

The Sherry of Andalusia, Spain

By **Richard Frisbie** - October 4, 2016 103 1

from Fino through Brandy – the tastes of sherry

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SHARES

The Sherry of Andalusia

I'm a gin drinker and a chef whose experience cooking with booze was basically limited to brandy and beer. I've never been fond of sherry, probably because I was only familiar with its cooking use and didn't like the flavor it imparted to my food. Whenever a recipe called for sherry I'd substitute vermouth instead. It never occurred to me that people drank sherry.

Olive groves with castle across the valley – classic Andalusia scenery

Fortunately, I am surrounded by people who are tolerant of my occasional idiosyncrasies and try to help me overcome them. They cooked up a series of sherry tastings to assault my biased palate. And, to further convince me, they created a rollicking foodie adventure in one of my favorite cultures. That's how I found myself in Andalusia, Spain, the heart of sherry production in the world, for a sherry immersion accompanied by all the things that go with it, food, flamenco and good friends included.

Also Read: [Sangrias in Sunny Sevilla](#)

Charcuterie plate

I'd never been to southern Spain before. For years I've reveled in the food and wines of northern Spain. Galicia, the [Basque](#) region and Catalonia were my playground and where I honed my Spanish cooking skills. Suddenly I found myself in the southern region of Andalusia drinking foreign wines and eating Moorish influenced dishes I'd never tasted before. After a week I have to admit I don't know what took me so long – I loved it!

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Checking into our hotels , we found that guests were offered tastes from open sherry bottles and glasses at the desk. Talk about hospitality! Sherry is their baby. They trot it out to be adored and made of by every visitor. It was that way everywhere we went and has been the tradition here for centuries. When you're in southern Spain you drink sherry.

Manzanilla Sherry

When the Moors conquered southern Spain they brought more than their religion, food and architecture with them – they brought stills. The [Arabs](#) believed distilled alcohol was [beneficial](#) to their health. Their brandy was added to the wines of the region, and sherry was born.

Sherry originated near Jerez de la Frontera, in an area of dominion called the Sherry Triangle in the province of Cadiz. It is well-known throughout Andalusia, Spain, and therefore – the world. Sherry is a fortified wine, meaning brandy is added during the process to create wines that range from very dry to syrupy sweet. One cannot like or dislike sherry as I thought before, because sherry has many iterations and uses, and they all taste different. (And nothing like my cooking sherry!)

from Fino through Brandy – the tastes of sherry

The principal grape used in sherry production is a white grape called Palomino. It is fermented as traditional wine and then used as a base for several styles of sherry. Brandy is added to increase the alcohol content before aging in oak [barrels](#). To over simplify, the longer they oxidize in the barrels the darker and sweeter they become.

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The lightest sherrys are similar to white table wine and called Manzanilla and Fino, both very dry with a high acidity. Amontillado is an aged Fino Sherry, still a dry wine but richer. Oloroso is full-bodied sherry of deep golden color. Finally, there are the sweet dessert wines of Cream and PX.

Sherry is not a vintage wine. Each year the wine is made and distilled spirits added to reach different levels of alcohol depending on which type of Sherry it is to become. Each is then put into oak barrels to age. To guarantee the same quality and taste each year, the wines

are [blended](#) using a system called Solera, where year after year, part of each [barrel](#) is mixed with the previous season's wine.

At the Gonzales Byass winery, the largest sherry producer in Andalusia, there are 92,000 barrels of wine and brandy in their cellars stacked four high in seemingly endless rows, with each barrel holding 500 liters. Here, one third of each barrel is pumped into the barrel below it and refilled from the barrel above it. The bottom barrel's one third is blended with that of the other rows and [bottled](#), leaving the highest row of barrels to be topped off with the new season's wine. Using this time-tested process, their blended sherry of forty years ago would taste the same as the sherry they bottle today.

Charcuterie

croquettes

Besides a tour of the Gonzales Byass winery (famous for their Tio Pepe sherry) (<http://www.gonzalezbyass.com/en/>) and an extended tasting of their many types of sherry, (Go – you won't believe their tasting room!) my friends arranged an introduction to Flamenco, the gypsy inspired national dance of Spain, via the Flamenco Bienal in Sevilla, and endless tapas tastings and dinners paired with the wines and sherrys of Andalusia. We had a blast!

The shrimp course at D mercao

From dinner at [DMercao Restaurante](http://dmercao.com/) (<http://dmercao.com/>) in Sevilla where we had a seven course, beautifully delicious presentation, each paired with a different wine, to the many Jamon Iberico laden charcuterie plates and tapas at countless eateries, we ate and drank well. Too well – I gained five pounds on this trip!

I also gained an awareness and appreciation of the southern culture of Spain I've missed all these years. And – after all – isn't that what good friends are for?

Andalusia Spain

When visiting Andalusia ([more info](#)) you must see the dancing horses at The Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian [Art](http://www.realescuola.org)(www.realescuola.org) in Jerez, [Alcazar](#) in Sevilla (<http://www.visitasevilla.es/en>) where The Game of Thrones is being filmed, and **Doñana National Park** – the largest nature preserve in Europe.