

New Jersey

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Sherry is Back in Style

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I studied Spanish in high school and college and in 1985 spent a couple of months wandering around the Iberian Peninsula. On the trip, I discovered that Sherry (Jerez as it is called in Spain) is not the sickly sweet beverage that my grandmother sometimes enjoyed.

Sherry, the fortified wine from Andalusia in Southwestern Spain, bears no resemblance to the mass-market, overly sweetened type that Nana drank. The real stuff involves the artful and labor-intensive process of blending multiple vintages over a period of years in a system known as the Solera.

Sherry's unique flavor is due in part to the varying degrees of intentional oxidation that take place in the Solera. Certain types of Sherry have a particular delicacy that derives from a spontaneous growth of wild yeast (called flor), which blankets the wine for all or for part of its development.

While there is quality sweet Sherry made, the dry styles have gotten some favorable press lately, as the new "it" drink of the young, hip, and discerning wine drinker. According to a recent New York Times article, dry Sherry is served at tapas bars as well as non-Spanish-themed restaurants from New York to San Francisco. Sherry tastings at various venues are selling out and better wine shops are carrying a variety of reputable producers and styles.

The drier Sherrys — tangy finos and delicate manzanillas, richer, nutty amontillados and olorosos — are great with a variety of foods. After all, they do come from the land of tapas bars, thinly sliced jamón, and gazpacho — not to mention a never-ending bounty of fresh seafood.

In my next post I'll offer a quick overview of the various Sherry styles with food pairing suggestions and serving and storing tips.