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ARTS & CULTURE | FOOD & COOKING | ON WINE

The Drink of the Summer Is an Icy-Cold Glass of Dry Sherry

We've been overlooking this delicious white wine—ideal for summer sipping and snacking—for far too long. Here, dry Sherries you should be planting in your picnic cooler and pouring at your summer parties.



By [Lettie Teague](#) [Follow](#)

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The last time I wrote about Sherry, 13 years ago, I discovered most of its fans were retailers and sommeliers. “People don’t really buy it, but we like it,” said Erica, a salesperson at a Manhattan wine store.

According to the Sherry importers and distributors I contacted recently, this Spanish fortified wine remains a niche drink in the U.S., and a casual poll of oenophile friends revealed not a single Sherry fan. Their reasons ranged from “too sweet” or “too complicated” to my favorite, “a wine people drink on English TV shows.” (Not sure why that’s a disqualifier.) But I have news for them: Sherry is a great summer drink.

I’ve been Sherry-shy myself over the years. It’s just not a wine I think about drinking very often. And yet, after sampling a few very good, very cold glasses of Sherry recently, I am firmly committed to drinking more of the same this summer.

The Other White Wine

Sherry is so delicious cold because it’s a white wine—something surprisingly few wine drinkers know, said Nick Africano, owner of Mirador, a Sherry bar in Kingston, N.Y., and En Rama Sherry Co., an events company, Sherry club and bottling project. “When I’m asked, ‘What is Sherry?’ I always start with: ‘Sherry is wine.’ It’s made with white grapes and starts as white wine. I think people are

surprised,” he said. “Maybe they thought it was a spirit, a cordial, a blend of red and white grapes.” In fact, the bottles I bought were emblazoned with “Serve cold” or “Serve very cold” or “Serve chilled.” Sherry producers clearly aren’t taking any chances.

The name of the wine is an anglicized version of Jerez, a city in Spain where Sherry is made. The towns of Jerez de la Frontera, El Puerto de Santa María and Sanlúcar de Barrameda, where all Sherry aging takes place, form the so-called Sherry Triangle. And aging is key.

Sherry is made by a unique blending process that entails a regular, fractional blending of older and newer wine in tiers of barrels stacked with the newest wine on top, oldest on the bottom. This “solera” system produces a wine of a consistent character in the style of the individual Sherry house—similar to the idea of non-vintage Champagne, a blend of several vintages of different wines and sometimes different grape varieties made in a consistent style year after year.

Dry Styles, Best Served Cold

While some Sherry types are sweet, for this column I focused on drier styles: Fino, Manzanilla and Amontillado. Fino is the driest of all. Produced from the Palomino grape, it’s very dry, very pale Sherry fermented under flor (yeast) in American oak for a minimum of two years and fortified, like all Sherries, with a neutral spirit until the wine reaches a minimum of 15% alcohol. Manzanilla is a Fino-style Sherry produced exclusively in the port of Sanlúcar de Barrameda. While the Amontillados in my tasting were all quite dry and light, others are darker, sweeter and more oxidized.

The 12 bottles I purchased for my tasting included wines from both small and large producers. Most retailers only carried a few bottles, and more often than not they were from the large Sherry firms. I found the best selection at Astor Wines & Spirits in New York, where all the Sherries are stored in a refrigerated case set to a crisp 64 degrees.

“I think it’s especially good to keep the lighter styles—Finos and Manzanillas—temperature controlled, but we keep them all at this temp regardless,” noted Astor wine buyer Lorena Ascencios. She said that Astor’s Sherry sales, while

steady, had not increased over the years. In summer, Ascencios likes to drink the Sherry Cobbler cocktail, a mix of Sherry, simple syrup and citrus poured over crushed ice.

Bang for the Buck

The five Sherries I liked best were all very good buys. One wasn't technically a true Sherry but a "Sherry-style" wine made in the mountains north of Jerez. The Bodegas Gómez Nevado Pálido Sierra Morena En Rama Seco (\$14 half bottle) is a "Fino-style" wine aged an average of five years under flor, but unlike true Fino from Jerez, it is not made entirely from the Palomino grape but from a blend of several grapes. It's not fortified, either, but has the same 15% alcohol that sherries must meet. In a tiny booklet that came attached to my bottle, the late winemaker Gabriel Gómez Nevado suggested pairing his wine with tapas, such as Serrano ham or squid.

The other four Sherries I liked included the Bodegas Hidalgo La Gitana Manzanilla Sherry (\$28), the Bodegas Lustau Dry Amontillado "Los Arcos" Sherry (\$19), the Bodegas El Maestro Sierra Fino Sherry (\$21) and the Bodegas Valdespino Inocente Fino Single Vineyard Sherry (\$15). The Lustau came in a full-size bottle (750 ml), the El Maestro and Valdespino were both halves (375 ml), and the Hidalgo La Gitana was a 500-ml bottle, which seemed like the perfect sharing size.

I featured both Hidalgo La Gitana and Lustau Sherries in my last column on the topic. Both bodegas are fairly large, and their wines are relatively easy to find. The Lustau Dry Amontillado Los Arcos was easy to drink, dry but full bodied with an appealing almond note—a Sherry to pair with food. The Hidalgo La Gitana, produced by the oldest founding-family-owned Sherry bodega, was best as an aperitif, delightfully dry and nutty.

The next two Finos I tasted were stylistically quite different. The El Maestro Fino Sherry, deeply colored and richly flavored, was aged "at least six years" under the flor according to Steven Alexander, chief strategy officer of De Maison Selections, the winery's importer, who grandly labeled it "the Montrachet of Fino" (referencing the famed grand cru white Burgundy). He suggested pairing it with oysters. The Valdespino Inocente Single Vineyard Fino was a wonderfully

light, saline, tangy wine. Crisp and easy to drink, it was one I could imagine changing a Sherry doubter's mind.

I was largely unimpressed with the wines from big producers; my tasting note would be “English TV show.” But if you're willing to try one of the five cited here—and drink it cold—I think there's a good chance you will become a Sherry believer just like me.

OENOFILE / A sherry selection for sweltering summer days



1. **Bodegas El Maestro Sierra Fino Sherry**, \$21 for 375 ml. Aged at least six years under flor, this artisanal Fino is rich and concentrated but also refined. The historic bodega, founded by a barrelmaker who turned to making wine, is now run entirely by women, a rarity in the region.

2. **Bodegas Lustau Amontillado Los Arcos Dry Sherry**, \$19 for 750 ml. At 18.5%, this was the highest-alcohol Sherry of my tasting, yet so well-balanced it didn't seem over the top. This rich nutty wine is best paired with food: a creamy soup, perhaps, or a well-aged cheese.

3. **Bodegas Hidalgo La Gitana Manzanilla Sherry**, \$28 for 500 ml. It's not hard to understand why this wine is one of the most popular Sherries in the world. Beyond the memorable bottle shape and iconic label, there's the delightfully brisk, saline wine inside.

4. **Bodegas Gómez Nevado Pálido Sierra Morena En Rama Seco, \$14 for 375 ml.** Produced north of Jerez, this is not technically a Sherry. Still, aged solera-style in American oak, dry with a piquant bitter note and lush texture, it's an excellent, absolutely Sherrylike aperitif.

5. **Bodegas Valdespino Inocente Fino Single Vineyard Sherry, \$15 for 375 ml.** Valdespino is the only Sherry producer to craft single-vineyard wine, and the care paid to production is evident in the delicacy and purity of this wine. Terrifically racy and saline, it's an easy-drinking delight.

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Videos

