

To butt or not to butt

27 Nov 2009 by Jancis Robinson

A quaint and surely admirable tradition was continued recently in Jerez, Andalucía. Britain has a Poet Laureate, a sort of official poet to the nation, expected to conjure up lines, if not verse, to celebrate state and national occasions. Not an easy job, then, but there is at least one perk: a butt (720 bottles) of sherry.

The latest Poet Laureate and the first woman to hold the title, Carol Ann Duffy, recently returned from three days in Jerez where she was officially presented with her butt by the Consejo Regulador Sherry- Jerez- Xérès on behalf of the sherry industry.

Originally 'a butt of Sherry Sack' was given by the monarch as payment to the Poet Laureate and this continued until 1800. The tradition was revived in 1984 by the sherry producers to mark the long commercial links between the sherry business and Britain. 'Sherry sack', after all, is specifically mentioned by Falstaff in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. While in Jerez, Duffy gave a reading of her poem 'Anne Hathaway' from *The World's Wife* during the annual Shakespeare festival at the monument dedicated to him.

The first Poet Laureate was Ben Jonson, appointed by King James I in 1619; Carol Ann Duffy is the 22nd to hold the title. Both of Duffy's predecessors Ted Hughes and Andrew Motion travelled to Spain to receive their gift.

Carol Ann Duffy was presented with her butt of sherry at the Casa de Vino in Jerez accompanied by her daughter Ella (14) and artist Stephen Raw, who is going to design a special label for her sherry. Upon signing her butt of sherry, Carol Ann Duffy commented, 'With your third British Poet Laureate standing here, I think we can say that we have a tradition – and a lovely connection between two countries who value both poetry and great sherry'.

In response, César Saldaña for the Consejo Regulador Sherry- Jerez- Xérès, commented, 'We are delighted to have Carol Ann Duffy with us in Jerez to continue this tradition. The Poet Laureate's butt of sherry is a clear proof of the very deep cultural roots of our wines and the historic ties between sherry and the United Kingdom. We are absolutely convinced that Carol Ann Duffy will be an extraordinary Poet Laureate'.

I'm sure that is true. I just wish I felt more confident about sherry's future in the UK. Please patronise all the tapas bars that are springing up, and make sure you drink at least one glass of good sherry in them. If they don't have any decent sherry, nag them!

Some favourite tapas bars London

Barrafina, Dean Street, W1
Dehesa, Ganton Street, W1
Fino, Charlotte Street, W1 (the bar thereof)
Iberica, Great Portland Street, W1
Moro, EC1
Salt Yard, Goodge Street, W1
Tapas Brindisa, W1
Tierra Brindisa, W1

But I see that [Harden's Guide](#) lists many more. More recommendations please. Feel free to add a comment.

