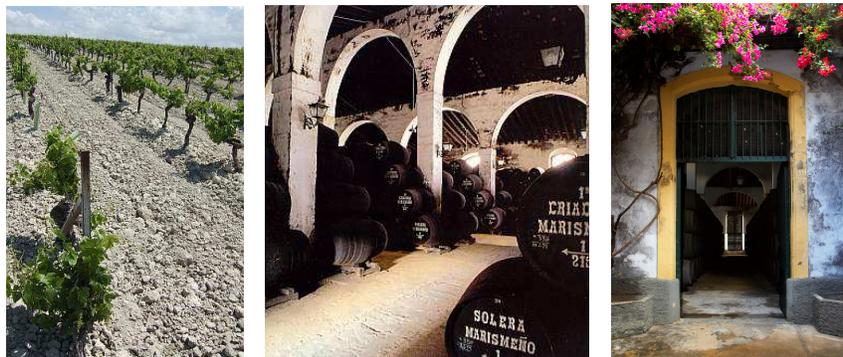


## Sánchez Romate, D.O. Jerez



### Sánchez Romate, D.O. Jerez

Sánchez Romate was founded in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century by Juan Sánchez de la Torre, and today is one of the few D.O. Jerez wineries to still be in the hands of local owners. Over time the winery has grown and adapted to modernisation and technology, whilst maintaining their respect for traditional viticulture and winemaking. In Jerez, the main Romate Bodega(s) are 230 years old. Romate are a significant producer of Brandy and Vinegar as well as Sherry wines per se.

Romate's a middle sized sherry house, with 70 hectares on the best white *albariza* soils of Jerez de la Frontera soils at Pago Balbaina, about 8 km west of Jerez, towards Sanlucar. This is an area of gentle rolling hills, with situation being critical – altitude and aspect are highly influential in the possibility of growing truly 'fino' fruit. The friable chalk soils are very deep and humid, retaining moisture like a sponge, allowing un-irrigated Palomino to grow roots up to 20m deep (the first 6 or so being Albariza chalk).

All Romate's wines come from these holdings, save for Moscatel which comes from the coastal town of Chipiona, west of Jerez and south of Sanlucar. PX is another matter: although sold as "Sherry" and hence implying it's from Jerez, virtually all Jerezano PX comes from Montilla-Moriles, inland north-east towards Cordoba. Romate buy young PX wine on long term contract from a single grower and transport it to Jerez to mature.

The wines are aged in two phases: initial making and ageing is at a processing bodega right in the vineyard, and then before the next vintage the wines are sent into town for ultimate ageing. Each of the three main classifications (Fino, Oloroso and PX) which Romate plans to produce are pressed separately at different pressures to get more or less 'body' from the fruit, depending on the classification being produced.

The Palomino Fino is picked in early morning, into small baskets to avoid fermentation, bruising and browning, then destemmed, pressed as whole grapes and fermented under temperature control in stainless tanks. The first press is aged as fino, second pressing becomes part of the selection for oloroso (later, tasting in barrel will see some of the fino re-classified as oloroso or perhaps palo cortado). After fermentation the wines (12% a/v) are filtered, racked into another stainless deposit and fortifying spirit is added, then to barrel (the 500 litre 'bota') where the flor yeast in bodega auto-innoculates and spreads over the wine. The base wine, tasting of chalk and lemon, spends a year in the vineyard winery gaining it's first layer of 'sherryishness' in barrel under flor before transfer to the Jerez bodega. On arrival, the young sherry is re-filtered and held in tank as *añada* – young wine ready for solera maturation. As needed, it's introduced into the first criadera of whichever solera it's destined to inhabit.

Note, 4 distinct Fino-Amontillado systems are maintained in separate Jerez bodegas: Romate Fino solera feeds the market for Romate Fino and the distinct Romate Amontillado solera. Likewise, Fino Marismeno Solera is bottled as such, and also is the exclusive source material for Amontillado NPU. A Third distinct feeder system of other old Amontillados is maintained to feed the separate Old+Plus Amontillado Solera. The 15 bota which comprise the Fino Perdido are a 4<sup>th</sup> distinct system.

### Romate Range

**\*\*not shipped by TSA – the extraordinary reservas are such good value that despite the quality of their standard range it makes no sense to ship anything but the very best**

Romate Manzanilla 'Viva la Pepa' (made for them by Almacenista 'Cuevas'): fine, salty and chalky, delicious simple light and clean (screwcap)



Romate Fino: 3 ½ years' age; tangy and lean, nice mineral grip, acacia wattle nose, toasted rice yeastiness; delicious and interesting, cheap and now in screwcap halves

Romate Amontillado (4 yrs fino + 3yrs in amont solera) waxy roast almond, green olive juice, polished timbers

Romate Oloroso: 5yo: lovely honey and toffee nose; gently rich on entry and tightens to pleasantly spirituous finish

Romate PX 3 yo: lovely and simple not too sweet with 30% Oloroso blended in, very clever ...



### **Reserva Range**

**Romate Fino 'Marismeño':** Fine, great mouthfeel, clean snappy finish. Very dry and delicious with almond, briny green olive, chalk, and also liquorous depth. Aged 7 years in solera, Marismeño is a 4-scale solera of 3 criadera and the solera, totalling only 836 butts. 1/3 of the solera (227 butts) is bottled just 2-3 times per annum, and part of this feeds the NPU solera as well as being sold as Marismeno.

**Romate 'Fino Perdido' 1/15:** 8 yo fino-amontillado from 3 tiny soleras totalling just 15 bota; perdido refers to the 'lost style' of fino since the advent of modern technology. Keep in mind, manzanilla and fino as we know it are technological styles only possible since the 60's; prior to that, all 'finos' were like this. Romate's version is very lightly filtered and as close to a commercial 'fino en rama' (raw, ex barrel) as is possible. Honey-gold-brass in colour, smells of fine old toffee, gingerbread, wattle grove; palate is toasted almond-macadamia, wattle toffee, gently liquorous, very dry, plush at centre with great sherry snap at the rim.

**Romate Amontillado 'N.P.U.':** 20yr old (inc 7 years as fino). Pretty and elegant - mahogany, hazelnut, roast almond in a dry, spicy palate with trace of green olive. Long++. In our judgement, a close to perfect Amontillado, achingly dry and spare; fine elegant lingering precise, JOY.

**Romate Oloroso 'Don José':** 15yo. Rich, woody-nutty walnuts and quince fruit. Soft, round middle given grip by oak. Delicate, languid, round but not fatty, with a light spicy dry finish and ripe walnuts releasing at back. Very good example of the dry-but-glyceric richness of Oloroso.

**Romate Palo Cortado 'Regente':** Palo Cortado is the weirdest of Sherry classifications: a mixture of Oloroso aromatics and the lean drive of Amontillado, formed when Fino barrels fail to conform to style. A great Sherry to serve with meats. 15yo, only 30 barrels; golden syrup rich nose, mustard fruits on palate at entry becomes increasingly lean and dry with ultra salty-flinty finish.

**Romate Cream 'Iberia':** Oloroso plumped with 15% PX. Walnuts meet prune juice, with delicious honey bear biscuits and anise lollies - very good balanced sweetness. Really excellent wine to serve cool with mixed cheese plates.

**Romate Moscatel 'Ambrosia':** Very old, but nervy material, thanks to Moscatel's lovely fresh natural acidity. Rich and heady, with dried fruits and fresh motor oil. Balanced, silky back palate, drying finish.

**Romate PX 'Duquesa' 9 yo:** 15% oloroso, my least favourite wine, a bit clunky and lacks continuity

**Romate Pedro Ximénez 'Cardenal Cisneros':** Raisiny, prune juice, chocolate dates—rich, sweet, viscous, spice and through-line, gentle grip to off dry finish.



### **Old+Plus' Range (30+ years average solera age)**

These wines bear the new VORS appellation tag—Vinum Optimum Rarum Signatum, which colloquially means Very Old Rare Sherry. Classified as 'over 30 years' age, they are more likely to be based on material no less than 40 years of age. Each have been skilfully freshened and they really dance!

**Romate Amontillado 'Old+Plus':** Made from Palomino fino grapes, the Amontillado 'Old+Plus' is made and aged in an oak cask solera for more than 30 years in line with Jerez's traditional methods. Exceptional smoothness and intense aromas of toasted nuts, olive and age are its defining characteristics, yet it is typically Romate in its weightless, clean ease. Splendid wine of adobe, brandy snap, deep open nose, macadamia, acacia wattle, dried posy flowers; serene, ultra-elegant, closer to very very old cognac, saline.

**Romate Oloroso 'Old+Plus', 30+:** extra rich walnut nose with lovely acetic rinse, gently spiced very old and very fresh, beautifully handled; palate is evanescent – gorgeous and full but delicate, everywhere and nowhere, enormous character with very little weight, utterly deft and very very lovely.

**Romate Pedro Ximénez 'Old&Plus':** Pedro Ximénez grapes are picked very ripe and then left out in the sun to attain a higher sugar concentration, yet the 16% alcohol belies the heady concentration of this wine. Pedro Ximénez 'Old&Plus' has been aged in an oak cask solera for more than 35 years. Layers of deep prune fruit, with mace and sweet spices. Essence, for sure - but almost ethereal in its dancey, light-hearted finish. Remarkably refined PX.

### **NOTES ON PX, Bodegas Galan, Montilla-Moriles**

Galan have been PX supplier to Romate for 35 years, as EU exceptions to normal DO regulations allow Montilla-Moriles wine to be aged in Jerez and sold as Sherry. Montilla is a solely PX appellation, covering 17 villages, it's about the same size as the Jerez/sherry zone. Increasingly, the Montillanos also produce red wine, but these are VDT. Finos from Montilla are made from PX, are about 15% natural alcohol, dry with no fortification, but aged biologically (ie under flor). Amontillados etc are fortified slightly so as to kill of yeasts and bottled at 18% +/-

PX is hand-picked and sun-dried on carpacho mats in the vineyard for 8 days or so. Picked in late August, they are 13.5-15 beaume at harvest, and 24 bé after drying. In the winery, the bunches are destemmed, broken in the press and then fortified to 9% with distillate from La Mancha Airen grapes. This young Mosto of PX is delicious, with the appearance of cloudy honey, a slightly greenish gold-tan, and tastes like honeyed plums. This part-fortified, un-fermented mosto is cold-stabilised, but un-filtered. It's held in stainless for 3 months or so, after which Romate collect it, truck it to Jerez, finish the fortification and add to their PX soleras as required. Bodegas Galan produce PX to several grades, and Romate purchase according to the dictates of the solera to which it is destined. Sanchez Romate only take the free run PX, second pressings are sold as Montilla, and 3<sup>rd</sup> pressings make Orujo Arguardiente.

### **BRANDIES**

(note rules: solera brandy DO rules 6 months' minimum; solera reserve 12 months; gran reserve 36 months)

**Romate Solera Reserva 5yo**, young and raw

**Uno en Mil 10yo** (name refers to it always being a single cask bottling of the 1000 barrels produced) a bit like raw single malt

**Cardenal Mendoza Solera Gran Reserva 15 yo**, full note below

**Cardenal Mendoza Solera Gran Reserva 'Carta Real' 25 yo**; is fine and elegant a revision of CMB as we know it, spicy around a nutty centre, languorous and reserved, very beautiful

**Cardenal Mendoza Solera Gran Reserva 'NPU' 50 yo**, in magnificent decanter set - old couches and plum liqueur, very nice indeed

### **CARDENAL MENDOZA Brandy de Jerez Solera Gran Reserva**

This amazing value super-old brandy is from a Solera commenced in 1871. It has a 'linear' age of 15 years and a nominal age character of 100+, but freshened.

It begins life as white Airen grapes in La Mancha, which is then distilled via Pot Stills and aged statically (no blending or movement) for 2 years in old barriques. The eau-de-vie is now at an in-between stage called 'Holandas', although it technically qualifies as brandy. However, SR do not call it brandy until it has been blended into the Cardenal Mendoza Solera (3600 barrels in 8 Criadera and the Cardenal Mendoza Solera itself). Brandy in butt is 36 % a/v.

Brandy is bottled from up to 1/3 of the Solera up to five times a year, each bottling required the 9 scales to be run, culminating in new Holandas entering the first Criadera and immediately beginning its transformative inheritance, assimilating the enormous aged character of this extraordinary Solera. This is the same pain-staking labour-intensive drill that occurs with bottling and running the scales for Sherries. The bodega which houses Cardenal Mendoza (in fact two whole bodegas adjacent to one another) measure 2.5 hectares.

### **D.O. Jerez**

Sherry is an Anglicisation of Jerez, the central town in the south-west corner of Spain. In it's time it has been invaded by Ottomans, Romans, Huns and the Moors. While these left some splendid architectural traces and pretty ceramic tile work, 400 years of British merchant dominance has celebrated, entrenched and refined the production of the diverse group of lightly fortified wines which today we call "sherry".

Sherries come in sweet and dry, rich and elegant styles. They're made from both brown and predominantly white grapes. But what they all share is an extended period of barrel maturation (4 years minimum for decent wines) in a solera system, and fortification with three or more degrees of clean, neutral alcohol.

### **The Sherry Region**

Sherry is produced in the province of Andalusia, in the south-west corner of Spain, in a quadrilateral area running north-west up the coast from Cadiz, near the Gibraltar Straight, and diagonally inland. It is centred around the inland town of Jerez de la Frontera, so named as it was often the "frontier" of various battles for land-ownership and cultural-economic supremacy.

Like it or not, the history of sherry is inextricably linked with war. British soldiers invaded, caused havoc, drank lots and stayed. British merchants established trade links, bought bodegas (wineries), formed partnerships with Spanish Lords and Dons and conducted trade on behalf of themselves and the Jerezanos.

The Sherry region today is owned and managed by a complex Colonial amalgam – Spanish and British names intermingle at every level of ownership management and promotion. Although it's a Spanish wine, geographically speaking, the weird mix of economic vested interest and mad passion for a very particular wine by the British has undoubtedly been instrumental in keeping the region economically viable and a part of the world market in fine wine.

### **Solera, Flor, and Production**

Three main varieties are used to make sherry: Palomino, Pedro Ximénez and Muscat of Alexandria. After fermentation the wine is fortified with an addition of neutral grape spirit to raise the alcohol to between 15% to 20% a/v, depending on the style. The wine is then transferred into very large old barrels (commonly called butts) for ageing.

All Sherries share a parental link to the "solera". A sherry solera comprises of a number of groups of butts, each of which is called a "criadera" – these are nurseries of like-aged material (think literally of one room full of just born babies, the first criadera; another of toddlers, second criadera; another of pre-schoolers, the third; primary school kids the fourth criadera; and high school graduates ready to make their way in the world the solera criadera.

When the Bodega (wine house) needs sherry for bottling, it is drawn out of the oldest criadera (which is also called the solera). Rarely would more than 30% of the solera criadera be drawn off in a single bottling. The solera criadera is replenished with wine from a younger criadera, which in turn is replenished by an even younger criadera, and so on and so on. Simple soleras are fed by three or four criaderas while more complex systems may run up to fourteen. The whole solera is fed with new wine from each harvest. This method ensures the consistency of house style and standards are maintained. Criaderas can range from just one barrel to tens of thousands.

Sherry butts are kept ullaged – usually about 80% full. This allows oxygen to feed the flor yeast. The basic stylistic differences of sherry revolve around the flor yeast (literally, flower), which grows like a carpet across the surface of the sherry in the butt and defines its character. Oxidation is minimised because of the blanket effect of the flor, and the yeast cells that die impart a gentle nuttiness. Richer, broader base wines have the natural flor growth stopped, and instead of the fine, edgy styles raised under flor, develop a deeply nutty, rich, brassily-oxidised character.

The solera system is particularly important to flor-based styles – regular movement through the criaderas of different aged wines refreshes the flor by adding fresh nutrients from younger barrels. Nevertheless, the carpet of flor is far from constant – the temperature of spring and autumn is most conducive to a full, thick yeast carpet; in winter and summer it can become alarmingly sparse. If the flor dies off, the tang, vigour and finesse which defines good fino sherry will be lost.

An interesting side-note to sherry has to do with indigenous yeasts. Flor is far from the only such strain in the Bodegas: *mycoderma aceti* (vinegar yeast) also abounds, and the two are constantly at war. In a healthy solera, however, the flor yeast will almost always win out, and only a few barrels are lost to vinegar (which go on to become sherry vinegar).

While the solera system is a seamless intermingling of vintages, to the point where the year of origin and average age are more or less incalculable, “Anada” (single-vintage) wines are made, but are extremely rare and expensive. However, this is a relatively recent evolution. Until the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nearly all sherry was “Anada” wine – the product of a single vintage, held in a row of barrels of the same provenance.

### **The Range of Styles**

The common processes of fortification and barrel ageing within a solera system nevertheless yields many distinct types of sherry, and subtle variations within each type. The majority are based on the white grape Palomino, while a small percentage come from the brown grapes Muscat of Alexandria and Pedro Ximénez (PX). The later become sweet, rich, alcoholic wines much akin to the Muscat and Tokay produced in Rutherglen. Most sherry, however, is the product of the virtually characterless Palomino, which gains its actual style and character from the solera-ageing process, not from the grape. Two things which can be said of Palomino is that (a) it faithfully exhibits the character of the earth in which it is grown – the barren, chalky-white soils (termed “albariza”) of the region between Jerez and the coast; and (b) it has terrific acidity for a warm growing region.

### **Fino**

Literally meaning “fine”, it is a bone-dry white wine, grown under a fairly constant covering of flor yeast. With delicate hints of nut and chalk, these are remarkably fine, delicate wines considering their heightened alcohol content. The slightly oxidative regime of barrel-aging imparts a gentle textural breadth and depth, and alcohol adds warmth and mouth-feel, but the green, acidic fruit at harvest cuts its way through all of this, leaving a clean final impression of lightness and delicacy.

As mentioned, all flavour and character are imparted in the butt. Hence the location of the cellar becomes influential. Sherry bodegas inland (Jerez), in estuary waters south ( Puerto de Santa Maria), and the Atlantic coast west of Jerez (Sanlúcar de Barremeda) produce notably different Fino sherries. This is entirely due to the microclimate of the Bodega in which the butts are stored, for all the fruit comes from a single growing region of chalk soils triangled between the three towns.

The cooler, humid, maritime climates of the coastal towns produce much finer, more delicate and tangy sherry. The relative stability of temperature compared to the blazing hot/cold alternation at Jerez, is also conducive to a less lusty wine, thanks to the more even growth of flor yeast which is facilitated. While this is true for Fino del Puerto, it’s doubly so for the wines from Sanlúcar. The astonishingly light, pale and pretty Fino here is not even called Fino – its appellation name is Manzanilla. The sea air imparts a definite sea tang, redolent of oyster shells and the twining sweet-sour crunch of sea salt. Manzanilla, in Spanish, also is the word for chamomile, whose floral character is clearly suggested in the delicate aromas of this sherry. In keeping with its delicacy, Manzanilla is often slightly lower in alcohol than other Fino styles. As a result, an open bottle will oxidise and lose its fresh vitality at about the same rate as a bottle of freshly opened sauvignon blanc, while other Finos dull at about the same rate as an opened bottle of decent chardonnay.

No matter their origins, Finos at maturity (four to eight years in barrel) are delicate, nervy, and nutty with an agreeable tension between softness and tang. They have an overall savouriness, and are utterly bone dry. They are a perfect aperitif or accompaniment to seafood or tapas and are always consumed chilled.

### **Amontillado**

Amontillados evolve naturally when the flor has exhausted its supply of nutrients, or the style may be induced if the flor is killed off by fortification to 18% or above. A good Amontillado will have spent sixteen years or so in oak, about half of which time is oxidative, post-flor. Amontillado is Fino in style and flavour, but overlaid with a brassy richness, enhanced nuttiness and depth, with extra warmth from the higher alcohol levels. Classic Amontillado is full-bodied, amber and dry with delightful soft nutty flavours. It is ideal served as an aperitif at cool room temperature or with tapas and pâtés.

### **Oloroso**

Since only the most delicate Palomino wines are designated to become a Fino, broader, less vibrant base wines are used in the production of Oloroso (Spanish for fragrant). Oloroso is sherry raised from the same Palomino grape, in the same solera system, but the flor yeast is killed off. It is in an oxidative regime from the start, and so has even greater richness, brassiness, warmth and a different form of nuttiness. Olorosos also have a roundness, and silken texture absent in flor-related sherry (since flor survives on the glycerol of its host wine).

Most good Oloroso remains as Seco (dry) but some is sweetened to Abocado (mildly sweet) by the addition of sweet base wines. Oloroso Seco is dry, amber to mahogany coloured with a pronounced aroma of dark, old walnut characters. It is quite full-bodied and velvety, is usually served at room temperature and complements rich winter foods such as consommés, pâtés, game and mushrooms.

### **Pedro Ximénez**

The darkest and sweetest of all sherries are the PX styles, where very ripe grapes are further concentrated by raisining on mats prior to vinification and barrel maturation. PX is a dark mahogany colour wine with deep raisin aromas and is smooth and sweet in the mouth. It is full, vigorous and often extremely viscous. PX is mostly consumed at room temperature, and is one of few wines which match well with chocolate desserts. Otherwise, it's delicious poured over ice cream.

### **Other Styles**

And then there is the black sheep of the family: Palo Cortado. Some sherries just refuse to play by the rules. A Palo Cortado is a rare and accidental sherry – the product of a barrel designated as fino but in which the flor fails to take, and the wine remains stranded in a stylistic half-world, in-between Amontillado and Oloroso, and sharing characteristics of both.

Moscatel is a medium sweet wine made from the Muscat of Alexandria grape. It is raisiny, smooth and has a delightful clean dry finish, which means it is not as rich as a Pedro Ximénez. Having much higher acidity than PX, it's a cooler, fresher style, and very versatile with food.

Cream sherry was originally produced for the British market; this is dark with a rich, sweet flavour. Obtained from a blend of Oloroso and Pedro Ximénez, it is usually preferred as an aperitif, and much like Moscatel and Oloroso can be served anywhere from room temperature to fairly cool, depending on ambient temperature, food to match and personal preference.