



Wines made by Bodegas Faustino Gonzalez.

## Exploring Sherries in Jerez de la Frontera, Spain

IN LATE SEPTEMBER, my wife, Pat, and I along with Greg Pearson spent two days and nights in Jerez de la Frontera—the epicenter of all that is Sherry. Until this time, I knew a considerable amount about the theory of Sherry production, but I wanted more in both theory and practice.

Because Fino (the lightest color Sherry) does not age well, in order to have the freshest, I have long preferred flying Iberia to Madrid so that I can drink great Fino. We did this on this trip and then flew to Jerez de la Frontera.

Our guide stopped at González Byass, most known for their main wine, Tio Pepe. We got in

the mood quickly when he picked a handful of the Palomino grapes, the grape of dry Sherries Fino, Manzanilla, Amontillado, and Palo Cortado. We then tasted Muscatel and Pedro Ximénez—grapes of the naturally sweet Sherries of the same name. We spent several hours on a private tour for the three of us and learned a lot. All the Sherries were excellent examples of their type and considering it is one of the largest producers, that makes it even more amazing.

Our next visit was to a high-quality, but small producer, Emilio Hidalgo, S.A. This visit was arranged by my friend Michael LaRoque of Winebow. Fernando Hidalgo, a co-owner and winemaker, graciously hosted our small group, although he had just returned from the U.S. and was busy. We loved this visit and sampled several world-class Sherries. Most memorable were the La Panesa Especial Fino and the Oloroso Viejo Villapanés, although all were excellent. This special Fino is about 15 years old, darker than most Finos, and richer and more complex. The taste is of roasted almond churned butter, and dried coriander and ginger with a long and intense palate. The special Oloroso averages 15-20 years of age



The flor is a film formed by the indigenous yeast on top of the Sherry.



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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and is a rich mahogany color. The nose detects almonds, caramel, and fig. The wine is dry, rich and full-bodied with persistent and lasting flavors. It ranks as one of Spain's greatest Oloroso Sherries.

We went to dinner at a fabulous restaurant recommended by the Spanish Wine Consortium where we had great food washed down by generous amounts of some of Spain's best wines, including Vega Sicilia Unico—a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Tempranillo. It is considered by



Jaime Gonzalez pouring Sherry using a venenciador at Cruz Vieja.





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*Grapevines grown over courtyards to provide shade.*

many to be one of the best wines of Spain and also one of the world's best.

The next day will be forever remembered by this Sherry fan. We were granted admission to the smallest Sherry producer in Jerez de la Frontera—Bodegas Faustino González. We had a private tour with the owner and were joined by a tour guide who had led tours at many of the bodegas but had never been successful in visiting this one. Talk about the “Luck of the Irish”! With Jaime González co-owner and wine maker,

we tasted all of his Sherries: Fino, Amontillado, Palo Cortado, Oloroso, Oloroso Muy Viejo, and Pedro Ximénez. Sitting outside in the courtyard under the vine covered trellis with the owner/winemaker drinking world-class wines really makes a memorable impression. In this case the Oloroso Muy Viejo, from a solera begun in 1789 (French Revolution) and almost as old as the United States, was the pièce de résistance. It is from three barrels and almost exclusively reserved for family. Limited to only 120 bottles produced per year it was an “out of this world experience”, or at least an “out of Spain” experience as one bottle came home with me.

We next visited the Urium Winery, another small, but excellent one. We did a lot of barrel sampling and enjoyed Fino, Oloroso, and Manzanilla, a single barrel of medium dry Sherry. This was a very enjoyable experience produced by the Urium father/daughter team.

We finished our winery tours by visiting Emilio Lustau, one of the oldest wine companies in Spain. We were treated to all the different categories of Sherry and enjoyed the experience immensely and left with a gift of our choice of Sherry.

After this memorable day we concluded with a dinner at an incredible restaurant which was gourmet in all aspects. We drank plenty of wine and it was all outstanding to world-class. What an ending to an intense, short seminar on Sherry. *Á Vòtre Santé!* 🍷



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