

## Sherry 101: The Versatile Wine

*Washington Post*

January 21, 2009

Here is a short primer on the various styles of sherry, generally from lightest to heaviest:

**Fino** and **manzanilla** are the driest and most common types of sherry. Their pale color and nutty flavor come from the flor, a layer of yeast that develops over the wine in cask and protects it from oxidation.

Fino and manzanilla are essentially the same except for one difference that is the stuff of sherry legend: Finos are produced inland, in Jerez de la Frontera, while manzanillas hail from the seaside town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, where the sea air off the [Atlantic Ocean](#) reputedly imbues the wines with a delicate saline character. Served well chilled, these wines are marvelous aperitifs, and they pair well with salty and briny foods, such as olives or shellfish.

**Amontillado** is an aged fino that has been fortified to at least 16 percent alcohol, a level that kills off the flor and exposes the wine to oxygen. The wine turns slightly amber and develops more complexity. Pair it with mildly flavored fish, chicken or pork dishes.

**Palo cortado** is a fairly rare sherry that falls between amontillado and oloroso in style, sort of a misfit that matures into something wonderful. It is quite versatile with food, as it straddles the two styles.

**Oloroso** is darker and fuller-bodied than amontillado, due to greater exposure to oxygen. Better examples are labeled "dry," though most have some sweet wine blended in. They feature pronounced flavors of hazelnuts and dried orange peel, and match well with spicier foods and soy sauce-based dishes.

**Cream sherries** are indistinctly sweet, not really for dinner, not quite dessert either. Sipping wines.

**Sweet sherries**, either from Pedro Ximénez or muscat grapes, can be rich and honeyed, and expensive.