



Sidrerías

LA TENTACIÓN DEL INVIERNO TAMBIÉN VIENE DE LA MANZANA

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La temporada de la sidra artesanal arranca en Bizkaia a mediados de enero con la tradicional ceremonia del "Txotx" o apertura de las cubas y se prolonga hasta bien avanzada la primavera.

La relación de las casas de labranza del País vasco con los manzanos ha sido históricamente tan intensa como con la vid. Tanto la uva como la manzana facilitan la conservación de energía para el invierno con procesos relativamente sencillos. La uva produce vino o txakoli. La manzana, en algunas variedades se mantiene con pocas alteraciones si es bien tratada y

almacenada en lugares secos y areados, también puede convertirse en mermelada o en sidra.

Para la elaboración de sidra, la fruta se recoge entre septiembre y noviembre. Después se selecciona, limpia, tritura y prensa hasta que produce un mosto que se decanta y deja fermentar. A mediados de enero, la nueva sidra ya tiene sus características organolépticas y un grado alcohólico ligeramente superior al 5%. Es el momento del "Txotx" o apertura de cubas.

Mucha de la sidra es envasada por los productores en unas botellas muy reco-

nocibles. Pero lo tradicional es consumirla desde la misma cuba, abriendo la espita y capturando el energético chorro en un vaso ancho y profundo de cristal fino que se coloca en la trayectoria del líquido. Las propias sidrerías disponen de mesas de madera con largos bancos corridos en los que sirven platos sencillos pero de extraordinaria materia prima: carnes o bacalao a la brasa, la exquisita tortilla de bacalao, pimientos rojos asados, queso, membrillo, nueces. Todos meriendan a la perfección con la acidez y la frescura características de la sidra. Conviene llenar poco el vaso y beber su contenido de un trago cada vez para poder captar todas

Cider houses

CIDER, ONE OF WINTER'S TREATS



ready for consumption. It is time for the "Txotx," and the season to begin.

While much of the cider is bottled in traditional bottles, it is also customary to drink it straight from the barrel. Diners line up, with thin-walled, wide-mouthed glass tumblers in their hands, ready to catch the spurt of cider which shoots out when the stopper is released from the barrel. The cider houses traditionally have long trestle tables and benches where diners sit down to a simple meal of excellent produce which pairs beautifully with the fresh, slightly acidic cider: grilled cod and steak, delicious salt cod omelette, roasted red peppers, cheese, quince jelly and walnuts. To enjoy the cider at its best, only a small amount of cider is served at any one time and is drunk in one go. You can return to the barrel for a refill as often as you want. The price of the menu is set, including the cider.

Basque makers of craft cider use up to 115 different native varieties of apple (Errezil, Gezamina, Urtebete, Txalaka, etc.), which they combine in varying proportions to produce the perfect balance of acidity, sweetness and bitterness. As they are keen to preserve the local varieties, they never use imported apples or add gas. Any effervescence is naturally occurring and caused by the transformation of sugar into alcohol.

The cider is best served cool, not cold, at around 12° centigrade. When consumed from a bottle, it should be shaken before the cork is removed, and poured from a height of about half a metre from the glass to aerate it and release its full

In Bizkaia, the craft cider season starts around the middle of January, with the traditional "Txotx" ceremony, when the barrels of the new season's cider are officially uncorked. The season continues into late spring.

Apple trees have long been associated with Basque farmhouses, as long, in fact, as vines and grapes. The energy of the grape and the apple can be preserved to last the winter through relatively simple processes. While grapes are used to

produce wine or Txakoli, some varieties of apple are carefully stored in a dry place to last the winter but can also be used for jam or cider.

To make cider, the apples are collected between September and November and are carefully sorted, washed, mashed and pressed to produce must, which is siphoned off and left to ferment. By mid-January, the new cider, with an alcohol content of just over 5%, and fully-developed, characteristic flavour and aroma, is





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Bacalao, merluza, txakolones, pisto, solomillo...

Lo mejor de la cocina tradicional en pleno centro de Bilbao.