
Why Sherry Is So Extraordinary



Sherry wines are really quite extraordinary. They are diverse, delicious and incredibly versatile. They are also some of the most under-appreciated and undervalued wines in the world. So many people tell me they dislike sherry. When questioned further, this is usually a result of a bad experience with an out-of-condition, poorly stored sherry. Also, some people think that sherry is old-fashioned – their grandmother's tippie! Well, let me try dispelling the myth.



Today, Sherry is enjoying a well-deserved renaissance and, is deservedly the new hip drink of so many sommeliers.

While I have enjoyed Sherry for many years, it was during a visit to the region last October that I had a real epiphany, and returned home with a zealous desire to convert every wine drinker, one-at-a-time, to the deliciousness of the wines. Sherry wines can only be produced in the region of Jerez (Her-eth), in Andalusia in Spain. All Sherry is fermented dry – which means that sweet styles are sweetened after the wine is made through the addition of a sweet wine called Pedro Ximenez (PX). Sherry is also a fortified wine. This means that after the fermentation, the wine is fortified with neutral spirit to between 15 and 18% abv, depending on the style. There are basically two main categories of Sherry - those that are biologically aged such as Fino and Manzanilla (Man-thsan-E-a) in the absence of oxygen and under a thin film of yeast called flor; and those that are oxidatively aged, which are called Olorosas. All other styles of Sherry emanate from these two main categories.



Aged Finos and Olorosa Sherries are called Amontillado. Olorosa styles can be dry (secco) or sweet (dulce). Cream Sherries are part of the Olorosa family.

All Sherry wines go through a unique ageing system called the solera system. This is a dynamic system by which the wines from different stages of the ageing process are blended together. It is often affectionately explained as putting the young wines in touch with their ancestors. This also means that sherry wines are not vintage dated, but rather a combination of many different vintages.

In terms of taste, Fino and Manzanilla Sherries are among the driest and most refreshing wines in the world. For me, in an era of loud, powerful wines, these wines provide the perfect antidote of elegance and refinement.

Sherry is so versatile that it can both be enjoyed early evening at a bar, and also carry you through a whole dinner. The different styles pair with many different cuisines from around the world. They also come to the rescue, when serving dishes normally considered difficult to pair with wine such as artichoke, asparagus, salad and soup dishes. Try these with a Fino or Manzanilla. You will be surprised how well they work.

A traditional dry Amontillado, works wonderfully with spicy foods. Indian, Thai and Vietnamese flavors are complimented by the fuller and nuttier character of an Amontillado. Amontillados also lift many fish, mushroom and white meat dishes. More robust dishes like game, or red meat favor Olorosa styles. A smooth dry Olorosa can really elevate a winter stew, or ragoût of wild mushrooms. Olorosa aromas and flavors are nutty and toasty with complex spicy notes they can match a wide range of full flavored dishes.

And finally, one of the best wines to pair with rich chocolate desserts is PX (Pedro Ximenez), the sweetest white wine in the world. Rich with flavors of dried figs, dates, nuts and honey, this wine is at ease as much with desserts as it is with strong blue cheeses like Roquefort and Stilton.

Many people shy away from Sherry, because it is fortified wine. But at 15 or 16% abv, it is really not much higher than many of the table wines on offer today. Price point is another reason that sherry wines are so extraordinary. Most Sherries cost less than \$20 and, come in half bottles.

Some tips for buying and storing sherry are: Firstly buy from a store that either specializes in Sherry, or from a large grocery store or supermarket, where you know the bottle has not been gathering dust on a lonely shelf. Sherries are best consumed fresh. Fino and Manzanilla should be stored in the fridge like any white wine, served chilled and the bottle consumed within 1-2 weeks of opening. Also forget the copita, serve sherry in a decent white wine glass. You will taste the difference.

Here are a few recommendations that I particularly like and that are well distributed around the country.

- Tio Pepe Fino (\$10) – classic, bone dry with a tangy nose. Flavors and aromas of almonds, stone fruit and long mineral finish
- Osborne Fino Sherry (\$10) - crisp, with hints of almonds and tart apple
- La Gitana Manzanilla \$13 – lighter and more delicate than fino. Citrus notes and wonderfully refreshing with a delightful salty tang on the finish.
- Domecq Manzanilla Sherry (\$15) - bracing, with intense herb, green olive and apple flavors along with the classic salty tang.
- Lustau Dry Amontillado "Los Arcos" Sherry (\$11) – Dry and smooth, with toasty nuts and golden raisin aromas and flavors
- Lustau Dry Oloroso "Don Nuño" Sherry \$20 – Dry, amber gold color with aromas and flavors of bitter chocolate, toasted nuts and rich fruitcake.
- Gonzalez Byass Oloroso Dulce Sherry "Matusalem" VORS (\$23) – What value! Aged for over 30 years. Mahogany color with a warm toffee nose. Luxurious, packed with raisins and prunes and hints of cake spice and sweet oak.

Stores carrying a good selection of Sherry:

Sherry –Lehmann (Manhattan, NY)

Chambers Street Wines (Manhattan, NY)

Winerz.com (Orange, CA) –

Astor Wines (Manhattan, NY)

Beltramo's Wines & Spirits (Menlo Park, CA)

Chevy Chase Wine & Spirits (Washington, DC)

Total Wine & More (various locations, FL, NC)

The Grape Merchant, (Weston, FL)

Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board (PA)

Malloys Finest Wine and Spirits (Glen Ellyn, IL)