



Traditional World Cider Styles

United States Association of Cider Makers

Background: Whereas the American cider making tradition dates back to our Colonial era, many European countries have cider making traditions that are far older. These traditions have carried forward to today. European ciders are available in US markets. Having an understanding of traditional styles is therefore important for Certified Pommeliers™. The CCP Level 2 exam covers the traditional styles of Spain, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. They may be featured in the tasting portion of the exam as well. We recommend test takers develop an intimate understanding of these styles.

Spain: Cider (*sidra* in Spanish) has been made in parts of northern Spain along the Bay of Biscay for at least a thousand years, possibly longer, in particular in the provinces of Asturias and the Basque Country. Traditional Spanish ciders, known as *sidra natural*, are medium straw to light gold in color, and produced without the addition of sulfites and using native yeasts. They are fermented to dryness, bottled still and unfiltered and are typically around 6% ABV. Their flavor profile is acidic and tannic, expressed more as a sense of body than being overtly astringent or bitter, with bright fruit notes. Some amount of volatile acidity is acceptable, even characteristic to a degree, but the amounts are subject to government regulation. Examples of Spanish cider-specific apple varieties are *Raxao*, *Blanquina*, and *Coloradona*.

Over the centuries, the cider-drinking areas of Spain have developed a unique style of service that is integral to the flavor and enjoyment of *sidra natural*. In Asturias, *sidra natural* is traditionally served in a cider-specific pub/restaurant (*asidreria*, although *sidra* is available in many stores and restaurants as well) by a specially trained server (an *escansador*) who pours a thin stream of *sidra* from a height of several feet (known as “throwing the cider” in English) above a unique glass (very thin and wide-mouthed) that is tipped so that the *sidra* hits just inside the lip and swirls as it flows to the bottom. This process oxygenates the *sidra* a little and awakens its flavor. Only a small amount is poured at any one time (a *culín*), and it is meant to be consumed very quickly lest the *sidra* become “dead”. This specialized pouring technique is used throughout Spain for serving *sidra*. Cider is also consumed at festive gatherings called *espichas* which take place at the cider houses (*llagars*) throughout the year. Families and friends meet to celebrate anything and everything (work meetings, birthday parties, weddings, etc.). Cider is often poured directly from cider barrels and usually served with traditional foods like *empanadas*, *tortillas* (a potato and egg dish), and shellfish.



The Basque Country (mainly in the Guipúzcoa region, close to San Sebastián) has its own historic cider tradition (*sagardoa* in Basque). However during and after the Spanish Civil War, the drinking of cider declined and did not begin to pick up again until the 1970s. In order to revive the Basque cider industry and culture, many elements were borrowed from Asturias, including the celebratory *espicha*, which developed into the Basque *txotx* (pronounced “tchotch”). During the season, typically from January until early May, patrons will visit a cider house (*sagardotegi*) for a traditional communal meal of grilled rib-eye steak, salt cod omelet, and other traditional dishes. Periodically the cider house owner will call out “*txotx*” signaling that he or she is opening the spigot on one of the large, wooden cider barrels so that the patrons can form a line and “catch” a *culín*, a process which enhances the cider’s flavor much as being poured by an *escanciar*.

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom makes and consumes a greater volume of cider than any other country, and cider-making in England has been documented from at least the 13th century. While cider is produced throughout England, Wales and northern Ireland today, historically there was significant production in England's western counties (often called the West Country), notably Herefordshire, Somerset, and Devon. They were often drunk during harvest or because cider was safer than the water. Traditional West Country ciders are still, dry, and moderately cloudy to clear. They are high in tannin and generally low to moderate in acidity. They range in color from medium to deep gold in color and are typically around 6-7% ABV. Examples of West Country apples commonly used for cider are Dabinett, Kingston Black, Yarlington Mill, Brown's Apple, and Porter's Perfection. Examples of West Country ciders commercially available in the US include Oliver’s Herefordshire Dry Cider, Henny’s Dry Cider, and Hogan’s Dry Cider. While traditional West Country ciders compliment many things one would certainly find them accompanying traditional English pub fare such as a Ploughman’s lunch (a bread and cheese board with butter, onions and some sort of pickle) or bangers and mash.

Germany: Cider has been made in Germany since at least the 8th century during the reign of Charlemagne, although the modern German cider tradition dates to the mid-19th century. It goes by various names in German including *apfelwein*, *ebbelwoi*, *most*, and *viez* depending on the region in which it is produced. Many, if not most, traditional German ciders are produced in the state of Hesse around the city of Frankfurt. They are typically made from older table varieties such as *Boskoop*, *Rheinischer Bohnapfel*, and *Kaiser Wilhelm*. Traditional German ciders are high in acid and low in tannin, dry and still. They range in color from light straw to gold in color, and are clear to brilliant in appearance, and range from 5 to 7% ABV. Some drinkers will dilute their *apfelwein* with water, sparkling water, or lemonade to dilute its acidity. Examples of traditional *apfelweins* available in the US is Frankfurter Apfelwein from Possmann or Most from



Fuschoff. They work well with traditional German dishes such as braised pork with sauerkraut or a schnitzel. One traditional dish often served with cider in Frankfurt is *handkäse mit musik*, a pungent sour cheese served with a raw onion vinaigrette.

France: Traditional ciders (*cidre* in French) are mostly produced in Normandy and Brittany. They are typically a medium to deep gold in color. They are produced by the technique of keeving without the addition of sulfites pre-fermentation, using native yeasts, and subjected to a long, cool fermentation, which creates a pronounced set of aromatics. Fermentation is traditionally completed in the bottle and typically finishes before all of the sugars have been converted to alcohol, creating a naturally sparkling, naturally sweeter cider with alcohol levels ranging from 3% to above 5% ABV. There is also a traditional French perry (*poiré*) principally made in the southern part of Normandy, in the Domfront. Traditional French ciders tend to be relatively low in acid and high in tannin based on the choice of apple varieties used. Examples of French cider-specific apple varieties are: *Frèquin Rouge*, *Bedan*, *Kermerrien*, *Ch'wero Brizh*, and *Mettais*. Examples of commercially available French ciders in the US include *Tendre* made by Eric Bordelet, *Cidre Pays d'Auge* made by Le Père Jules, and *Cidre Brut* from Le Brun. Traditional French cidres are often paired with some of the classic cheeses of Normandy such as *camembert* or *livarot* or the savory buckwheat crepes called *galettes*.

References:

Cider Hard & Sweet: History, Traditionas, and Making Your Own by Ben Watson, 3rd edition (2013)

World's Best Ciders: Taste, Tradition, and Terroir by Pete Brown and Bill Bardshaw (2013)