

# Wine Connoisseur

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Photography by Russell Bamert



## Falling for Ports and Sherries

With the holidays fast approaching, it's a good time to explore two wines that are very popular throughout the season.

The first, *Port* wine (officially known as *Porto*), originated in Portugal, and has been part of their winemaking tradition since the Phoenicians introduced it to the Lusitanians living in the area, circa 600 B.C. Expansion of the industry continued during the Roman occupation. The main producing area is along the Douro River, in the northern section of the country. This area is famous, with 83,000 vineyards producing Porto at varying levels, controlled by a rating system called *beneficio*, introduced in 1947. It awards points to the wines produced based on a number of issues such as geographic position, age of the vines, grape quality, and even maintenance and upkeep of the vineyards.

However, Porto is probably best known for the crushing method used in making it. Grapes are picked, and after the stems removed, are placed in a container called a *lagares*, made from granite or slate and large enough to hold about two dozen barefoot people. Once the feet are inspected for cleanliness, the process of stomping the grapes (known as *corte*) begins, and can continue for several hours.

Okay, enough history; let's talk about enjoying this coveted wine! Porto can be sweet and thick, and is usually served at the end of the meal. Pair it with a rich cheese such as Stilton Blue or Maytag, serve it with nuts or dried fruits, or serve alone as dessert.

In some cases, Porto is aged up to 20 years and can be expensive. There are, however, local producers in New Mexico producing reasonably priced, acceptable Ports that can stand shoulder to shoulder with the larger producers. Two of the better-known wineries, St Clair (DH Lescombes Port) in Deming and La Chiripada (New Mexico Port) in Dixon are examples.

A second wine choice for the holiday season is *Sherry*. Most Sherry comes from the Southern region of Spain, and was originally named *Jerez*, for the capital of the province, Jerez DO.

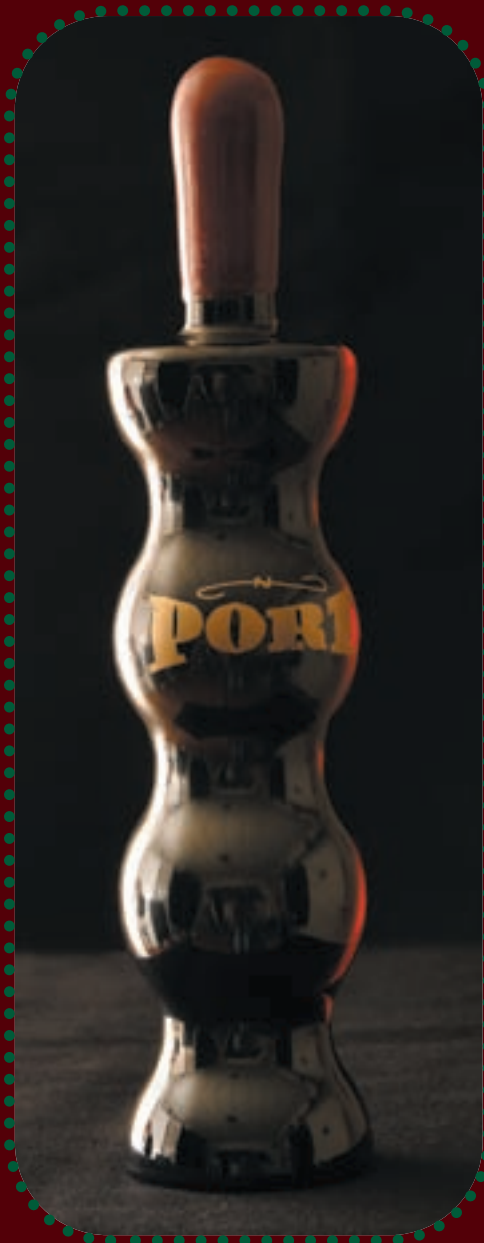
Sherry became a tradition in England in 1587 when Sir Francis Drake raided the town of Cadiz, located on the southwest coast of Spain, and carried off almost 3,000 barrels of wine. Returning to England, with his "booty", the wine became the most popular drink in the country. The English corrupted the name Jerez, and it evolved into the now commonly used Sherry. Unfortunately, you won't find *Sherry* produced in New Mexico.

Usually served as an appetizer, *Sherry* is well known for exciting the taste buds prior to enjoying that large holiday dinner. While food pairing with Sherry can be a challenge, there are some perfect matches. For instance, red chile, a food that New Mexicans are very familiar with, goes well with Sherry. Serve shrimp sautéed in ripe olives, sprinkled with red chiles and garlic, with a glass of bone dry *Fino* for a combination that will warm the coldest of hearts. Gazpacho is another excellent dish that can served with a glass of sherry - watch your guests ask for more.

Sherry is made almost exclusively from the Palomino grape, which produces a base wine of approximately 12% to 15% alcohol. Because everyone's taste differs, a little experimentation may be in order. There is very little "vintage" sherry, so here is some labeling to look for:

**FINO:** Pale and very dry with about 15% alcohol aged about 5 to 10 years.

**MANZANILLA:** The driest of all the Sherries; slightly salty tang with about the same alcohol as Fino.





**AMONTILLADO:** This sherry is aged about 15 years and is slightly sweeter with about 16% to 19 % alcohol.

**OLOROSO:** Full bodied, rich and dark; not sweet and has a long, dry finish. It contains about 20% alcohol and has been known to last more than 100 years.

**CREAM:** This is one of the best-known and most popular Sherries. It is sweet and pleasant to drink. Moscatel grape concentrate is added to form the final product.

**PEDRO XIMENEZ/P.X:** Dark brown, very sweet and often used as syrup on ice cream containing nuts.

Here are some of the brand names to look for: Osborne, Hidalgo, Real Tesoro, Sandeman, Domecq, Valdespino and, of course, John Harvey & Sons, best known for Harvey's Bristol Cream.

Both Port wine and Sherry have found a place in most societies around the world. They are used to entertain, enjoy as a beverage, and are also used in cooking. I can't imagine not being able to cook with these delicious wines! Being fortified, they contain more alcohol but are also more flavorful. Once opened, they can be used for months and will still hold their flavor. Because these wines have a

roasted nutty flavor, they add complexity to soups and dishes that are sautéed, as well as stews.

I have a favorite recipe that I use at Thanksgiving or Christmas when cooking the turkey: I butter the inside of a large brown paper bag (be sure to use one that is not processed with chemicals), place the dressed turkey in the bag into a deep roasting pan and pour in a half gallon of port wine. Seal the bag and roast it in the oven as recommended. Baste periodically, spooning the wine over the turkey. When done, you will serve the most beautiful and tasteful bird to your family and guests. P.S. The liquid remaining in the pan makes outstanding gravy. 🍷

Enjoy the holidays!



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