from oxygen during their development in the way that finos are.

## Madeira:

This is a style of wine similar to Sherry that may appear in one of our wine competitions.

### The History of Madeira Wine

Madeira has a fascinating history. To begin with, the island of Madeira served as a well-known port for various shipping routes going to and from the New World. England had specific legislation ("The British Navigation Act") in place that ultimately prevented the exportation of wine (and other goods) to British colonies in the New World, unless it came on a British vessel and originated from a British port of call. However, the island of Madeira was exempt from this pesky law and Madeira became a "staple" wine on the vessels bound for the American colonies.

Madeira wine is a delicious fortified white wine find that is produced on the Portuguese island of Madeira (situated in the Atlantic Ocean, about 350 miles northwest of Africa's Casablanca coast and located about 500 miles off of the coast of Portugal). Madeira is a fortified white wine that is available in several different styles of dry/sweet variations. There are four principle grape varietals that are recruited to make the best Madeira wines (Sercial, Verdelho, Bual, Malmsey). The base white wine is fortified with alcohol at different points of fermentation, depending on the level of sweetness the maker is going for (the more sweet the Madeira, the earlier in fermentation the base wine was fortified). Madeira is unique because it is not only fortified, but also oxidized *and* "cooked," (technically referred to as "estufagem") making for a fairly indestructible wine option. In fact, the term "Madeiraization" refers to the process of oxidizing and heating a wine. Madeira is typically an amber colored gem with caramel, nutty flavors.



## GRAPES AND STYLES OF MADEIRA WINE:

- **Sercial** – Sercial is a white wine grape that is used to produce a dry style of Madeira. Serve this style of Madeira as an aperitif with salty foods, almonds, walnuts, assorted olives, soups that are heavy on broth and the like.
- **Verdelho** – Verdelho is a white wine grape used to make a semi-dry variation of Madeira. Serve a Verdelho with richer appetizers like prosciutto, fancy mushroom dishes or caviar.
- **Bual** - Bual is a white grape that makes a semi-sweet Madeira. Consider serving Bual as a dessert wine with fruit-based or caramel desserts.
- **Malmsey** – Malmsey is a white grape that typically registers sweet when made into Madeira. A Malmsey Madeira is the richest, most full-bodied Madeira style and makes for an excellent dessert wine on many fronts. Consider pairing a Malmsey Madeira with cheesecake, tiramisu, crème brulee or dark chocolate-based desserts.
- **Madeira** - A "generic" Madeira labeling basically denotes that the wine is not made from one of the four key noble grape varietals. It will also typically come with a label "hint" as to whether you can expect it to be sweet (doce), dry (seco) or somewhere in between (meio doce - "medium sweet").

## MADEIRA WINE AGING CLASSIFICATIONS:

- **Finest** - aged for a mere three years.
- **Reserve** - aged for five years.
- **10 and 15 year** - as the name implies - aged for ten or 15 years.
- **Vintage** - dated for a specific year.