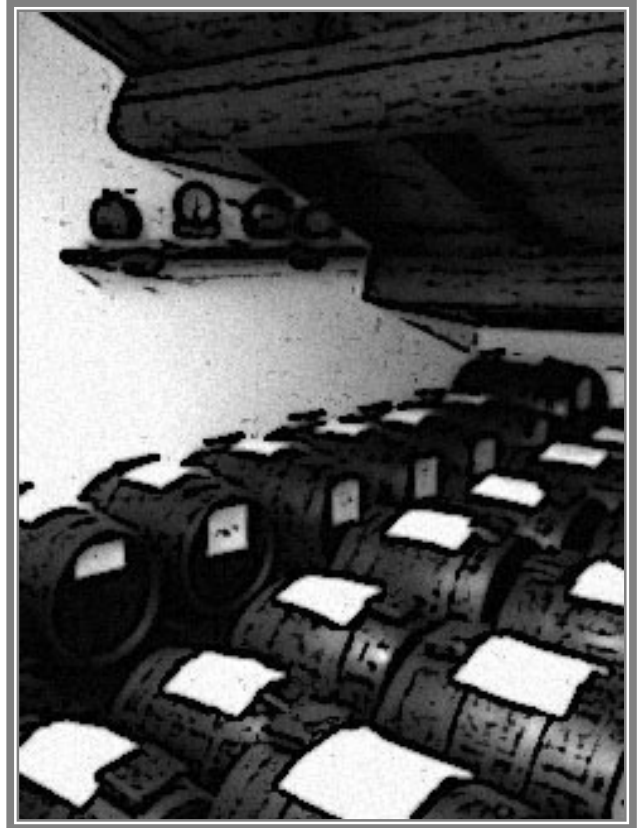


# Talsamic Vinegar

## Introduction

The village of Zodena lies inland from Zadian in the heart of the Zandiran wine country. It is here that a handful of vintners produce the gastronomic elixir known as Zodenic vinegar. The traditional recipe produces a liquid that is darker than Zar in the night sky, luxurious as the Sultan's chambers, and complex as a Nadir Absolute's winning stratagem.

Unlike most vinegar, the Zodenic is not made from wine, but rather the freshly crushed white Sultana grapes. These are cooked down to a small portion of their original volume then transferred to wooden barrels for aging. Just short of a ton of grapes is needed to produce a single gallon of the 14 year old Zodenic (the minimum aging allowed is set by decree of the Sultan). The vinegar is available commercially in three grades: an un-judged septennial version that is sold as Zadian vinegar, the bisepennial traditional Zodenic, and the septiseptennial Sultanic Majesty's Special Request.



Zodenic is aged in wooden barrels of various types. Exposure to air is critical for development of flavor and texture - it provides ready access for aerial sub-elementals to commune with those in the wood and juice. Therefore the barrels are only filled 3/4 full. After a period of time, the vinegar has evaporated somewhat and is transferred to a smaller barrel, usually made of a different type of wood. This process is repeated until the aging is complete (7, 14, or 49 years). Classic Zodenic requires a minimum of five woods be used: Span Oak, Viridian, Spice Tree, Whitewood, and Barb-berry. Some vintners also make use of Silver Deodad. The Sultanic Majesty's Special Request is always aged in a cask made from a Prophet Tree as the final step of aging.

Adding a little of the previous batch of vinegar into the barrel is a vital step that ensures the blessing and approval of the spirits and elementals whose presence is responsible for this remarkable transformation. The barrels themselves are cherished treasures and are used again and again. When a barrel becomes leaky, a new one is built around it that the old wood elementals residing in its staves can continue to work their magic.

## Zadian

The Zadian grade is commonly served in lower and middle class homes and restaurants. Zash stands always have a bottle and shallow dishes handy for customers to dip slices of hot provender bread into the vinegar. Foreign imitations are often sold as Septennial vinegar and are seldom as complex or worthy. Zadian and its imitators are produced in bulk. Aging is done in large, open vats rather than barrels. An 8 oz. bottle can retail for as little as five silver lumens.

## Zodenic

Zodenic vinegar is strictly controlled at the source. When a barrel is ready for bottling, it is sent to the Zodenic Council in Zadian where it is tasted and judged. If worthy, the vinegar is immediately bottled, marked and sealed. If not, it is sent back for more aging. About half of the product sent for judging is returned. Zodenic vinegar is a minor luxury and is priced accordingly, ranging from 2 to 5 gold lumens for an 8 oz bottle. Outside of Zandir, prices are much higher. For example, expect to pay two to five times this in the Seven Kingdoms. Prices vary with the specific product as well. Some are aged longer than the fourteen years required (21 and 28 years are popular versions).

## SMSR

A little less than fifty gallons of Sultanic Majesty's Special Request is produced each year, much of it for the export market. As with the Zodenic, the SMSR must meet the approval of the Zodenic Council. Mild and pleasant visions brought on by the Prophet Tree wood must be present. A single drop of the SMSR is used by Zandir's finest chefs to transform wonderful dishes into something extraordinary. Lightly drizzled over slow-cooked quuk livers, it is ambrosial. A standard SMSR retails for 20 to 100 gold lumens. With increases in production over the last two centuries, the Sultan and his court have created demand for ever rarer, subtler, or extreme versions of SMSR. Three hundred and forty-three year old versions are occasionally released as are versions with much stronger influences of Prophet Tree. These special versions command truly majestic prices.

Rumors of assassins mixing in deadwood influenced vinegars are specious and scandalous. The Zodenic council assures you all such charges are false and reminds the gentle reader that surely their own nose would detect such an outrageous substitution before even a drop passed their lips.

## Appendix: Modena woods vs. Zodena woods

Modena	Zodena
Oak	Span Oak
Chestnut	Viridian
Cherry	Spice Tree
Ash	Whitewood
Mulberry	Barb-berry
Juniper	Silver Deodad
Acacia (Black Locust)	Prophet Tree