# Tea & sherry as performance art

10 May 2011 by Jancis Robinson

The first-ever food and wine event to take place in the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London's biggest arts centre on the Southbank took place last night as trailed here. The picture shows Heston Blumenthal of The Fat Duck and me publicising the event at a live edition of the BBC radio programme *Today* in the QEH foyer on Good Friday.

Almost 800 people crammed into one of the most packed tastings I have ever witnessed, in the foyer of the concert hall, to try to taste as many of the 24 superior sherries listed below as possible and then spent more than an hour and half listening to me on sherry and the star that is Heston Blumenthal on tea-related food and his historical researches into it. Heston supplied a box of edible tea-time treats and also brought along the most beautifully made film of his Mad Hatter's Tea Party dish involving mock turtle consommé pressed into the shape of a fob watch and wrapped in gold leaf.

This whole event was Nick's idea and he was intimately involved in its organisation, including physically moving all 72 cases of sherry from the Festival Hall to the Queen Elizabeth Hall via a cumbersome set of lifts. This was the largest consumer tasting of fine sherry in the UK - possibly anywhere? - that anyone could remember. Unfortunately but inevitably the wines were shown by importer rather than style, so there was a switchback of styles on the tables and tasting sheet.

But what I was so thrilled about was to see such enthusiasm for the wines, and to see what a very youthful and inquisitive crowd had been attracted. I asked for votes as to which sherry style was most appreciated and expected only about half the audience to be sufficiently motivated to vote, but I'd say the poll turnout was many times better than at last Thursday's referendum on our country's voting procedures. The most favoured styles seemed to Palo Cortado, Fino and PX - though I suspect some people voted more than once.

There were masses of questions at the end, three of which were for me.

*Young restaurateur from The Larderhouse, Bournemouth*: How can I offer sherry to my customers most effectively?
*Me*: Choose a good example of each style from the list below and offer them by the glass on a prominent page or place in your wine list. Keep opened bottles chilled to prolong their life.

*Young Asian WSET student:* Given that these serious styles of sherry represent such a small proportion of total production, how do you expect sherry styles to evolve?
*Me:* You need a lot of time to produce top-quality Amontillado, Oloroso and Palo Cortado so the industry probably couldn't cope with the whole world falling in love with them immediately. But I would hope and expect sales of Fino and Manzanilla to climb steadily as word of their supreme quality and versatility with food (especially top restaurant food) spreads around the world.

*Young man in too gloomy a corner of the hall to identify:* Natural wine is all the rage. How does sherry fit in?
*Me*: A bit behind the curve, not least because sherry takes a relatively long time to make, but most of the wines below have been made very 'naturally' even if the commercial brands are routinely filtered. (See Jesús Barquín On the bottle life of sherry in our Members' forum.)

**BARBADILLO**
Manzanilla, Solear £5.49
*Waitrose, Cambridge Wine Merchants, SH Jones, Wines of the World SW18, Connolly's Wine Merchants, Birmingham, Underwood Wine Warehouse, Warwick's*
Palo Cortado, Obispo Gascon £27.49
*Larner Bros of Holt, Roberson Wine Merchants, The City Beverage Co of EC1, The Best of Wines W13, The Waterloo Wine Co SE1*
PX, La Cilla £19.49
*Paul Adams Fine Wines, The Best of Wines, Bin 21 Morpeth, Taste Fine Wines Huddersfield, Remarkable Wines SE21, Dartmouth Wine Co*

**EMILIO HIDALGO**
La Panesa Especial Fino £33
*Les Caves de Pyrène*
Marques de Rodil Especial Palo Cortado £31
*Les Caves de Pyrène*
Villapanes Oloroso Viejo £31
*Les Caves de Pyrène*

**EMILIO LUSTAU**
Puerto Fino £14.95
*Adnams, Harvey Nichols, Pallant of Arundel, Corks Out, Fortnum & Mason, Field & Fawcett, The Oxford Wine Company, Butlers Wine Cellar, Noel Young Wines, Quaff Wine Merchants, Raffles & many good restaurants throughout the UK*
Los Arcos Dry Amontillado £14.95*
*Pallant of Arundel, Weavers of Nottingham, Bottle Apostle, Harvey Nichols, Fortnum & Mason, Quaff Wine Merchants & many good restaurants throughout the UK*
Emilin Moscatel £18.50
*Adnams, Harvey Nichols, Pallant of Arundel, Corks Out, Fortnum & Mason, Field & Fawcett, The Oxford Wine Company, Butlers Wine Cellar, Noel Young Wines, Quaff Wine Merchants, Raffles, Theatre of Wine & many good restaurants throughout the UK*

**FERNANDO DE CASTILLA**
Fernando de Castilla Antique Fino £17- £20
*Harvey Nichols £20; The Sampler £17; just listed at Virgin approx £20*
Fernando de Castilla Antique Oloroso £22 - £23
*www.waitrosewine.com £21.84; The Sampler £23*
Fernando de Castilla Antique PX £23 - £25
*www.everywine.co.uk £23; Henning's Wine £25, Handford Wines, Old Brompton Road, also stock a selection from Fernando de Castilla*

**GONZALEZ BYASS**
Tio Pepe £9.49
*Widely available*
Apostoles Palo Cortado £19.99
*Tesco, Ocado, Majestic Wine, www.thedrinkshop.com, www.everywine.co.uk*
Matusalem £19.99
*Tesco, Ocado, www.thedrinkshop.com, www.everywine.co.uk*

**HARVEYS**
Harvey's Fino £7.64
EH Booths, Tesco, Morrison's
Harvey's Palo Cortado VORS £20.98
*www.thedrinkshop.com*
Harvey's Pedro Ximenez VORS £20.98
*EH Booths, Waitrose, www.thedrinkshop.com*

**HIDALGO - LA GITANA**
Manzanilla, La Gitana £9
*Majestic Wine Warehouse, Tesco, Waitrose*
Manzanilla Pasada, Pastrana £12
*Majestic Wine Warehouse, Whole Foods*
Wellington Palo Cortado VOS £20
*Tanners Wine Merchants*

**WILLIAMS & HUMBERT**
La Jalifa Amontillado £19.99
*Cambridge Wine Merchants, Bowland Forest Vintners*
Palo Cortado Dos Cortados £16.99
*Cambridge Wine Merchants, Bowland Forest Vintners, Hawkshead, Roberts and Speight, Luvians, Peckhams,*

*Henderson Wines*
Winter's Tale £11.99
*Cambridge Wine Merchants, SH Jones, Roberts and Speight, Luvians, Peckhams and Henderson Wines, Field and Fawcett*

*replaced on the night by Lustau's Fino Amontillado

For more information on stockists contact: sherry.institute@btinternet.com
Sherry website: www.sherry.org