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Sherry as Montrachet - revelations

18 Feb 2010 by [Jancis Robinson](#)



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On 19 Jan 2010 in the south London flat of Neil Beckett, the editor of *The World of Fine Wine*, [sherry guru Jesús Barquín](#) tasted his entire current range of sherries together for the first time. His explanation - 'I normally drink them, not taste them' - seems fair enough. He had persuaded his students of criminology at the university of Granada, where he is professor, that he could postpone his Monday afternoon lecture in order to fit this trip to London into his schedule.

Fortunately for me and a group of British wine professionals, including [Margaret Rand and Linden Wilkie](#), he shared them with us. See [here](#) for the background to his bottled-from-individual-casks range La Bota de X, bottled by Equipo Navazos, the company he founded with fellow enthusiasts for absolutely top quality sherries. The UK importer is Paul Shinnie of Rhône to Rioja Ltd and some of the wines can be bought by the single bottle, from around £20, from The Sampler in London N1. US importer is Eric Solomon of European Cellars. See other international distributors on their website [here](#), but be warned that quantities are extremely limited.

Equipo Navazos taste and then select individual casks of very superior sherries and have them bottled with their own label, 'La Bota de...' (the cask/butt of...). All these wines are bottled at the bodega that produced them. The job of Barquín and his colleagues is merely to choose the wines, not make them. All the finos below, for instance, come from Valdespino. Barquín reckons that virtually all the bodegas in the sherry region have some wine of the sort of the quality they seek, especially Finos and Manzanillas, 'if they have the ability and will to leave it alone and not filter or clarify', but the bodegas tend to keep it for themselves. 'I'm not exaggerating, I could make a long list of bottle-able wines: 40-50 in Valdespino alone, 100 in all Jerez. BUT there is no market for them. We only bottle what is reserved in advance. Retailers take the risk. They pay in advance.' Equipo Navazos bottlings are typically just 4,000 bottles at a time.

The reason Barquín is so keen on presenting these unique wines straight from the cask is that it shows them as they should be savoured. 'Imagine the contradiction of taking a five- or six-year-old wine such as a Montrachet and stripping out character. That's what happens with many sherries. So people are not 'disturbed' by its character. Pale gold is the true colour of a Fino or Manzanilla but most of them are filtered and look much paler. (Equipo Navazos filter lightly for stability.)

'Our main aim is to let people know how great and complex Fino and Manzanilla are. People know about the old richer and darker sherries,' he says. 'I would love to be a wine lover who just discovered a wine like Fino no 2. It's a new world and opens a new door. I'm not being boastful because other people made them.'

As noted by me here before, Barquín also challenges the conventional wisdom that these, the lightest, driest sherries, should be drunk as soon as possible after bottling. 'You definitely shouldn't drink these wines straight after bottling. They need to recover. When to drink varies according to taste, but many finos and manzanillas should not be drunk before six months after bottling. Because they are so exaggeratedly filtered and clarified, they need at least that long to recover. There's one well known brand that says "Drink before X" and I actually drink it only *after* X.' (Unfortunately Barquín insists on being super-tactful about the various sherry producers.)

He's very proud of never having had a bad bottle of his wine. You can find TCA in sherry although he admits you have to be pretty familiar with the wine to spot a corked PX!

He thinks his Manzanilla 16 is still improving while Manzanilla 4 maybe hasn't improved but it's interesting.

Introducing the concept of Manzanilla Pasada, Barquín observed, 'So far we have tasted the simplest wines. Wait for what is coming! Autolysis is created by flor ageing and the dead yeast cells give lots of buttery texture. Palomino Fino gives lots of glycerine but if you go to a Fino or Manzanilla at the height of ageing, around six or seven years, the wine is very straight and vertical with no roundness. But three more years of ageing gives it butteriness, thanks to the autolysis - which makes it an extreme wine in that sense.'

We asked about examples of sherries with very extended bottle age and Barquín remarked on a huge sale of Queen Victoria's sherry collection (sweet probably) 100 years ago. Ex cellar prices of sherry are currently very very low, 'but they ensure that those who take the risk get the profit.'

The wines were served and are listed below in ascending order of body and sweetness, from young to old within type of wine.

[Navazos-Niepoort 2008 Vino de Mesa](#) 16.5 Drink 2009-2011

This is the first vintage of a ground-breaking wine, a table wine not a sherry, inspired by the visit that Barquín, David Schildknecht, Dirk Niepoort the port producer and I made to Jerez in April 2008. This is Palomino Fino that has spent only five months under flor so it is much less evolved than sherry - a sort of youthful cross between table wine and fino. Light, rather fatter nose than a fino. Certainly more fino than manzanilla - a slight lack of tang. Slight astringency on the finish. Certainly obviously lighter in weight though it becomes more and more interesting on the finish. Unlike any other wine I know. Should be really interesting to see how it develops. Bravo for trying it! 12.5%

£20.40 per 75 cl, or £18.36 as part of a 6 bottle case, *The Sampler*

[Equipo Navazos. La Bota de Manzanilla 4 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 18 Drink 2007-2010

(bottled Jan 2007) Putty nose, then nutty and bone dry and pretty pungent. Lively and not in first flush of youth, but with bags of character. Cries out for *jamon Iberico!*

[Equipo Navazos. La Bota de Manzanilla 8 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 19 Drink 2008-2011

(bottled Oct 2007) Delicate and ethereal and lively. Super refreshing. This would be a wonderful wine to serve your most discerning friends instead of a really fine dry Riesling.

[Equipo Navazos. La Bota de Manzanilla 16 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 18.5+ Drink 2010-2013

(bottled Jan 2009 - his wines now say this on the front label) Nerry, frisky and softer than the others. Not quite as settled as the other Manzanillas.

[Equipo Navazos. La Bota de Fino 18 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 18.5+ Drink 2011-2014

(bottled Dec 2009) Probably not ready yet. Because of bottling. Soft and feathery in texture. Smudgy putty finish. Lots of tang on the finish. Almost 10 years old. JB thinks this will be better than No 15 eventually. Still some green notes.

[Equipo Navazos. La Bota de Fino 15 Macharnudo Alto NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 20 Drink 2009-2012

(bottled Jun 2008) Very pungent, gunpowdery nose. A certain softness. Chewy finish. Even a hit of whisky. Long. A real fine wine in the mould of Montrachet. This is now probably the right stage to drink? Fab for any dish that would go well with a Montrachet.

[Equipo Navazos. La Bota de Fino 7 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 18.5 Drink 2008-2011

(bottled Apr 2007) Lighter and slightly less characterful than No 15. Floral, fragrant.

[Equipo Navazos. La Bota de Fino 2 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 18.5 Drink 2007-2011

(bottled Jun 2006) 10-year-old wine with a lightly toffee nose and a certain sweetness. Tingly and treacy.

[Equipo Navazos. La Bota de Manzanilla Pasada 10 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 19 Drink 2009-2012

(bottled Jan 08) Very pale copper. 'You can make up your mind about it only after you've tasted it as well as smelled it.' Definite

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age and smudginess. Very firm acidity with, surely, a lot of concentration through age. Very firm and deep. Round yet delicate. Smokissimo. Descriptions are very difficult! The palate is much fresher than the nose. A lovely drink for now.

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[Equipo Navazos, La Bota de Manzanilla Pasada 20 Bota Punta NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 20 Drink 2010-2015

(cask sample, will be bottled in 50cl) Bota punta denotes a selection of the solera that includes the end cask, which has a special history by virtue of its position. Very pale tawny. Very heady and aromatic. Slightly dusty and very concentrated. More intense than no 10 – JB's favourite. Real structure and like a young Grand Cru white burgundy. About 14 years old, with a very thin layer of flor. Casks kept fuller than usual which reduces the surface area. There are very few wines like this. Great tang and life. This is going to be more of a virtual wine than a real one. They can take only 300 litres out of the solera so they will fill just 600 half bottles. It will be very difficult to allocate. Comes from La Guita.

[Equipo Navazos, La Bota de Amontillado 9 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 19 Drink 2008-2013

(bottled Oct 07) Light tawny. Smells of an old bodega. Those old straw mats? Then rich and super tangy. Pretty substantial. Super long and tangy. Firm. This is like 8, 4 or 16 after 25 years of oxidative ageing without flor. Hint of raisins but not at all sweet. This wine had been untouched for 22 years. No topping up. From a Sanlúcar bodega. Still delicate and very dry. Lovely stuff but probably more difficult to find a food match for than 20.

[Equipo Navazos, La Bota de Palo Cortado 21 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 18 Drink 2011-2013

(cask sample) Brighter yellow than the 9. Deeper, less open nose, a hint of caramel. A certain sweetness. Hint of whisky. Broad and smoky.

[Equipo Navazos, La Bota de Palo Cortado 17 Bota Punta NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 18.5 Drink 2010-2014

(bottled Jan 09) This wine from the Fernando Castilla bodega recently won a prize. Pale/mid tawny. A little dustiness. Then great richness and huge vibrancy. Really racy and tingly. Long and dry. Very complete. Great nobility. Long and with hints of putty. Lovely stuff.

[Equipo Navazos, La Bota de Palo Cortado 6 Bota Punta NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 19 Drink 2009-2013

(bottled Apr 07) Pale tawny. From a Puerto Santa María bodega that has disappeared. Lovely roundness and depth and complexity. SO clean!! Delicate finish with a hint of (good) farmyard smells. Unfiltered because the quantities were just too small. If they filtered they would have lost half of the wine. It's a little cloudy. Barquín says the wine should be decanted.

[Equipo Navazos, La Bota de Oloroso 14 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 18 Drink 2009-2013

(bottled Jun 08) Mid bright rosy copper colour. He recommends the Riedel Chianti not burgundy glass for this. From Valdespino. From a solera that was sold with an ancient C19 year on it. Rich and broad. Super tangy. So concentrated by age that it's actually rather uncomfortable to taste but then tasting it after the no 5 NPI makes it taste gentler! Whisky like. On going back to this from the Amontillado 5 NPI, I increased the score!

[Equipo Navazos, La Bota de Amontillado NPI 5 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 17.5 Drink 2009-2013

(bottled Feb 07) The oldest wine of the lot. 70-80 years old. JB recommends the Chianti not burgundy glass for this. From Sanlúcar. Dusty and bone dry and very much an acquired taste it's so concentrated. An intellectual wine. 'Very suitable for a rainy quiet day when you just have a tiny amount to read a newspaper with' apparently. 20%

[Equipo Navazos, La Bota de Cream 19 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 18 Drink 2010-2014

(bottled Sep 09) Their first Cream sherry. Mid chestnut with a greenish rim. Much less distinct nose than most - a bit smudgy. This is probably a blend of Oloroso and PX. Not a late blend of ready-made wines in the way that commercial Cream sherry is. Much more integrated. Dusty, hint of cigar smoke. Very interesting – and so, so different from mainstream cream sherries. Great refreshing tang. Quite a chewy finish, but with some delicacy. RS 120 g/l is the legal minimum for Cream but this is one of the less obviously sweet.

[Equipo Navazos, Casa del Inca Pedro Ximénez 2008 Montilla-Moriles](#) 17 Drink 2010-2011

(bottled Sep 09) Light fox red. Made for a retailer in Spain from the 2008 vintage - a Montilla counterpart to Dirk Niepoort's Jerezano table wine. From Perez Barquero of Montilla. Very odd nose indeed – I've never smelt anything like it on a wine before. Sort of like a cereal or porridge – barley? spelt? - with a bit of malt. Yet with – just – enough sugar on the finish. Thick and just enough acidity.

[Equipo Navazos, La Bota de Pedro Ximénez 3 NV Montilla-Moriles](#) 17.5 Drink 2008-2012

(bottled Oct 06) This is the same wine as Casa del Inca after 20-24 years. Super concentrated. The alcohol in Montilla decreases rather than increases (as in Jerez) because the atmosphere is so much drier. Blackish with yellow rim. Tangy gunpowder nose with lots of syrup and jujube flavours – like intensely reduced strawberry jelly. But not strong. 11%

[Equipo Navazos, La Bota de Pedro Ximénez 11 NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry](#) 18 Drink 2009-2014

(bottled Jan 08) Higher alcohol and aged in casks filled up to five-sixths of capacity and with more alcohol, so ageing is the opposite to Montilla where casks are fully filled with lower-alcohol wine. So in Jerez, there is more oxidation, and more complexity of esters because there is more alcohol. 18% minimum. This wine is about 18 years old. Very sweet and pungent and more complex indeed than the Montilla version. Lots of umami and rancio. Strong treacle finish. 17%
£65 per 50cl, The Sampler

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