

# YEAR'S BEST SHERRY: AMONTILLADO, PALO CORTADO & SWEET

Our blind panels tasted **105** new-release oxidative Sherries over the past 12 months. **Patricio Tapia**, our critic for Spanish wines, rated **35** as exceptional (90+) and **13** as Best Buys. Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at [wineandspiritsmagazine.com](http://wineandspiritsmagazine.com).

## AMONTILLADO

**97 | Yuste** \$173/375ml  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Conde de Aldama Amontillado** Francisco Yuste bought an old Amontillado solera in 1927 that had been established in the Barrio Alto district of Sanlúcar de Barrameda in 1740. Today, the Yuste family believes that the average age of the wines in this solera is more than 100 years, making the wine one of the oldest marketed in all of Jerez. This Amontillado, blended from those casks, is a trip. First it evokes the seashore, with its flavors of salt, shells and iodine; then it reveals the lime and mushroom scents the wine developed as it matured under the veil of flor. With air, there are notes of walnuts, smoked almonds and spices. While the aromas are as delicate and nuanced as a perfume, in flavor, with its direction and strength, it is a bullet. *Classical Wines, Seattle, WA*

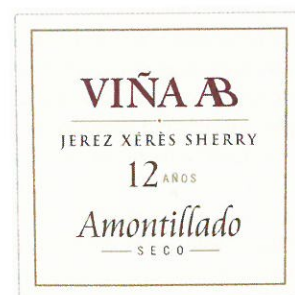
**96 | González Byass** \$114/500ml  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Cuatro Palmas Amontillado** With the Palmas series, González Byass aims to show the evolution of wine under flor, from younger wines (Una Palma) to older (Cuatro Palmas). This Amontillado comes from a solera of only six casks, with an average age of about 45 years. Be prepared when you open it: This wine is tremendous in size and impact. Saline and dry in flavor, it's as austere as a Franciscan monk in penance. The flavors are all mineral at first—chalk and iodine—but, if you give it time in the glass, it gets more fun, developing flavors of almonds, black pepper and mushrooms. *González Byass USA, Chicago, IL*

**96 | El Maestro Sierra** \$110  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry 1830 Amontillado** This Amontillado is based on a solera established by the founder of the bodega, José Antonio Sierra, in 1830. He was a master cooper at the time and, little by little, he stored up enough wines to establish his own winery. Today, the wines of this solera average about 50 years of age, and the salinity of their flavors is extreme: You might wonder if you're

tasting sea water rather than wine, which, in theory, does not sound very good, but, in this case, is delicious. Notes of dried fruits, nuts, almonds and iodine unite with the saline flavors to create a wine that is both powerful and firm, balanced and elegant. *De Maison Selections, Chapel Hill, NC*

**95 | El Maestro Sierra** \$36  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Amontillado** This is the youngest of El Maestro Sierra's Amontillados, from a solera where the wines are an average of 12 years old. In the classic style of the house, it feels delicate, with soft, seductive salty aromas, but the youthfulness of the blend adds an inner strength, a force felt in the wine's mineral acidity and textural grip. Give it time in the glass: With air, what at first seems easy to understand becomes something more complex. *De Maison Selections, Chapel Hill, NC*

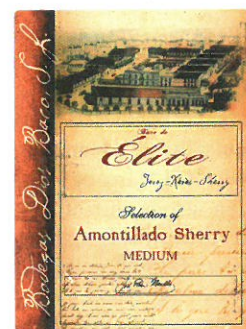
**94 | Dios Baco** \$100  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Imperial VOS 20 Amontillado** Imperial is the top of the line for Dios Baco, blended from some of the house's oldest wines. This bottling comes from a solera with wines that average 20 years of age. It immediately charms, with an intriguing mix of apricot and chalk notes, then becomes austere, as dry as a stone. Give it time in the glass or decant it for smoked sardines. *Cordelina Wine Co., Gold River, CA*



**93 | González Byass** \$26  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Viña AB 12 Años Amontillado Seco (Best Buy)** González Byass used to call this wine a "Fino Amontillado,"

signifying that it's a Fino that lost most of its flor and began to oxidize, transitioning towards an Amontillado. Now called AB, a reference to Andrés Botaina, the original owner of the vineyard that supplied the grapes for the wine, this is a blend of wines that average 12 years of age. Youthful in its strength and vigor, this takes its time to reveal the fruity notes hidden behind the salty flavor. Then it becomes a refreshing and vibrant delight—a gentle giant in a state of vital youth. *González Byass USA, Chicago, IL*

**92 | Delgado Zuleta** \$16  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Dry Amontillado (Best Buy)** Light in body and nearly stabbing in acidity, this is dominated by marine flavors that bring to mind smoked oysters in their depth, richness and complexity. The acidity seems to accelerate through the wine, stirring up notes of spice and toasted almonds as the flavors last. *Frontier Wine Imports, Dover, NJ*



**92 | Dios Baco** \$30  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Elite Amontillado Medium (Best Buy)** The Elite line from Dios Baco focuses on soleras with wines of medium sweetness that average 35 years of age. This Amontillado offers gentle sweetness, but not enough to put off a dry-Sherry lover: The salinity is such that it brings a mineral balance vis-à-vis the touches of candied figs and walnuts. Pour it with blue cheese. *Cordelina Wine Co., Gold River, CA*

**92 | González Byass** \$50  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry del Duque VORS Amontillado** This *muy viejo* Amontillado

has spent about 30 years in the solera. That age makes for concentrated wine, saline and still fierce in its acidity. Its feels austere at first, the flavors somewhat shy, overshadowed by the wine's structure, which seems to present a thick wall of limestone. Give it time in the glass and, slowly, it begins to show more detail. It's even better if you have *mojama* (salt-cured tuna) to accompany the wait. *González Byass USA, Chicago, IL*

**92 | Yuste** \$18/375ml  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Aurora Amontillado (Best Buy)** At first sip, this feels buttery, with aromas of toasted nuts and sweet spices. Little by little, the flavors head toward a drier place, the wine becoming less aromatic with air, but more structured. It ends up feeling austere, vertical, powerful, the sort of Sherry to drink with sea urchins. *Classical Wines, Seattle, WA*

**91 | Pérez Barquero** \$34  
**Montilla-Moriles Gran Barquero Amontillado** Made entirely of pedro ximénez, aged under flor for ten years, and then another 15 without flor, this rides the licorice-like aromas of the grape into a thick wall of salty flavors, like a wave that suddenly drops you on the beach. This is a very dry, serious Amontillado, to accompany thin slices of *jamón Ibérico*. *V.O.S. Selections, NY*

**90 | Hidalgo-La Gitana** \$20  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Napoleon Amontillado (Best Buy)** This wine offers soft herbal touches amid scents of pebbles, salt and candied almonds. It's medium bodied, with deep salty flavors that fill the mouth, and a mild acidity, almost timid, that fulfills the role of refreshing everything in its path. *V.O.S. Selections, NY*

**90 | Alexander Jules** \$42/500ml  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Alexander Amontillado 3/10** Alexander Jules is a winemaker and Spanish wine importer from California. In Jerez, he selects casks for his own label and bottles the wines unfiltered. This Amontillado comes from Bodega Juan Pinero and was bottled in June 2016. It offers slightly caramelized scents, along with spice and mineral notes, but in the flavor, there is nothing of that sweetness suggested in the aromas. It is dry, medium bodied and tense with acidity. Ready for salted clams. *Alexander Jules, Santa Monica, CA*

**90 | Lustau** \$25  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Escuadrilla Rare Dry Amontillado** Escuadrilla is part of Lustau's

"Solera Familiar" line, meant to serve as an introduction to the world of Jerez. This Amontillado is round, the generous texture enriched by a little sweetness in the midst of saline notes. *Europvin USA, Van Nuys, CA*

**90 | Lustau** \$16  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Los Arcos Dry Amontillado (Best Buy)** This wine's caramel flavors become more saline as the wine opens in the glass. It's soft in texture and voluptuous in aromas, a seductive blend of sweet, concentrated liqueur-like fruit and salt. *Europvin USA, Van Nuys, CA*

## MEDIUM

**92 | González Byass** \$50  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Apóstoles VORS Medium** A flagship wine of González Byass, Apóstoles is a blend of 18- to 20-year-old wines, including 13 percent from sweet pedro ximénez. That's a high percentage for a Palo Cortado, but the strength of the Apóstoles base wine is such that it can absorb the intense sweetness, allowing it to add some gentleness to the wine. The salty flavors are wrapped in a layer of hazelnut tones, but the intense minerality is what predominates. *González Byass USA, Chicago, IL*

**91 | Lustau** \$20  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry La Plaza Vieja Medium Dry Golden** A little bit of pedro ximénez in this blend (around eight percent) makes this wine very approachable, adding sweetness to its salty notes. The marine flavors are still the main actors, but that sweetness places the wine after dinner, served slightly chilled, with a plate of aged cheese. *Europvin USA, Van Nuys, CA*

## MOSCATEL

**90 | Dios Baco** \$30  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Pasa Esnobista Moscatel** Every note in this wine is sweet: candied figs, caramelized nuts, the fragrant floral scents. The texture is unctuous, the wine best enjoyed in small sips after a copious dinner. *Cordelina Wine Co., Gold River, CA*

**89 | Delgado Zuleta** \$16  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Moscatel (Best Buy)** Creamy and unctuous, this has enough acidity and sweetness to drink with dessert, especially if there are homemade *churros*. It's built to last in the bottle, so save it for at least five years, as it will gain in grace and complexity. *Frontier Wine Imports, Dover, NJ*

## OLOROSO

**97 | El Maestro Sierra** \$225  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry 1/7 VORS Oloroso** As the decades go by, Sherries tend to lose all glimmer of sweetness, the best examples becoming small cathedrals of salty flavors, rich in iodine tones. This Oloroso comes from the seven oldest butts of the Maestro Sierra winery, and its average age is estimated at 80 years. Time has taken the wine far beyond fruit flavors, deep into the world of oxidative notes, from earthiness and iodine to chalk. Although it's already old, with such great structure and firm acidity, this should have a long life in the bottle. Bravo Maestro. *De Maison Selections, Chapel Hill, NC*

**95 | El Maestro Sierra** \$110  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Oloroso 1/14 VORS** For lovers of dry, austere Olorosos, this is a tremendous wine, edgy, all about marine, mineral and iodine aromas, dry fruit and spice playing in the background. Those flavors seem to last forever, and get more intriguing with time. There are no concessions here, but after a couple of days open, the wine slowly begins to show a caramelized side that buffers the extreme minerality, and adds another layer of complexity. *De Maison Selections, Chapel Hill, NC*

**92 | Lustau** \$25  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Don Nuño Dry Oloroso** A delicate, subtle Oloroso, this has notes of nuts and dried apricots, with slightly candied touches. The texture is soft, so gentle that it's easy to forget there's alcohol involved. Its depths of salty flavors make it a match for braised pork cheeks, a classic dish in Andalusia. *Europvin USA, Van Nuys, CA*

**91 | Dios Baco** \$125  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Imperial VOS 30 Oloroso** Touches of exotic spice and dried-fruit flavors meld into this wine's soft texture; then a delicious acidity shines through, refreshing the flavors and adding some grip. The salt and iodine notes appear as background music. This one needs grilled trout. *Cordelina Wine Co., Gold River, CA*

**91 | Lustau** \$35/500ml  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Very Rare Emperatriz Eugenia Oloroso (Best Buy)** Don Emilio Lustau founded this solera in 1921, to commemorate the visit of Eugenia de Montijo, the last empress of France. Today it's one of the emblematic wines of the bodega. It's immediately appealing in its seductive balance of candied and salty flavors. Delicate

in body, with a soft texture and lots of spice notes, this would complement smoked oysters. *Europvin USA, Van Nuys, CA*

**90 | Pérez Barquero** \$34  
**Montilla-Moriles Gran Barquero Oloroso**  
With saline notes in the foreground, this is fragrant, dry and refreshing. Mineral tones, smoky notes and a pleasantly bitter finish give even more complexity. All it needs is *jamón serrano* and salted almonds. *V.O.S. Selections, NY*

**88 | Cesar Florido** \$19  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Cruz del Mar Oloroso (Best Buy)** This is a good introduction to the Oloroso style. It starts out spicy and salty, then slowly begins to show classic notes of toasted hazelnuts and oxidative aromas of earth and fungi. *De Maison Selections, Chapel Hill, NC*

**88 | Hidalgo-La Gitana** \$20/500ml  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Faraon Oloroso (Best Buy)** With sweet notes of caramelized almonds and deeper flavors of walnuts, this is light and friendly. Its combination of bright acidity and dark flavors would work well with rich meat dishes, like braised oxtail. *Classical Wines, Seattle, WA*

**87 | Grant** \$16  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry La Garrocha Oloroso (Best Buy)** A salty acidity runs through this wine, balancing its creamy texture and sweet flavors of candied walnuts. It's medium bodied, with spicy notes. *De Maison Selections, Chapel Hill, NC*

PALO CORTADO

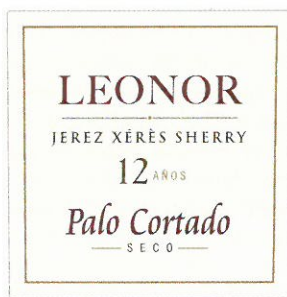
**95 | Hidalgo-La Gitana** \$45/500ml  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Wellington 20 Years VOS Palo Cortado** One of our panelists remarked that this seemed the most "Fino-like" of all the Palo Cortados, and he was right: It has a subtlety, freshness and delicacy in its aromas of salt and iodine, as well as a touch of sweetness in its flavors of nuts and fruit. A blend of wines averaging more than 20 years in age, it's impeccably balanced, complex and elegant. *Hidalgo Imports, Miami, FL*

**93 | Delgado Zuleta** \$27/375ml  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Palo Cortado (Best Buy)** Delgado Zuleta bottles this Palo Cortado after 18 years of aging in casks. The result is a wine rich in caramel, iodine and

shellfish scents, yet it delivers its flavors with linear austerity, like a spear, projecting notes of nuts and honey, stones and chalk, directly onto the tongue. After you open it, make sure to save enough to try over the next several days: Its evolution highlights the wine's mineral and saline side, leaving the caramel notes in the background. *Frontier Wine Imports, Dover, NJ*

**93 | Lustau** \$100/500ml  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry 30 years old VORS Palo Cortado** While this is a dry Palo Cortado, age has enriched it with notes of candied figs and walnuts that give it an extra touch of complexity. It's best paired with something simple, like salted almonds, allowing its detailed flavors to shine. *Europvin USA, Van Nuys, CA*

**93 | El Maestro Sierra** \$110  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Palo Cortado** This rare Palo Cortado comes from four butts of a solera that Maestro Sierra estimates to be more than 70 years old. Although there is a slight sweetness to it, the flavors are framed in sea salt, stony notes, iodine and spices. It has the character of the greatest dry Sherries, but that sweet note gives it a touch of distinction—and makes it more approachable as well. *De Maison Selections, Chapel Hill, NC*



**92 | González Byass** \$26  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Leonor 12 Años Palo Cortado** Here's a terrific example of the classic Palo Cortado style: One side of this wine is sweet and unctuous, the other more delicate and dry. The two come together in a wine that balances a figgy richness with herbal and mineral notes that last until the very end, leaving a refreshing sensation. *González Byass USA, Chicago, IL*

**92 | Yuste** \$173/375ml  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Conde de Aldama Palo Cortado** At first, seductive notes of candied fruit predominate, but soon an oceanic salinity takes over, opening a door to complex notes of mushroom, chalk and stone. This

Palo Cortado comes from one of the oldest soleras in Jerez, with wines that average 100 years old. *Classical Wines, Seattle, WA*

**89 | Lustau** \$35/500ml  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Almacenista Cayetano del Pino y Cía Palo Cortado (Best Buy)** With deep flavors of toasted almonds, this wine's play of caramelized scents and salty notes makes for a gentle Palo Cortado. Ready now for sautéed shrimp. *Europvin USA, Van Nuys, CA*

PEDRO XIMENEZ

**93 | González Byass** \$50  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry VORS Noe Pedro Ximénez** It takes about three decades to complete the aging process for Noe, which is why this wine has already moved on from the typical PX notes of sweet figs and candied walnuts to include drier, salty flavors. It's enormous in size, with salinity that intensifies all its many flavors, a classic PX to drink in small sips after dinner. *González Byass USA, Chicago, IL*

**93 | El Maestro Sierra** \$110  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Viejo Pedro Ximénez Viejisimo** This is the oldest Pedro Ximénez bottled by El Maestro Sierra, aged in the solera for 50 years. Rich in notes of dried figs, toasted chestnuts and caramel, it has the texture of honey and probably a similar weight. That sweetness would suit vanilla ice cream. *De Maison Selections, Chapel Hill, NC*

**91 | Delgado Zuleta** \$25  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Pedro Ximénez** Flavors of roasted figs and chestnuts play a starring role in this wine. It's nearly as dense as maple syrup, but there's a salinity in the background that keeps the wine balanced. Drink it as a dessert in itself. *Frontier Wine Imports, Dover, NJ*

**90 | Dios Baco** \$21/500ml  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Oxford 1.970 Pedro Ximénez** This is unctuous and ample, redolent with notes of candied figs and almonds in syrup, salty notes playing like background music. *Cordelina Wine Co., Gold River, CA*

**90 | González Byass** \$26  
**Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Dulce Nectar Pedro Ximénez** This PX is like a nectar of candied figs. It's deeply sweet, with notes of nuts and maple syrup adding detail as the wine expands to fill every millimeter of your mouth. *González Byass USA, Chicago, IL* ■