

Boise Gets a Taste of Basque Cider Traditions

Cider Flows at sagardotegi dinner

By Tara Morgan @tarabreemorgan



Kelsey Hawes

Lael Uberuaga expertly fills a sagardotegi-goer's glass with a glug of traditional basque cider.

Basque cider is an acquired taste. The murky, honey-hued liquid washes over your tongue with a watery hint of apples that quickly dissolves into a lingering sour funk. Unlike most commercially available American cider, which is more like fizzy apple soda pop, Basque cider is still and meant to be savored with food. That's where the Basque ciderhouse, or sagardotegi, comes in.

At these ciderhouses, clustered chiefly in the towns of the Gipuzkoa province outside San Sebastian, revelers gather at long wood tables to sip cider and snack on protein-heavy snacks, like cod omelets, steak and cheese. When a cider-master calls "Txotx!" (pronounced "choach"), cider-swillers swarm the barrels, where streams of cider spew into thin tumblers held a few feet below. The process is said to aerate the cider but it also adds to the messy merriment.

On Oct. 18, Boise's Basque Center was transformed into a sagardotegi to raise money for the Oinkari Basque Dancers. A line of locals queued outside the building, eager to pick up glasses emblazoned with the word "txotx" and fill them with two-finger glugs of Bereziartua brand cider.

As the Bereziartua website explains: "The tumbler should be filled with an amount corresponding to the width of two fingers, and the cider has to be drunk immediately. Only the amount that is to be drunk in one gulp is poured into the tumbler."

At the Basque Center, a crowd of cider-sippers clustered around a façade made to look like wooden barrels with two spouts streaming cider. One person held their glass under the rivulet while another crouched below to catch the stream when the first person walked away. This delicate dance continued throughout the evening, even as plates of croquetas began to appear on the tables.

Following in the sagardotegi tradition, the main meal featured family-style platters of Tortilla de Bacalao, salt cod omelets flecked with red peppers and served with toasted bread; Bacalao al Pil Pil, skin-on cod chunks bathed in a garlic, green pepper and onion sauce; Txuleton, rare slices of tender steak; and manchego with walnuts and membrillo, a pink jelly made from tart quince.

As the dishes were passed from hand to hand around the tightly packed long tables, cider conversation started to spill forth. While one man enthused, "I think the cider with the steak is even better than with the codfish; it's perfect," his neighbor, who emigrated to Boise from Bilbao in the 1960s, shook his head. "I don't like it; I drank too much when I was young."

In the background, a handful of performers played the txalaparta, a wooden percussive instrument traditionally used in the Basque Country to summon the neighbors to drink cider. In



Basque Sagardotegi Dinner

Basque Cider, dancing and dining at the Basque Center

By Kelsey Hawes

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this case, no one needed to be summoned. Thirsty cider lovers were already gathered around the spigots: clinking their tumblers, draining their glasses and heading back for another splash.

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A culín of cider isn't bad, but a glas of Chacolí (txakoli), would be much better

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Tara and Kelsey, thank you for the write-up!

--Lael Uberuaga, Oinkari Basque Dancers

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