Sherry

**Vocab**

* **Andalucia:** The southernmost of Spain’s autonomous regions, encompassing 8 regions: Jerez, Malaga, Montilla-Moriles, Sierras de Málaga, and Condado de Huelva. Hottest part of Spain, traditionally been associated with strong, alcoholic wines. Most are fortified, others are super alcoholic without fortification anyway.
* **Jerez (de la Frontera):** City in Andalucia that’s the center of the Sherry industry. Owes full name to the fact that in the Middle Ages it was on the frontier between Christian and Moorish Spain.
* **Sanlúcar de Barrameda:** One of 3 Spanish towns in which Sherry is made and matured. Manzanilla is a delicate, pale, dry sherry matured in Sanlucar.
* **Puerto de Santa Maria:** One of 3 towns making and maturing Sherry. Puerto Fino is the name given to a Sherry matured here.
* **Consejo Regulador:** “Regulating council”. Spanish wine law administered through this council. They represent vine growers, wine producers, and merchants to decide on the ground rules for each DO. Oversees quality control, both in vineyards and cellars. Researches new developments and innovations. Promotes Sherry internationally.
* **Almacenista:** “Almacen”= store. Literally, a wholesaler. Term for sherry stockholder who sells wine to shippers. Small bodegas that provide stocks of wine for the large shipping houses. Most active promoter of this is Lustau
* **Domecq:** One of the oldest sherry houses, founded in 1730. Has ancient line of soleras (oldest founded in 1732, and other sherries aged in soleras dating from 1830, 1902, and 1919). Has isolated own strain of yeast to ensure consistent fermentation. Acquired by Jim Beam in 2005 (along with Harveys), who sold the name to Pernod Ricard. The current owner of the Domecq bodega in Jerez's beautiful and increasingly valuable old town is Andrew L Tan (part of Alliance Global Group), Chinese owner of Emperador, the world's biggest-selling brandy. He is based in the Philippines and presumably was most interested in Spain's favourite brandy Fundador, acquired by Harveys along with Terry, one of the two bodegas it bought in 1985. Today, the old Domecq bodega has been rebranded Bodega Fundador.

Domecq's flagship line includes four sherries: the "La Ina" Fino, a Manzanilla, a Medium Dry Amontillado, and the Vina 25 Pedro Ximenez. They also produce three VORS (Very Old Rare Sherries): the Amontillado 51-1A, the Sibarita Palo Cortado, and the Venerable Pedro Ximenez; the abbreviation indicates a minimum average age of thirty years. Outside of Sherry they produce the Marques de Arienzo Riojas and some sparkling wines.

* **Gonzalez-Byass:**
  + History: Est 1835.Largest sherry producer, still owned by family that founded the house. Manuel Maria Gonzales Angel set up business as a shipper in Jerez, sent first big shipment to Robert Blake Byass, who became their UK agent and became a shareholder in 1855.

1844: company purchased their first vineyards.

1846: first wines bottled in Jerez.

Mid 1800s: Fino brand Tio Pepe created, named after Manuel’s uncle (who helped nephew establish solera).

Mid 1990s, started releasing expensive vintage-dated dry sherries (a pre-solera Jerez tradition).

2001: acquired Spanish interests of Croft port.

* **Harveys of Bristol:** For many, Harveys has developed a poor but undeserved reputation; nonetheless, it remains the best selling sherry in the world. Founded in 1796 by William Perry, who was later joined by John Harvey. Wines aimed at the British market. Until 1960 the company purchased wines in Jerez and shipped them to Bristol, England for aging and blending, now owns 10% of vineyards around Jerez. Around that time, they began buying their own vineyards so they could protect the quality of their source material. Their true claim to fame is their development in the 1860s of Harveys Bristol Cream, the world's first Cream Sherry (over 1 million cases sold in UK alone in 2016). The blend starts with wines from fifty different soleras, including three sherry types: Fino, Amontillado, and Oloroso. Finally some Pedro Ximenez wine is added for sweetness, and for the richness and creaminess that is the hallmark of the style. Wines made by Domecq’s winemaker. Purchased by Beam
* **Beam, Inc.**: Now Beam Suntory. Sold shares to Emperador in 2015 of several brandies and sherries for $275 million.
* **Bodega:** A building where the Sherry casks are stores, typically above ground rather than below as in most regions. Word is also used to refer to a Sherry company as a whole (Bodegas Almocaden)
* **Solera:** The last tier, or scale, of a system of fractional blending used in Jerez; this is typically the tier from which the wine is drawn for bottling. Can be used to refer to the whole system, involving the solera itself with its criaderas. Used to create a product that is consistent and complex, also keeps flor alive in the case of Fino Sherry.

In the solera process, a succession of containers are filled with the product over a series of equal aging intervals (usually a year). A group of one or more containers, called criaderas ('nurseries'), are filled for each interval. At the end of the interval after the last scale is filled, the oldest scale in the solera is tapped for part of its content, which is bottled. Then that scale is refilled from the next oldest scale, and that one in succession from the second-oldest, down to the youngest scale, which is refilled with new product. This procedure is repeated at the end of each aging interval. The transferred product mixes with the older product in the next barrel.

No container is ever drained, so some of the earlier product always remains in each container. This remnant diminishes to a tiny level, but there can be significant traces of product much older than the average, depending on the transfer fraction. In theory, traces of the very first product placed in the solera may be present even after 50 or more cycles.

* **Flor:** A generic term for a group of yeast that form a film over the surface of the wine. Flor feed on oxygen, alcohol, glycerin, and produce acetaldehyde (characterizes the taste of Fino) and carbon dioxide. They also protect the wines from oxidation. To thrive, they need very precise conditions:
  + Sufficient nutrients
  + Temperature at 15-21 C or 59-70 F
  + Alcohol at 15-15.5% abv
  + Low levels of SO2
  + pH @ 3.3-3.4
  + Good levels of humidity
* **Arrope:** Grape juice concentrate. Dark, sweet syrup that has been prepared by boiling down fresh grape must to ⅕ of its original volume. Usually how dark sherries are sweetened. Used to be mixed with fresh must to obtain *vino de color* for blending.
* **Palomino:** white grape variety that accounts for vast majority of plantings (95%). 2 sub-varieties: Palomino Fino (majority) and Palomino de Jerez (rare).
  + Palomino Fino: of Andalusian origin. Susceptible to Downy Mildew. Likes warm, dry soils. Loose, generous bunches with relatively high, regular yields. Low in acidity and fermentable sugars and has tendency to oxidize, all no problem for Sherry producers. Neutral, often uninteresting flavor profile as a base wine.
* **Pedro Ximenez:** Rare white variety. Most comes from Montilla-Morilles (calcium carbonate soils) where it grows most successfully (70% of all plantings there). Sometimes used to sweeten blends, other times used in varietal wines. Thin-skinned and traditionally dried in the sun. Generally lower in acid and alcohol than Palomino Fino.
* **Muscat of Alexandria:** “Moscatel Gordo Blanco.” 3% of plantings. White grape that performs well in arenas, esp around Chipiona. Mainly used for sweetening sherries, but can be used to make a dried sherry like PX. Likes heat and produces good yields of very ripe grapes. Vaguely grapey aroma with geranium notes. Unicorn wine: Valdespino’s Toneles (super old and powerful varietal Moscatel).
* **Location:**
  + Southwest Spain (Andalucia). Vineyard areas in “Marco de Jerez”, bound by the Guadalquivir and Guadelete rivers.
  + NW of city of Jerez, mostly, with another sector closer to Sanlucar de Barrameda
* **Climate**:
  + Warm Mediterranean, lots of sunshine
  + Actually high rainfall (autumn and winter). Rest of year is dry
  + 2 winds:
    - Levante (hot and dry): blows from Sahara to SE
    - Poniente (cooling and wet): blows from Atlantic, westerly
      * Provides balanced ripening in vineyards and optimal cellar conditions
* **Soils (3)**:
  + Albariza (rich in limestone)
    - Derives from Latin *albus*, meaning white
    - Nearly all vineyards on this soil type
    - Greatest water-holding capacity, but risk of chlorosis
    - Also reflects sunlight, increasing warmth and enhancing ripening
    - Important because Jerez is so dry during growing season
  + Baros (clay-based)
    - Found mostly SE of Jerez
    - Yields higher quantities of grapes, but of inferior quality, so only planted during periods of expansion
  + Arenas (sand-based)
    - High iron oxide content, so reddish color
    - Good for moscatel, not Palomino
    - Became popular during phylloxera epidemic
* **Grapes**:
  + W: Palomino, Pedro Ximenez, Muscat of Alexandria
* **Viticulture**:
  + Soil is ridged in winter to maximize capture of rainfall
  + Average altitude of vineyards: between 325 and 500 ft
  + Pruning and Trellising:
    - Vara y Pulgar (“Stick and Thumb” aka Single Guyot), limited training
    - Move towards modern wire trellising to facilitate mechanical harvesting
    - Canopy shade to prevent sunburn
  + Max permitted Palomino yields: 4.5 tons/acre
  + Harvest begins when grapes hit about 11 degrees Baume (19.8 Brix)
  + Vineyards near coast more associated with lighter styles and more suitable for Finos
  + Hotter and drier styles inland more suitable for Olorosos
* **Vinification**:
  + Dry Styles
    - Pressing:
      * Done quickly to avoid oxidation.
      * Juice extraction limited to 70 L/100 kgs.
      * Free run often used for Fino
    - Acid Addition:
      * Tartaric often added before fermentation
    - Fermentation:
      * Warm for whites since primary fruits and esters aren’t part of the wine style. Still, Finos at cooler temps than olorosos
      * Often in stainless steel tanks or American oak butt
    - Flor allowed to develop:
      * This happens on ALL wines 7-10 days after fermentation. Butts ⅚ of the way filled to allow for flor to develop (feeds off oxygen)
    - 1st Classification: Fino or Oloroso
      * Initial classifications of the wine based on the style and whether it is right for the house. Weight and intensity of base wine required for Finos and Olorosos varies by bodega rather than development of flor (all wines have flor at this time). Style of wine controlled by sourcing right grapes and controlling processes in winery.
    - Fortification w/ neutral grape spirit (usually produced in La Mancha from Airen) to produce a sobretabla (young, recently fortified wine ready to enter a solera system).
      * 15% for Fino (finest, most delicate wines)
      * 17% for Oloroso
    - 2nd Classification: Selecting the wines that will enter the solera
    - Enters solera: each group of butts known as a criadera
  + Naturally Sweet Styles
    - Grapes sundried to concentrate sugars. Sugar in must levels between 300-500 g/l
    - Fermentation reaches a few degrees abv before must is fortified to 15-18%
    - Aging in solera systems
* **Aging and Maturation: The Solera System**
  + Within the DO, there are 3 main centers for maturation:
    - Jerez de la Frontera
    - Sanlúcar de Barrameda
    - Puerto de Santa Maria
  + Solera System= system of fractional blending
    - For biologically aged wines, keeps flor supplied with nutrients
      * Rate of water evaporation matches flor’s consumption of alcohol, keeping it at 15-15.5%
    - For oxidatively aged wines: retains freshness in wine
    - Comprised of a group of butts, known as a criadera
      * Wine drawn off the oldest criadera, also confusingly known as the solera…
      * This is replenished from the butts that form the next oldest criadera, those are replenished by the next oldest criadera, and so on (process called “running the scales”)
        + Some are simple (3-4 criaderas, some 14+)
    - Whole system fed with new wine from most recent harvest
      * Fino soleras need refreshing most frequently to keep flor alive (2-3 times/year)
  + Common for soleras to feed into one another, like Fino into Amontillado
  + All sherries: min AVERAGE aging of 2 years
    - To calculate average aging period, divide the total volume of wine in solera by the total volume drawn off in one year
    - Total volume per year limited to 40% to guarantee min average age of all Sherry
* **Classifications of Sherry**
  + Fino: Sherries aged under flor (biologically). Only 15%-ish abv.
    - Pale Cream: sweetened Fino. 45-115 g/L RS. Normally sweetened with RCGM and fresh Palomino must. Color removed with activated charcoal (Jancis says they’re just Cream sherries with the color removed). Some sweeten with fortified Moscatel (grapey style).
    - Manzanilla: Fino aged in Sanlúcar de Barrameda. Seem to be lighter, tangier and “saltier” than Finos.
      * Manzanilla Fina/Pasada: aged Manzanilla that starts to take on characteristics of an Amontillado. Can be labeled as Fino-Amontillado
  + Amontillado: Finos that lose their flor. Evolve naturally if the flor have exhausted supply of nutrients. Can also be made purposefully if flor killed off by fortification to 16%+
    - Medium: sweetened Amontillado. 5-115 g/L RS
  + Oloroso: Sherries aged oxidatively. 18% + abv. Dark brown and concentrated due to evaporation (some old Olorosos reach 24%).
    - Cream: Sweetened Olorosos. 115-140 g/L RS. Finest styles made by blending Olorosos with sun-dried PX. Today, Palomino is dried, pressed, and fortified before fermentation to make a *mistela* and added to made most commercial cream sherries. Perhaps coloring even added.
  + Palo Cortado: Confusing style with the aroma of an Amontillado and palate of an Oloroso, result of oxidative aging after initial covering of flor has disappeared. Made when flor of wine fails to develop and gains distinct quality. Refortified to 17% and matured oxidatively. Some are blends of Amontillado and Oloroso wines. Difficult to blind taste and identify because each producer makes it differently and there’s a greater range of flavors.
  + V.O.S. aka “Vinum Optimum Signatum” (Very Old Sherry): avg 20+ years
  + V.O.R.S aka Very Old Rare Sherry: avg 30+ yrs
  + Anada: Vintage
  + 12 yrs, 15 yrs: these are averages
* **Commercial and Economics:** 
  + Overall production: has dropped continuously for 25 years, down to 12 million gallons in 2012.
  + Most important markets: Spain, the Netherlands, Great Britain