



# Fortified against the cold

DIANA PROCTER explains the difference between sherry, port and muscadel.

**L**ANDSKROON estate sent me an e-mail recently, informing me that the 2002 Landskroon Port has been released — just in time for winter sipping in front of a roaring fire. The press release described it as “a blend of the classic port varieties Tinta Barocca, Tinta Roriz, Souzao and Touriga Nacional... [with] a beautiful aroma of spicy black prunes and tobacco and... an attractive dry finish” and says that it will improve in the bottle for up to 10 years. “Enjoy on its own or with matured cheese and fresh nuts after dinner.”

Landskroon's prowess in fortified wines is not restricted to port. The estate is also known for its Morio Muscat Jerepico, which has the sweetness of a muscadel, but a more subtle and delicate muscat flavour. (Serve on crushed ice as an aperitif or enjoy it over vanilla ice-cream or with dark chocolate mousse.)

And then in last week's *Home* supplement I wrote about Monis' new Fino Sherry, which prompted a colleague to ask me what the difference is between sherry, port and muscadel.

The only similarity is that they're all fortified wines — that is wines that have had a spirit, usually brandy, added to them. This was originally done way back when as a means of preserving the wine. In muscadel and ports, the addition of the spirit stops the fermentation process by killing the yeasts, resulting in a sweet wine that still has lots of natural sugar.

Muscadels deliver a double wammy of high alcohol and lots of sugar — there's a recipe for a headache if I ever heard one — and are not nearly as popular as they used to be. However, some fine examples are made in the Breede River and Klein Karoo regions where the hot weather encourages high sugar development in the grapes as well as flavour concentration through dehydration.

There are two types of muscadel made in the Cape — those that are fortified before any fermentation has taken place (12-volt grape juice, as it were), and this category includes the jerepigo that Herman Charles Bosman wrote about, and those that have undergone a slight fermentation before the fortifying spirit is added. To qualify as a



WHERE IT ALL BEGAN: The Douro valley (left) and boats carrying port at Cais de Gaia, Porto in Portugal.

muscadel the wine must be made from either Muscat de Frontignan or Muscat Blanc à Petit Grains grapes.

Sherry, originally from the Jerez region of Spain, is made from white grapes, fermented dry and then fortified before being aged then blended through a continuous process, year by year. This blending means that, unlike port, sherry does not carry a vintage year. Because sherry is essentially a white wine it should be served chilled. All sherry starts out dry with the sweeter versions (medium or full cream) created by the blending in of sweet wine towards the end of the maturation process.

Flor sherry is the classic style and is named after the yeast that gives the sherry its unique character. A film of the flor (meaning “flower”) yeast develops on the fortified wine, which is stored in wooden casks, protecting it from oxidation as it ages. After about two years under the flor yeast the sherry is moved to a system of stacked barrels called a solera where it is gradually blended with older sherry over the next three to five years.

There is another process where the formation of the flor is prevented and which creates

a fuller style of sherry called oloroso.

Port, originally from the Douro region in Portugal, is a red wine that has fortifying spirit added when just enough fermentation has taken place to extract colour from the grapes and enough grape sugar is still left to give the wine the desired level of sweetness. The wine is then aged in wood, the period of maturation depending on the type of port being produced (see below). The best ports are blended wines and are made from traditional Portuguese grape varieties such as Tinta Barocca, Tinta Roriz, Souzao and Touriga Nacional. Calitzdorp is South Africa's unofficial port capital and Axe Hill, Bredell's, Boplaas and Die Krans are all names to look out for.

Because of a trade agreement with Portugal, South African producers may no longer use the term “port” so our port-style wines are now known as Cape Tawny, Cape Ruby and Cape Vintage.

• Reference: *Wines and Brandies of the Cape of Good Hope*, by Phyllis Hands and David Hughes.



## Types of sherry

- **Fino** — Pale gold in colour, this sherry is dry, light and suitable for pairing with tapas as well as light meats, cheese and seafood.
- **Manzanilla** — Similar in style, colour and food pairings to Fino. Manzanilla should be served chilled.
- **Cream** — Rich and sweet with a dark mahogany colour, cream sherry is an ideal accompaniment to many desserts.
- **Oloroso** — Fragrant, full-bodied and amber to mahogany in colour, this sherry makes an excellent aperitif and is good served with game and red meats. Medium-sweet, it

can also be served with dessert, nuts and fresh fruit.

- **Pale Cream** — Smooth-tasting and pale in colour, this sweet sherry pairs well with *foie gras* and fruit salad.
- **Amontillado** — Amber-coloured, dry and full-bodied, Amontillado is an ideal partner for heavier fish dishes, older cheeses and white meats.
- **Sweet sherry** (*Jerez dulce* in Spanish) is created when dry sherry is sweetened with sweet wine. Full cream sherry is made from oloroso, pale cream sherry from fino and medium cream sherry from amontillado.

## Types of port

- **Ruby** — Lighter style, ruby coloured, non-vintage port, aged in wood for at least six months.
- **Vintage** — A port with a vintage date and bottled after about two years in wood.
- **Vintage Reserve** — A port made in exceptionally good years, aged about two years in wood and vintage dated.
- **Late Bottled Vintage** — A port with a vintage date and bottled after four to five years in wood.
- **Tawny** — A port aged for many years in wood. Develops a tawny colour. It need not necessarily carry an age indication.

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