

Rathdowne Cellars

348 Rathdowne Street

North Carlton 3054

Telephone 9349 3366

Fax 9348 1036

email wine@rathdownecellars.com.au

web www.rathdownecellars.com.au



all about



sherry

Region and soil

The Spanish Sherry region is in the south-western province of Andalusia. It forms a rough triangle of rolling countryside bordered by the crusty port of Puerto de Santa María, the sleepy seaside town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, and the bustling city of Jerez de la Frontera.

The barren chalky white albariza soil found between Jerez and the coast is where the best vines grow. They soak up the humidity from the winter rains, allowing the vines to thrive through the baking hot summers.



The history

People in Jerez are proud to have made wine since antiquity, but the modern Sherry business got started in the 18th century. The English were familiar with Sherry from the Middle Ages, and become very popular there after Sir Francis Drake raided the port of Cádiz in 1587 and stole 3,000 casks.

Later, trade with the English became more conventional, and many English importers ended up moving to Jerez in the 17th and 18th centuries, hence the un-Spanish sounding names like Osborne, Terry, Domecq, Harvey and Byass, and no doubt the mix of economic interest and mad passion for a very particular wine by the British has kept the region economically viable.

The sherry styles

The styles of Sherry, and the way they are made, have changed dramatically as fashion and winemaking innovation evolved. They can be sweet, dry, rich or elegant. Some appalling wines were available under the name of Sherry, so in 1996 the European Union ruled that the word "Sherry" was to be used solely for the produce of the Jerez region, similar to the way regional styles of wine, such as Burgundy and Champagne are used.

The grapes

There are three main grape varieties used to produce Sherry: Palomino, Muscat of Alexandria and Pedro Ximenez. Most Sherry is made from Palomino, even though it is something of a winemaker's nightmare. It gives a high yield, but lacks sugars and character, and is notoriously prone to oxidation. It produces thin, simple, white table wines, but in the Jerez region, wonderful things happen. "*Never did such a lowly grape give such a majestic wine,*" says Spanish wine critic José Peñín.



Fortification, blending and the solera

The grapes are harvested, crushed and fermented, then fortified with the grape alcohol, raising the alcohol level to approximately 15 per cent for finos, and 18 per cent for oloroso.

Then begins the criadera and solera process – the blending of different vintages to ensure consistent quality. A Sherry solera comprises a number of groups of butts (large Sherry barrels) each called a criadera and can range from just one barrel to tens of thousands. Simple soleras are fed by three or four criaderas.

When the bodega (Sherry house) needs to bottle, wine is drawn from the oldest criadera. Rarely would more than 30% of the criadera be drawn off in a bottling. The solera criadera is replenished with wine from a younger criadera, and is replaced by wine from an even younger criadera, and so on. The longer the wine has done the rounds, the richer – and more expensive – it is.



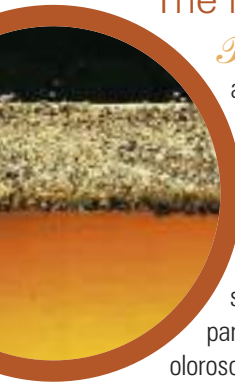
The flor

Thanks to the unique climate

a strain of yeast called *flor*, begins to grow inside the barrels of fino and manzanilla.

It forms a protective, foamy layer up to 5cm thick. This seals the wine from the air, resulting in fino Sherry's subtle aromas, bone dryness and pale colour. Amontillado starts as fino, but is aged further, allowing a partial oxidation. The higher alcohol level of

oloroso prevents the flor from forming, and natural oxidation produces its typical golden colour.



The Almacenistas

Some bodegas are huge

buildings, but in the maze of side streets of the Sherry towns you can find little bodegas, housing maybe a few hundred butts. These are the bodegas of the Almacenistas – the guardians of the tradition of making sherry. An Almacenista buys sherry, stores and matures it in his bodega, drawing on time-honoured skills handed down through the generations. The Sherry is bottled and marketed by one of the large bodegas such as Lustau, though still featuring the identity of the Almacenista.

Almacenistas are valued highly. Most are businessmen, from all walks of life, and their work is a labour of love. The pleasure of creating fine Sherry is reward enough for them.









Tapas

Mealtimes in Spain are lengthy affairs.

A sizeable lunch is served around 2pm and dinner is at about 10pm, leaving a big gap. So, when hunger strikes, the Spanish head to their local Tapas bar to snack and gossip.

The tradition of Tapas had practical beginnings: the local Sherry was served in a glass with a lid (tapa) of bread or ham, to keep the flies out! Today it ranges from simple snacks of fried almonds or olives to delicious savoury dishes of chorizo, boiled crayfish, Iberico ham or delicious seafood.



Type	Description	When to serve	To serve	Appropriate foods	Storage
 Manzanilla*	Very light and bone dry with salty notes	Perfect aperitif and great with seafood	Icy cold	Shellfish and appetizers	Keep refrigerated after opening and finish within 2/3 days. 18-24 months unopened.
 Fino*	Dry, light and fine	Ideal aperitif	Well chilled	Fish, olives, sharp cheeses and Tapas	Same as for Manzanilla
 Amontillado*	Hint of sweetness, nutty, warm with a dry finish	As an aperitif in cooler weather instead of a cocktail	Room temperature	In or with soups, mild appetizers, white meats and cured cheeses	Tightly corked keeps 6-8 weeks with/without refrigeration
 Cream	Creamy and sweet, but a clean finish	Instead of a cocktail or after a meal with coffee	Room temperature/ slightly chilled	Biscuits, cream pastries, sweet desserts and coffee	Tightly corked keeps several months with/without refrigeration
 Oloroso	Rich and either dry or sweet – full flavoured	Instead of a cocktail, with dinner or after	Room temperature	As an aperitif with unsalted snacks, stews, game and red meats, with coffee	Tightly corked keeps almost indefinitely, with/without refrigeration
 Palo Cortado	Smells like an Amontillado but dark and oxidised like an Oloroso	As an aperitif or as a food wine	Room temperature	With meat dishes and pies	Tightly corked keeps almost indefinitely, with/without refrigeration
 Moscatel	Mid-colour, sweet with a clean finish	Special dessert wine	Room temperature	Cakes, fruit, ice-cream	Refrigerate after opening and will keep for months
 Pedro Ximenez	Rich, full bodied and a clean finish	A unique dessert wine. Serve instead of liqueurs	Room temperature, or chilled	Sweet desserts especially chocolate cakes, ice-cream, or cheese, nuts and coffee	Tightly corked keeps almost indefinitely, with/without refrigeration

* Matured under flor yeast