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## Inquirer Lifestyle

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### KITCHEN RESCUE

## Tasting notes from Spain

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Inquirer

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#### OLIVE OIL TASTING IS AN ART.

Among the many activities at Madrid Fusion were olive oil- and wine-tasting sessions. As different as wine and olive oil are, they also share many similarities. And if there are wine connoisseurs, there are also olive connoisseurs.

But why must one taste olive oil when it is mainly used as an ingredient and hardly ever consumed on its own? Because, like wine vintages, vast differences and many factors determine and dictate one finished product from the other.

The type and blend of olives, growing techniques, fruit maturity and harvest, soil type, climate, geographic latitude, production, pressing, storage—all of these play vital roles in the production of high-quality olive oil.

Sometime in September, I did a primer on the subject discussing the basics in detail. This is more about the art of tasting it. It's a great way to learn and to hone your senses. Over time and with much practice, you can become more adept.

Without being technical, olive oil is classified into:

**Extra virgin**—most flavorful and costliest of all, cold-pressed, unrefined (refining takes away all character of the oil) product of the first extraction/pressing of the olives

**Virgin**—first-press oil, unrefined

**Refined**—oil goes through refining/filtration, sometimes labeled as pure or light

**Fino**—blend of extra-virgin and virgin oils

**Olive oil**—a combination of refined olive oil and virgin or extra-virgin oil.

The basics were pointed out to me by Fadrique Álvarez de Toledo y Argüelles and John Cancilla of Marqués de Valdecaza. Their oil was rated by the International Olive Oil Council (IOOC) as one of the world's highest in quality, obtained directly from estate-grown olives by most careful cold extraction, a family tradition for 500 years.

It got 8.5 in a 9-point scale. No oil was ever granted a perfect score.

The oil is a blend of four different olive varieties. Needless to say, it is delicious, perfectly well rounded, balanced and sound. Its attributes are fruity green olives, undertones of fresh cut grass, green almond, dried tomatoes, a touch of ripe bananas and a slight peppery finish... A splash of it on a dish is decadence.

Oils of such quality are used mainly for finishing. Drizzle onto your salads or to a dish just before serving. Different olive oils, due to their character makeup, react differently even to the same ingredients.

Pretty much like wine, the right oil must be paired with the right component or the right dish to make a perfect pairing.

The oil is available in Manila at Spices (tel. 8310448, 7582159) at P1,800 for 500 ml.

#### Tasting pointers

Wok only with extra-virgin olive oils.

Limit oil varieties to four per tasting to avoid palate fatigue. For blind tasting, remove labels.

Pour a tablespoon of each into separate mini tasting glasses. Use tinted glasses so oil color does not influence judgment. Oil hue is not reflective of quality.

Swirl the glass to wet the sides. Warm the glass with your palms, heat releases aroma.

Tip the glass and bring the oil as close to your nose as possible.

Slowly inhale. Repeat the process. Note the sensations, write down your findings. Pause awhile before inhaling again.

Start tasting the oil with the mildest aroma first.

Take a light sip (or dip plain white bread). Make sure that the oil coats the entire mouth.

Let the oil stay in your mouth and inhale three times. Remember the flavors then spit out. Write down findings.

Apples may be taken in between tastings.

"Good fresh oil should exhibit a definite olive-fruity note, followed by pungent, green and bitter plus other desirable notes, normally in decreasing strength. No negative attributes or defects should be present."—IOOC

#### Tasting terms

Olive oil is graded by acidity and by flavor. The Olive Oil Source points out the desirable traits: apple; almond—nutty; artichoke; astringent—puckering sensation created by tannins; banana; bitter—a preferred characteristic of olive oils from green olives or olives changing color; buttery; fresh—good aroma; fruity—flavor and aroma are similar to a mature olive; grass—taste of grass; green—young, fresh, fruity, often mixed with bitter; green leaf—when in the press a small quantity of fresh olive leaves are added, at times done to approximate the genuine green taste of green olives; harmonious—qualities of the oil blend and work well; hay-dried grass flavor; melon—perfume-y; musky, nutty, woody—when not overpowering; peppery; pungent—rough, burning or biting sensation in the throat; soapy—characteristics of mature olives; round—a peasy body that fills and satisfies without the aromatic character from mature olives; sweet—opposite of bitter, astringent, pungent.

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