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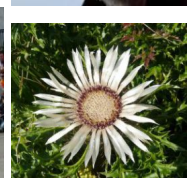
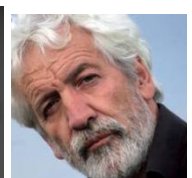
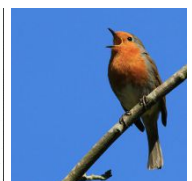
2017 Basque cider season kicks off with annual ceremonial opening of the barrels

JANUARY 12, 2017 / KATU / 0 COMMENTS

Yesterday's ceremonial opening of the new cider barrels to welcome in the forthcoming "txotx" cider season—the traditional time between January and April when the cider is drunk straight from the barrel in Basque cider houses—

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is so much more than just a publicity stunt. It marks a key event on the Basque culinary and cultural calendar, with the dry apple cider produced there an important symbol of the Basques' culture, as we revealed in a [previous post](#). That said, it would be disingenuous to think that the event is not a canny marketing opportunity for the cider houses, too, but let's just say this is one of those moments where commercial and cultural interests intersect successfully.



The great “txotx” experience. Photo by Jon Urbe (Argia.com), courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Every year a Basque personality has the honor of taking the first drink from the new vintage, and this year that honor went to Eneko Atxa from Zornotza, Bizkaia, the 3-star Michelin chef at [Azurmendi](#) in Larrabetzu, also in Bizkaia. Prior to taking the first drink, at the Zapiain cider house in Astigarraga, Gipuzkoa, Atxa offered up the traditional toast to “Gure sagardo berria”

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(Our new cider). In keeping with tradition, too, Atxa also planted an apple tree in the grounds of the [Sagardoetxea](#), the Basque Cider Museum. And the event was accompanied by traditional dances (the “Sagar-dantza” or apple dance) and the participation of the *bertsolariak* (improvising oral poets) Amets Arzallus and Jon Maia. See highlights of all this in the video, from [Berria TB](#).

It is worth noting that numerous public figures also attended the event, highlighting its importance, and that this year’s celebration coincides with the recent announcement of a new regulatory classification system for the product: henceforth, all cider produced with apples cultivated exclusively in the Basque Country will be branded under the “Euskal Sagardoa” label (Basque Cider, natural cider from the Basque Country). Of the 12.5 million liters (approx. 3.3 million gallons) of cider produced in the 2016 vintage—a figure slightly down on the previous year—around 12% currently comply with these guidelines and will go by the name [Euskal Sagardoa](#), although there is a 15-year plan in

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place to increase this figure significantly. In the meantime, there is also the [Gorenak](#) label, which covers producers who also use apples cultivated both within and outside the Basque Country.



Basque cider is also bottled, of course, as in these two examples of the Zapiain (Hegoalde, the Southern Basque Country) and Eztigar (Iparralde, the Northern Basque Country) cider houses. Photo by Bichenzo, courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Whatever the case, the cider house “experience” is about so much more than just a glass (or more... maybe) of the crisp, refreshing dry apple nectar; it’s about good hearty no-frills food, conversation, conviviality, and, if you’re really

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