



FORTIFIED WINES



Fortified wines are made by adding spirits, usually brandywine, to wine. Fortified wines seem to have been created in the effort to prevent, or adapt, the spoilage of wine. Any wine stable enough to be shipped from Europe to the Western Hemisphere, without arriving in a spoiled condition, would be a profitable wine. Observing that brandywine survived conditions that would turn a standard wine into vinegar, an obvious attempt would be to mix brandywine into wine. Thus was born each of the three main types of fortified wine: Sherry wine, Port wine, and Madeira wine. These wines have historically been mostly consumed in the Western Hemisphere, especially in the English-speaking parts thereof.

The three regions most known for the production of fortified wine are: the Douro River valley in Portugal (producing Port wine); the Portuguese island of Madeira, and the Sherry countryside in Spain. Sherry is the classic English name for the city currently known as Jerez. The city's much older name is Xérès (pronounced "shay-ress"). In addition to Port wine, Madeira wine, and Sherry wine, other fortified wines include Banyuls wine, and Marsala wine. Fortified wines meant to be in the styles of Sherry, Port, and Madeira, wines are also produced in places like the USA and Australia.

Fortification of wine is often done during fermentation, which it arrests. When fortification is done early in fermentation, the resulting fortified wine will be richer in flavor, and sweeter, than when fortification is done late in fermentation.

Madeira wines, and Sherry wines, are produced with such rather different characteristics that they should not really be thought of as single types. Some Madeira wines, and Sherry wines, are very dry and low in flavor – with little more than a nutty flavor. Others are dry, but oxidized, or even heated, to the point that they have semi-rich flavor. Yet others and early-fortified, oxidized, and profoundly sweet and rich – with flavor like rich, sweet raisins or dates.

Sherry wine is often aged in a Sherry nursery, or solera nursery, or *sistema solera*. Whether it be Sherry wine, rum, or brandywine, that is aged in a Sherry nursery, the number on the label indicate does not indicate age in years. It indicates the number of barrels in the system. In a Sherry nursery, the fruity, funky, flavor of the *flor* will be imparted.

Madeira wine is traditionally heated in the *estufagem* process. This was originally done over long periods of time in hot attics. Now it is done in steel steamer vats. Some Madeira wines can be thought of as fully impervious to most types of spoilage, as they are already fully oxidized, and already fully cooked. That stipulated, it must be said that almost every type of fortified wine will resist spoilage much better than any type of standard wine. Madeira wines are available either as single-grape varietal wines, and as blends. The most-common blend is Rainwater, which is a medium and dry wine. Alvada is another blend. It is a medium and sweet wine. Colheita is a term applied to a single-varietal Madeira wine of declared vintage and rare quality that has been aged at least five years. Frasqueira is a term applied to a single-varietal Madeira wine that is of rare quality and has been aged for at least twenty years.

Port wine (and Banyuls wine) retains more of the classic flavor of a bold, red wine than Madeira wine or Sherry wine. If the grape growth in the Douro valley during a particular year is considered to be of high quality, a vintage year will be declared. Beyond vintage, the factors which create different characteristics in Port wine are usually whether-or-not the wine is oxidized, whether-or-not it is barrel-aged, and for how long it may be barrel-aged. Too long in the barrel is considered ruination, and that is why late-bottled vintage Port wine sells for only a fraction of the same vintage that was not bottled after too late in the aging process. Also, whether-or-not the wine is bottled with sediment so as to further mature in the bottle is an important matter of difference in Port wines.

Aromatized wines are typically fortified wines in which the fortifying spirit has been used in maceration of aromatic ingredients – such as chichona (quinine/quiquina) or wormwood (vermouth). In addition to quinquina wine (a.k.a. quina wine or china wine), and vermouth wine, ginger wine is an aromatized wine that is produced in England.