

The Effects of Spirits Seasoned in Oloroso and PX Casks

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Sherry cask maturation profile

- Profiles given are for 1st fill (fresh from Spain)
- Extraction Period
- Balancing Period
- Peak Balance Period
- Dominant Period

Extraction Period of Sherry Casks

- Months 1-4 in 250 L size
- Months 1-9 in 500 L size
- Marked by cloying “aromatic sweetness”
- Disjointed
- Not suitable for bottling if complete control is desired (change in the bottle)

Integration Period

- Months 4-8 in 250 L casks
- Months 8-16 in 500 L casks
- Cloying sweetness subsides
- Wine-specific aromatics become more pronounced and defined
- Can be effective blending tools

Peak Balance Period

- Months 8-30 in 250 L casks
- Months 16-(?) in 500 L casks
- Effective balance between type-specific sherry notes and original spirit character
- Best period for single cask release or focus of a blend

Dominant Period

- Months 30- (?) in 250 L casks
- Unknown in 500 L casks
- Type-specific sherry notes dominate the original spirit
- Type-specific sherry notes become less well defined.
- Useful blending tool
- “Sherry bomb”

Finishing vs. Full Term Maturation

- Recent (past 20 years) trend in whiskey-making is the “cask finish”
- Full-term maturation is more traditional
- Cask finishing is usually done for two years following used bourbon casks

Cask Finishing

- Subtractive or “fixing” reactions have mostly taken place before this stage
- Cask finishing is meant to add a final flair to a completed whiskey maturation
- Peak balance period is important for release time
- Westland typically does 9-12 months in Hogsheads

Full Term Maturation

- New make spirit into sherry casks
- Cask must accomplish subtractive reactions and oxidation-based reactions in addition to sherry flavor.
- Balance point can be hard to achieve, extraction can dominate before spirit is matured.
- Great blending tools
- Maturation arc can sometimes span decades

Blending with sherry casks

- As mentioned before, sherry casks can take months to integrate the wine flavor with the rest of the whiskey.
- Prevailing wisdom in Scotland is 9-12 months marriage time prior to release.
- If marriage time is not respected integration of flavor can still proceed in the bottle, with unpredictable results

Blending with sherry casks 2

- Sherry casks can be divas, can easily hog the spotlight
- If integrating into a non-sherry focused bottling, a little can go a long way
- A sherry focused bottling can be made in a variety of ways: finishing, full-term, mix of the two, blending out with sherry, etc...

Oloroso characteristics

- Oloroso has significant “aromatic sweetness” but usually dry on the palate
- The sweetness comes across as maple syrup most of the time
- Lends dark, dried or stewed fruit
- Nutty notes are also prominent
- Nutty notes can be manifested as grainy, pancake or sweet bread

PX characteristics

- Dark! Both in color and in aromatics
- Obvious notes of raisins, molasses, and syrup
- Unexpected savory notes: ancho pepper, smoked paprika, mole sauce
- Contributes less aromatic sweetness than you would expect
- Lends considerable palate weight and length

Westland's sherry casks

- Even mix of oloroso and PX
- Most 250 liter casks used for finishing first, then full term maturation
- Casks used previously for finishing are designated for “long-term” maturation greater than 10 years.

Westland Sherry Wood

- Aim for balance between sherry and house style of malt
- Oloroso and PX but leaning towards more PX in the future
- A blend of finishing and full term casks, along with some non-sherry casks to keep balance