



# Sherry

shining in a trendy light



Ainsley Szvitat

Many people associate sherry with either their grandmothers or watching reruns of “Intervention,” but sherry is an incredibly versatile and delicious wine. And, after decades of being out of fashion and unfairly considered a sweet wine, it is now trendy and making a comeback.

Labour-intensive and complex, sherry has been produced for more than 2,000 years in many ways, from bone dry to lusciously sweet.

Each production has an appropriate setting as well, much like any wine.

The sherries mentioned here go through the intricate blending process known as the solera system. Sherry production begins as any white wine does and then, the year after the harvest, the wine is fortified with a mixture of pure alcohol. This raises the alcohol content to 14.5 per cent. The alcohol helps stabilize the wine as well as encouraging growth of flor, which is a naturally occurring yeast.

The flor forms a film or layer at the surface of the wine and feeds off any of the residual sugar that had not been previously fermented. This natural barrier acts to protect the wine from oxidation. Avoiding oxidation leaves the wine with a nutty and yeasty tang.

By using the solera system, producers are able to have more control and produce a consistent product year after year. To begin, casks are divided based on the amount of

flor; those rich in flor are used for Fino-style sherry while the rest are designated for Oloroso solera.

To produce the sherry, rows of casks are set up on top of each other, typically four to five rows, with the newest on the top and the oldest on the bottom. The rows are referred to as criaderas.

Each year, in a process called “fractional blending,” two-thirds of the wine from each row will be blended with one-third from the row above. The oldest row is the one sold to consumers.

Generally, Finos have spent five years in the solera system before their release. To keep the wine fresh and lively, the barrels are drained of everything and cleaned before the next solera begins.

Oloroso casks, on the other hand, do not get drained. The “new” sherry is constantly being influenced by the sherries that were created before. This makes it difficult to determine how old an Oloroso is once it has made it to shelves. Typically, producers will have a date on the label stating when the solera itself was established. You could be enjoying a product of 2,000-year-old sherry.

In a nutshell, Fino sherries are meant to be vibrant and fresh while Oloroso takes on a rich and mature character from all the wines that came before.

## **Sánchez Romate Fino Sherry** (# 542746) \$16.95, 750 mL

This has been produced since 1781 and continues to focus on quality wines that reflect the region they come from. Only 6,000 bottles of this Fino were produced, so along with being limited, it comes at an incredibly reasonable price point.

Fino sherries typically show a hint of citrus zest on the nose with an almond-nutty savouriness on the palate. This sherry has a touch more age to it, so it is further along in its development and will be drinking well into 2020.

Still presenting with citrus notes, it has evolved into more of a candied citrus note as well as golden apples, a little bit of freshly baked bread on the nose and a



hint of salinity. Serve chilled by taking it out of the fridge 10 minutes before serving. Enjoy this with an array of soft cheeses, ceviché and seafood stews. Perfect for snacks or while playing cards with friends.

## **Hidalgo Faraon Oloroso Sherry** (# 471078) \$19.25, 500 mL

Hidalgo is one of the few remaining family-owned bodegas producing sherry with grapes from its own vineyard. Oloroso translates to “fragrant” and that is what you can expect with this wine. It presents with an intense roasted nut/Brazil nut aroma, with gunpowder, tea, bitter orange and almond accents playing backup.

Oloroso goes well with nuts – I recommend Marçona almonds – and an assortment of olives. This is also great to indulge in with a meal of robust meat

dishes, so dust off those Spanish cookbooks or have a Tapas-inspired night. Serve Oloroso at room temperature to ensure you don’t lose that beautiful bouquet.

## SHERRY IN THE KITCHEN

Aside from sherry being incredibly delicious and pocketbook-friendly – especially after Christmas and New Year’s celebrations have made a dent in everyone’s bank accounts – it is also wonderfully versatile.

I regularly use it when I’m deglazing a pan after caramelizing vegetables or after searing off meat. Use a dry or medium-dry sherry and it will add extra body to your stocks and sauces.

You can also amp up your salad game by adding a few splashes to your dressings before seasoning. This will mimic salt, as well as elevate your salad with a fresh citrus flavour. I recommend a Fino for your dressing purposes.

Even dessert and sherry can be friends. If you ever come across a Pedro Ximénez sherry, you can use it for dessert sauces by reducing it slightly to a lovely syrup. Pour it over spiced carrot cake with walnuts and raisins or simply on vanilla ice cream instead of chocolate sauce.

And, of course, cocktails!

Enjoy a classic like the “Adonis,” inspired by the 1884 Broadway show by William Gill.

## **Adonis**

**1 ounce Sweet Vermouth**  
**2 ounces Fino Sherry**  
**2 dashes of Orange Bitters**

**Garnish: orange peel**

Add sweet vermouth, sherry and bitters to a mixing glass. Pack with ice and stir quickly for approximately 20 seconds. Strain into a coupe glass and garnish with orange peel.

*Ainsley Szvitat is working towards becoming a certified sommelier. She has worked in hospitality in Kitchener and Waterloo for 14 years.*