



Moderator: Good morning. Today, we have the pleasure of talking with César Saldaña, Director of the Consejo Regulador in Jerez, Spain. He'll be answering all your questions pertaining to Sherry.

César Saldaña: Good morning everyone. It's a pleasure for me to be here today answering your questions on one of my favorite topics...Sherry!

Moderator: Good morning, César.

Let's get started.

César Saldaña: Great!

Moderator: The first question comes from Peter in France. Peter asks, "Why is Sherry filtered so heavily? Equipo Navazos has proven with their La Bota wines the Sherry can be shipped even without a heavy filtration. So why don't more companies offer en rama Sherries or try to filter less heavily?"

César Saldaña: The main reason why many houses tend to filter their Finos and Manzanillas is because they try to enlarge as much as possible the shelf life of the wine.

But you are right, Peter. Heavy filtering is something that improves the shelf life but also has an impact on the wine's intrinsic characteristics.

This is why more and more companies are offering "en rama" wines with very little filtering. Obviously, this requires a much better control of the distribution system so that the wine gets to the consumer within a much more limited shelf time.

Great question!

Moderator: Interesting. Along those lines, Equipo Navazos is from Montilla, correct? Is that part of Jerez?

César Saldaña: No, Navazos is from Jerez. In fact, it's a group of experts led by Jesus Barquin. They select wines from different provinces in the Sherry triangle.

However, Montilla is a completely different Denomination of Origin (DO) in the province of Cordoba in northern Andalusia.

They traditionally produce wines in the same styles as Sherry but should not be confused with real Sherry.

This is why it is always important to check the label and make sure you know where your wine comes from!

Moderator: Important clarification, thank you.

The next question is from Arnaldo in California.

César Saldaña: Hello Arnaldo

Moderator: Arnaldo asks, "How long has Sherry and Sherry-making been around and how was the solera system discovered?"

César Saldaña: If we speak about wine production in the Sherry area, we need to go back 3,000 years ago. But in fact, the styles that we know today as Sherry started to be produced at the end of the 18th Century.

The discovery of the Solera system was integral to the early production of Sherry.

Initially, the Solera system was simply a way of being able to provide the market with a consistent quality. But later, it was discovered that it's a key element in order to produce specific styles of wines.

Fino, Manzanilla, Amontillado...none of these wines could be produced without the Solera system as it secures the existence of the flor yeasts inside the barrels.

In fact, some Soleras today could be as much as 100 years or even older!

Thank you, Arnaldo for another great question.

Moderator: And for some of our novice readers, can you explain what exactly the Solera system is?

César Saldaña: Solera system is an aging process in which we are methodically blending the wines from each and every vintage with wines from the previous vintages.

We classify our stocks of wines in different scales of maturation. We always bottle wine from the last scale of maturation which we call the "solera scale." What we take out of the barrels in that Solera will be replaced with wine from a different scale which is a bit younger.

We continue doing the same thing scale by scale until we reach the barrels containing the younger wines.

It is in these barrels that we will introduce the wines from the last harvest.

So in every scale, the wines are blended and at the end of the process, what we rack off the barrels in this Solera is a perfect blend of each and every vintage, since the aging system was founded.

In this way, every single vintage counts for Sherry wine!

For a visual representation of what the Solera system looks like, you can visit our website at www.sherrycouncil.org

Moderator: Great, that's helpful. Our next question comes from Rick in New York.

César Saldaña: Hi Rick! I just love New York, it's a great place to visit some restaurants that are doing amazing things with Sherry wines.

Boqueria, Dovetail, and wd-50, for example, offer a wide selection of Sherry on their respective wine lists. I highly recommend them.

Moderator: Rick asks, "Why don't all producers put a bottling date on the Finos, Manzanillas and Amontillados?"

César Saldaña: Haha...again, great question. Probably they should!

But this is something that we are trying to regulate so that everybody uses the same codes. So far, what you find is that most of the houses give a "best before" date on the bottles of Finos and Manzanillas to help buyers know when it should be consumed.

It's very important to know that it's not only the length of time from when it's purchased that matters but also the conditions in which the wine is stored. We recommend storing it in a cool, dry place, with a stable temperature standing upright.

One other thing I would like to add...

The bottling date is critical for Finos and Manzanillas - which should be consumed within a year and a half from bottling - versus Amontillados and the other styles of Sherry which are much more stable and could be held in storage for longer.

Moderator: Interesting. Speaking of dates on Sherries, why don't we see vintages as we do with many other wines?

César Saldaña: Once again, because of the Solera system, we are blending wines each and every year. It's quite often that you find a date on some Sherry labels but most commonly it refers to the date when the Solera was started.

Moderator: Fantastic. Let's move on. Our next question comes from Shoefro in Boston.

César Saldaña: Hello Shoefro.

Moderator: Shoefro asks, "I'm doing a Spanish-themed dinner and am interested in some great Sherry cocktail recipes for the home cook/bartender. Can you provide with some of your favorites?"

César Saldaña: I have relatives in Boston. Another beautiful U.S. city.

Sure, Sherry cocktails are a great way to enjoy the many Sherry styles. They versatility of Sherry styles provide an extensive base of cocktails from dry to sweet.

Let me give you an example of each...

El Mejor de Jerez is a cocktail that contains 2 oz. of Manzanilla with 1 oz. of Brandy de Jerez, fresh citrus juices such as lemon, lime, or orange, which is combined over ice and served chilled with an orange slice. This could be a refreshing cocktail for summer.

On the sweeter side, I also recommend a Fino Mandrino Martini which is made with 2 oz. of mandarin vodka, 1/2 oz. of Grand Marnier and 1 oz. of Fino Sherry. It is mixed over ice, shaken, strained and served up with an orange twist. This is also a very refreshing cocktail for sweeter palates.

Moderator: These sound delicious, thank you!

Along these same lines, Rod from Philadelphia wants to know about the different Sherry styles.

César Saldaña: Great, one of Sherry's strengths is the diversity of styles and flavor profiles.

Moderator: He asks, "Exactly how many Sherry styles are there and are there any shortcuts to remembering all of them?"

César Saldaña: First, let me tell you that there are 3 groups of Sherries: the dry styles, the sweet styles, and the blended styles.

Among the first group, we have 4 Sherries: Fino, Amontillado, Oloroso, and Palo Cortado. Plus the Manzanilla which can only come from a place called Sanlucar de Barrameda on the coast of the Sherry region.

These 5 wines are bone dry, and range from very pale color to dark mahogany.

We have two very sweet styles of Sherry from specific grape varieties which are called Moscatel and Pedro Ximénez. These are wines made from sun-dried grapes with an incredible level of sweetness and concentration.

They can be enjoyed on their own, but in Jerez we also use them as a sweetening agent for the third group of Sherries – the blended styles.

These blended Sherries are a combination of any of the dry styles with different quantities of sweet wines.

We have 4 of this type: Dry and Pale Cream are based on Finos and have limited levels of sweetness. Medium is usually made from Amontillados with a moderate degree of sweetness and Cream is the combination of Oloroso with a generous proportion of sweet wine.

Now I don't know if there is an easy way to remember all this but if you start by considering the 3 groups, they can all be classified very easily.

Thank you, I am impressed with all the great questions!

Moderator: Well we have another great one from Jen in Richmond. Jen wants to know, "What grape varieties are used to make Sherry?"

César Saldaña: Sherry is made with 3 grape varieties, all of them white. They are: Palomino, Pedro Ximenez, and Moscatel.

The first one is always used for our dry styles of Sherry while the other two are sun-dried and used to make the sweeter styles that I mentioned earlier.

Moderator: Interesting. What type of climate or regional conditions allow these grapes to flourish in Jerez?

César Saldaña: Well, all of these grape varieties are traditional in the area and have adapted particularly well to the specific climatic conditions that we have in Jerez.

Our winters are very mild with temperatures very rarely dropping below the freezing mark. But summers are very long and hot with temperatures that can be over 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

Also, we have most of our rainfall very much concentrated in just a few weeks during the winter, so not only are the varieties special, but we have a very unique soil in Jerez called Albariza which is a very white, chalky soil that has the capacity to absorb the water from our rainfall and store it underground to nourish the vines throughout the dry season.

These conditions help us to enjoy very consistent harvests from year to year with relatively good yields. But again, the climate, the soil, the rainfall – all of these factors are critical to determining the wine's identity which is why no matter where a wine comes from, its geographic origin is unique and cannot be duplicated anywhere else.

As we like to say, location matters!

Moderator: That leads nicely to our next question that comes from Robin in Washington, DC.

César Saldaña: Hello Robin

Moderator: Robin asks, "I've seen several bottles of Sherry that were produced in the U.S. but have been told that Sherry can only come from Spain. Does that mean that they get their grapes from Spain?"

César Saldaña: Well, in fact there is no such thing as "U.S. Sherry" for starters. Unfortunately, some American producers use the Sherry name when their grapes do not come from Jerez based on the fact that American legislation does not recognize some important wine appellations such as Sherry, Champagne, Western Australia, and Chianti for example.

However, things are changing. Many U.S. producers have begun voluntarily changing their names so that consumers are not misled by the origin of the wine. And in fact, some countries that were also misusing place names have now ended that practice such as in Australia where at the beginning of this year an agreement was signed that will guarantee all products labeled "Sherry" must come from the Sherry region of Spain.

Again, this is why for consumers in the U.S. it is critically important that you study the wine label carefully to make sure that you are buying an authentic product and that you are aware of its geographic origins.

Moderator: Fascinating. Thank you, Cesar.

Looks like we have time for two more questions.

César Saldaña: Okay, great.

Moderator: The next comes from Brian in New York.

César Saldaña: Hello Brian.

Thank you for submitting a question for us today.

Moderator: He asks, "What kind of Sherry would you recommend with a spring lamb? And what can you tell me about Sherry vinegar? Is it made by the same process as the wines?"

César Saldaña: We always recommend a well structured Sherry for meat or game dishes such as lamb. Probably an Oloroso or a Palo Cortado would pair nicely with that dish.

As far as Sherry vinegar goes, it is another very traditional product that is protected by the same DO regulations that govern Sherry wine production. It is produced by the same companies with a similar process which involves the Solera system.

A Sherry vinegar is the result of a very "fortunate mistake" in the Sherry process, if you will. Some of our wines due to climatic conditions and the very special production process run the risk of becoming slightly acidic.

When this happens, we need to remove those wines from the Sherry Soleras but we will continue aging them in separate bodegas in which the process will continue on slower path. This is what will eventually lead to a very concentrated aromatic vinegar delicious with salads, soups, sauces, and many other dishes.

In fact, vinegar from Jerez is highly regarded as one of the best vinegars produced anywhere in the world.

Do we have time for one more question?

Moderator: I think so. It comes from Julie in Pittsburgh who asks, "Recently, I've read a lot of articles about Sherry in the food and wine sections of major newspapers. Have you seen shipments increase in the last 6 months and what do you attribute this uptick to?"

César Saldaña: Well, in spite of the very challenging economic situation around the world, last year we managed to increase Sherry shipments to the U.S. by about 1 percent.

We are encouraged by this growth and are closely monitoring shipments over the course of this year. This growth can be attributed to increasing interest by chefs, sommeliers, consumers, and many others who are discovered the tremendous range and potential of these wines with food and in cocktails as we discussed earlier.

I really wish we had more time to cover more questions but for anyone who we did not get to or who would like to ask me a follow-up question from anything we discussed here today, please email me at sherryexpert@gmail.com and I would be happy to answer more questions individually.

Thank you again so much, it was a pleasure to answer these great questions here today and thank you for supporting our Sherry wines.

Moderator: Thank you, César, for making yourself available today.

Sherry Council of America is the official U.S. representative of the Federación de Bodegas del Marco de Jerez (Fedejerez), the trade organization for all Sherry producers of the Jerez region of Spain. Based in Washington, D.C., the Council works to expand knowledge of the unique geographic characteristics, rich cultural traditions, and generations of winemaking expertise that are central to creating the distinctive range of flavors found in Sherry wines. The Council also works to raise awareness among U.S. policymakers, consumers, and other audiences about the importance of protecting the Sherry name.