

# Complicated Solera process yields fine after-dinner sherry

This is the sixth in a seven-part series on wine by Fine Arts staff member Larry Kubert.

by Larry Kubert

An evening is nearly over. Dinner has been served, and as the dessert is being brought out now is the time for the dessert wines and later the after dinner wines.

Two dessert wines have been mentioned earlier—sherry and Madeira. Both wines are fortified and have versions which can be served as aperitifs in addition to dessert wines.

The dessert versions of sherry are called oloroso and are relatively heavy and dark. Sherry originated in Spain, and with the possible exception of some Californian sherry, it still is best from there.

Sherry is made through a blending process that seems complicated. After allowing time for the moisture in the grapes to evaporate, the grapes are pressed, gypsum is added to increase acidity, and then the wine is left to ferment for a period of about three months.

Next, a white film or crust forms on the surface of the wine. This film is really a fungus and is called *flor*. By the amount of *flor*, it is determined which sheries will be aperitifs (thick, heavy *flor*) and which will be olorosos (thin and scanty *flor*). It seems strange, but before this the wine maker doesn't know which will be which.

The wines then are placed in fresh casks and fortified with brandy, bringing the alcohol content up to 18 per cent for the olorosos, and left to develop another couple years. After this period of time, the wine is blended with older and younger wines in a process called Solera.

Naturally, there are no vintage years in sherry since the Solera process makes it impossible and unnecessary.

Madeira also is an aperitif and a dessert wine. Bual and malmsey are the rich and full dessert wines in the Madeira family.

The grapes are crushed, the juice extracted and allowed to ferment for two to four weeks. Next the wine is fortified with brandy and moved to a heated room where it is cooked for a three to six month period. After the heating, it is aged for about two years before being fortified again to bring the alcohol content up to 20 per cent. It finally is permitted to mature—a process which takes an additional several years.

Madeira is the longest living wine. According to wine experts, Madeira as old as the 18th Century still can be drunk without any loss of its quality.

Port can be considered a dessert wine or an after-dinner wine to be eaten with nuts. Coming from the town of Oporto in Portugal, there are two basic kinds of port: vintage port and wood port. Vintage port matures in bottles, wood port matures in wooden casks.

Vintage port results when a certain grape year looks extremely promising. The wine is selected, fortified and kept in casks for two or three years. Then it is refortified and bottled, and left to mature for anywhere from 10 to 40 years.

Wood port is aged in wooden casks for eight to twelve years, depending upon the color desired—ruby red, less; tawny, longer. Wood port should be drunk within six months of its bottling date.

Only Portugal can sell a bottle of port with only the word "port" on the label. All other ports (which are many, coming from California, South Africa, Australia) must bear a qualifying name, such as California port.

After the dessert and dessert wines, it is time for the after-dinner drink. Brandy and liqueurs really are not wines; but brandy uses a wine base. The name brandy comes from a Dutch word, *brandewijn*, meaning burned or distilled wine, which is exactly what brandy is.

The world's best brandy comes from the Cognac region of France and is called such. There are seven grades of cognac. In descending order they: Grande Champagne, Petite Champagne, Borderies, Fin Bois, Bons Bois, Bois Ordinaires and Bois Communs. The use of the word champagne simply refers to "countryside" rather than the sparkling wine.

Cognac is distilled from the St. Emilion grape after fermentation has stopped. Distillation continues for several months, resulting in a double distillation. The first distillation is called *brouillis* and produces a 50 proof wine. The second distillation, which is called *la bonne chauffe*, is raw cognac and is about 135 proof. The raw cognac is barreled and allowed to age.



After aging, the brandy is blended with other brandies, allowed to mature and finally bottled. Although brandy has no vintage year, cognac is rated with stars according to its aging time. Three stars on a label indicates five years in the cask; four stars indicates six years; five stars means seven years.

Letters also are used to indicate age. V.O. means very old; V.S.O. means very superior old; V.S.O.P. means very superior old pale; E or X means extra; F means quality and Q means quality.

Brandy is said to be at its best after 25 to 50 years—but these years should have been spent in wooden casks rather than glass bottles.

Some famous names of cognac producers are Hennessy, Martell, Hine, Otard and Delamain.

There are other brandies outside of that which come from the Cognac region. Two fine brandies are armagnac, which retains a rather hard taste, and marc, which, although widely drunk in Burgundy, is not so good as cognac.

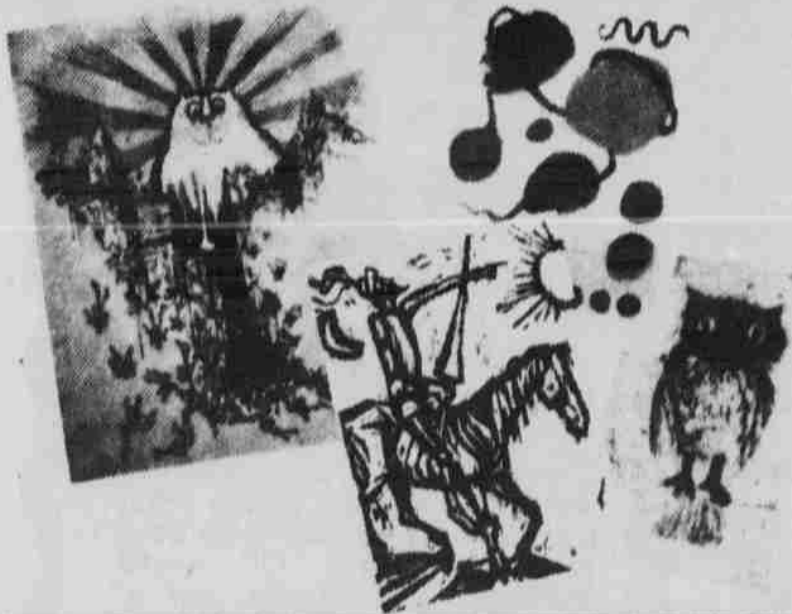
There are several types of fruit and plant liqueurs which are made through infusion and percolation techniques. Most people will recognize *creme de menthe*, *Benedictine*, *Chartreuse*, *Grand Marnier*, but since these liqueurs have a rather shakey connection with wine, it might be best to pass them by until a discussion of spirits. Suffice it to say, many of these liqueurs are extremely appealing.

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## ASUN finalizes budget

ASUN Senate Wednesday approved its 1972-73 budget with the minimum affirmative votes required.

Only a few changes were made in the ASUN Budget Committee's recommendations after executives met last weekend with Ken Bader, vice chancellor of student affairs, and James Zumberge, UNL chancellor.

Zumberge recommended the budget be cut by \$1,000, reducing the total to \$40,134.41. The \$1,000 was to have provided student funds for the campus ombudsman. Zumberge recommended that student fees still help fund the ombudsman but that those fees not go through student government.

Other changes recommended by the chancellor include increasing the budget for Student Services from \$2,050 to \$3,050 to provide day care and child care center support. Zumberge also recommended cutting the Contingency Fund budget from \$4,000 to \$3,000.

In other senate business, the body unanimously passed a deadweek policy proposed by the Center for Educational Change (CEC). The policy establishes a two-day period between the end of classes and beginning of finals during which no classes will be held and no finals will be given.

Unexcused absences: Cindy Mapes, College of Arts and Sciences