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# Cider house rules in Basque Country: Where to master the art of filling a glass

by **Jason Wilson**

No one really tells you what to do when you first arrive at a "sagardotegi", or traditional Basque cider house, especially if you don't speak Basque. You're simply given a glass, led to one of the long wooden tables in a vast room and immediately served a plate of chorizo, followed by a cod omelet. It's left up to you to figure out how to get a drink.

My brother, Tyler, and I learned this on our first night in [Astigarraga](#), 15 minutes south-east of San Sebastián, which happens to be the cider capital of Spanish Basque Country. In this town of just under 6000 people, there are an astonishing 19 cider houses.

We were spending several days here during the traditional cider season that runs through to April. With Spanish-style ciders becoming more popular among American and other [cider makers](#) and enthusiasts, I wanted to see what they tasted like at the source.

At Garziategi, a sagardotegi in a big stone barn on the outskirts of town, we learned that when a guy with a bucket yells "txotx!" (pronounced "choach"), he's about to open the tap on one of dozens of huge 13,000-litre barrels, shooting out a thin stream of cider. You're supposed to stand up from your meal, get in line and hold your glass at just the right angle to catch a few fingers of cider from that hissing stream. You drink the small amount in your glass and then follow the cider maker to the next barrel.

Thinking it was a free-for-all, my first faux pas was coming at the stream from the wrong side and essentially butting in line. Then, I couldn't quite figure out how to hold my glass so that the cider hit at the right angle, to "break" the liquid and create foam. Thankfully, the crowd at the Basque cider house was very forgiving. A kind white-haired man in a sweater, whose group was eating next to us, waved me along with him at the next shout of "txotx!"

We eventually learned on our cider house tour that advice was forthcoming if you sought it out. "Take it here, at an angle," said Igór, our tour guide at Petritegi, another sagardotegi just down the road from Garziategi (the suffix "tegi" means "place of").

## Easier said than done













