

What to Drink with Dessert

Lecture 9

Noble rot is a way to add complexity, which is one of the parameters of quality. ... It also adds weight and richness by forming more glycerol, which creates a silky mouthfeel. Plus it creates yeast-inhibiting glycol proteins that can stop the fermentation process before it is complete.

WINES FOR THIS LECTURE:

- A Sauternes
- A Tokaji (any *puttonyos* will do)
- A German Eiswein or Canadian Icewine
- A Vin Santo or Vino Passito



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Fortification and dosage are not the only ways to create a sweet wine. In Rheingau, Germany, in the early 1700s, an accidental late harvest revealed a third method: Using the natural processes of decay to concentrate the sugars inside the grape.

Spätlese is the name of this original late-harvest wine, made in Germany and Austria from Riesling grapes. (In the neighboring French-speaking region of Alsace, these are called *vendanges tardives*.) The grapes are allowed to dry on the vine and are carefully hand-selected, sometimes berry by berry. They are sweet and taste of peach, citrus, honey, and of course raisins. In the more refined forms, Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese, the grapes may also be infected with noble rot.

Botrytis cinerea, or **noble rot**, is a fungus that infects fruit under very specific climate conditions—namely, a string of cool, damp mornings and warm, dry afternoons. It is also more likely to affect white grapes than red, especially tightly-clustered ones. When botrytis attacks the grapes' skins, the pulp becomes dehydrated, and the berries resemble brown raisins. Like

many natural processes, it is hard to control botrytis infection; thus making **botrytized** wines is an unpredictable process.

Botrytization adds stone fruit notes to the wine (and thus complexity). It also creates silky mouthfeel through the addition of glycerol. Finally, it not only increases the sugar-to-acid ratio of the berries, but it can slow or stop the fermentation process—combined, these are the source of the wines' sweetness.

The French region of Sauternes, in Bordeaux, is completely committed to the production of sweet wine. These wines are approximately 80 percent botrytized Sémillon, with touches of Sauvignon Blanc and Muscadelle. The grapes are harvested and pressed by hand, then fermented in stainless steel or French oak. This produces a moderately aromatically intense wine, with aromas of honey, vanilla, and stone fruit in its youth and toast and nut aromas with age. They are full-bodied and sweet, with a lingering finish. They are long-lasting wines; the best recent vintages include 2007, 2005, 2001, 1999, 1997, 1996, and 1995.

Tokaji (pronounced *toe-kai*) is a botrytized wine from the region of Tokaj in northeastern Hungary. First made in the 16th century, they were the favorite wines of kings, enjoyed by Louis XIV of France and the Austrian Habsburgs. The primary grapes in Tokaji are Furmint, Hárslevelű, and Yellow Muscat. Like Sauternes, the wine is processed by hand and includes a combination of botrytized berries, called *aszú* berries, and fresh berries. The sweetness level is measured as the ratio of *aszú* to fresh in units called *puttonyos*.

Tokaji typically has a beautiful, topaz hue, with strong aromas of fresh and dried apricots, plus cinnamon and honey. Younger Tokaji has a floral character, while older wines develop nutty and caramel aromas. Despite its sweetness, Tokaji finishes clean because of its extremely high acidity, which sometimes includes volatile acids. The balance of sugar and acid makes it one of the longest-lasting wines in the world. For the sweet wine lover, it is the ultimate expression of the type.

Eiswein, or ice wine, is a German wine made (as the name implies) from Riesling grapes that have been allowed to freeze on the vine. In recent years,

production of Canadian Icewine (as it is spelled there) has surpassed that of German Eiswein. In Canada, the primary grape is Vidal. Traditionally, but not always, these grapes are clean of noble rot.

The grapes are picked when the nighttime temperature drops below 21°F (or -6°C); a temperature around 18°F (or -8°C) is said to be optimal. They are pressed immediately, while still frozen. The greatest danger to an Eiswein harvest is hungry birds and animals raiding the fields for these intensely sweet berries.

Eisweins and Icewines usually show the pale colors and strong aromatics of Riesling and Vidal grapes, especially when young. Aromas include lemon, honey, passion fruit, and baked apples. Some say it has an aroma reminiscent of fresh snow. Like the Tokaji, there is enough acidity to balance the sugar and leave the palate clean, and its light body adds finesse. They rarely see oak.

The discovery of late-harvest wines in Germany was actually a sort of rediscovery. Records from the 8th century B.C. tell us that the ancient Greeks made wines from dried, or raisinated, grapes. This practice was transmitted to the Romans and survives today in Italy in the manufacture of **Passito** wines: Among the most popular of the sweet dried grape wines is Vin Santo from Tuscany.

Vin Santo, or "holy wine," is made from two white grapes, Trebbiano and Malvasia. The grapes are dried on straw mats and crushed between November and March—the longer the drying period, the sweeter the wine. The must is

Extreme Hand-Picking

Beerenauslese and Trockenbeere-nauslese are among the most expensive and most labor-intensive wines in modern production. The pickers must go through the vineyards seeking out perfectly dried grapes, berry by berry. For a typical dry wine, a hand harvester can pick approximately 750 bottles worth of grapes per day. For Beerenauslese, a harvester can pick only one bottle's worth per day, and for Trockenbeereauslese, only half a bottle's worth.

fermented in old oak, which allows the wine to oxidize for the three years it must legally age in barrels. (Some winemakers allow five years of aging.) This oxidation lends an amber color to the wine, as well as nutty, toffee, and coffee aromas. On the palate, it is full-bodied. It can be nearly dry or very sweet and has very strong, sometimes volatile, acidity. They are lovely accompaniments to less-sweet, delicate pastry Italian desserts.

Whichever sweet wines you choose, serve them well chilled, but not refrigerator cold—about 45°F, or 7°C. ■

Important Terms

botrytized: A wine made with botrytis-infected grapes, usually showing honey notes.

noble rot: Infection with *Botrytis cinerea*, a fungus that dehydrates grapes, concentrating their sugars.

Passito: The Italian term for dried grape wine.

puttonyos: The unit of measure of sweetness in Tokaji, based on the ratio of dried to fresh grapes.

Tasting Notes

When tasting these dessert wines, among all the other characteristics, take particular notice of how each wine finishes. Is it cloying on your palate, or does it leave it clean? A clean sensation is an indicator of high acid, which contributes to a wine's overall balance—and thereby quality.

	Sauternes	Eiswein/Icewine
Grape	Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Muscadelle	Riesling or Vidal
Region	Sauternes, Bordeaux Bordeaux, France	Germany or Canada
Method	Botrytized	Frozen
Color		
Aromas		
Acid/Sweetness		
Body		
Finish/Length		

	Tokaji	Vin Santo
Grape	Furmint, Hárslevelű, Yellow Muscat	Trebbiano, Malvasia
Region	Tokaj, Hungary	Tuscany, Italy
Method	Botrytized	Dried
Color		
Aromas		
Acid/Sweetness		
Body		
Finish/Length		

Chateau Megyer Tokaji Aszu 5 Puttonyos 1993

\$44.99

500ml



Review

Tokaji, Hungary- Modern Tokaji, with honeyed citrus flavors of pineapple and orange with notes of apricot. Pack with sweet fruit yet superbly balanced, this is sweet but not at all cloying. 14.5% residual sugar.

Taste Profile

Sweet, Honey, Citrus, Medium-bodied

Vintage	NI (5 pts.)	FI (25 pts.)	FC (10 pts.)	B (5 pts.)	L (5 pts.)	Sum	+ 50	Final

Dessert, Port, Sherry Sweetness Level: Dry, Off-dry, Semi-sweet, Sweet

Flavors: Caramel, Nuts, Honey, Dark Fruit, Red Fruit, White Fruit, Other: _____

Acidity: High, Medium, Low

Body: Light, Medium, Full

Nose Intensity(NI)	Fruit Intensity(FI)	Flavor Characteristics(FC)	Balance(B)	Length(L)
1- Light	1-10 None	1-2 Undrinkable	1- Off	1- None
2- Average	11-15 Soft	3-4 Ordinary	2- Slightly Off	2- Fades Quickly
3- Pleasant	16-18 Ample	5-6 Good	3- Proportional	3- Lingering (30 secs)
4- Inviting	19-20 Abundant	7-8 Very Good	4- Harmonious	4- Lengthy (up to 1 minute)
5- Highly Aromatic	21-23 Bountiful	9-10 Outstanding	5- Perfect	5- Everlasting (> 1 minute)
24-25 Powerful				

95-100 Classic	90-94 Outstanding	85-89 Very Good	80-84 Good	76-79 Average	71-75 Below Average	66-70 Poor
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Date Tasted: _____

Notes:

Total Wine
& MORE

Bellini Vin Santo

\$29.99

500ml



Review

Italy- A most appealing example of Italy's most famous dessert wine, displaying molasses and toffee aromas, honey and earthy flavors and a not too sweet, nutty finish. The complex flavors are a real winner for that after dinner touch or to accompany dessert.

Taste Profile

Off-dry, Toffee, Honey, Nut, Medium-bodied

Vintage	NI (5 pts.)	FI (25 pts.)	FC (10 pts.)	B (5 pts.)	L (5 pts.)	Sum	+ 50	Final

Dessert, Port, Sherry Sweetness Level: Dry, Off-dry, Semi-sweet, Sweet

Flavors: Caramel, Nuts, Honey, Dark Fruit, Red Fruit, White Fruit, Other: _____

Acidity: High, Medium, Low

Body: Light, Medium, Full

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95-100 Classic	90-94 Outstanding	85-89 Very Good	80-84 Good	76-79 Average	71-75 Below Average	65-70 Poor

Date Tasted: _____

Notes:

Total Wine
& MORE

Dr Heidemanns Riesling Eiswein 2007

\$69.99

375ml



Review

Bernkastel, Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, Germany- A lovely expression of sweet Riesling. Lithe and filigreed, displaying dried citrus, pineapple, and apricot as vibrant acidity takes over. Great expression and harmony with a lip smacking finish.

Taste Profile

Very Sweet, Citrus, Tropical, Medium-bodied

Vintage	NI (5 pts.)	FI (25 pts.)	FC (10 pts.)	B (5 pts.)	L (5 pts.)	Sum	+ 50	Final

Dessert, Port, Sherry Sweetness Level: Dry, Off-dry, Semi-sweet, Sweet

Flavors: Caramel, Nuts, Honey, Dark Fruit, Red Fruit, White Fruit, Other: _____

Acidity: High, Medium, Low

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95-100 Classic	90-94 Outstanding	85-89 Very Good	80-84 Good	76-79 Average	71-75 Below Average	65-70 Poor

Date Tasted: _____

Notes:

Total Wine
& MORE

Chateau Suduiraut Sauternes 2003D

\$39.99

375ml



Rating

Wine Spectator - 93

Review

1er Cru, Sauternes, Bordeaux, France- "Intense aromas of pecan pie, dried apricot, apples and syrup...Medium-sweet, with a dense mouthfeel of very ripe fruit and a long, powerful and spicy aftertaste. Very, very impressive." Adjacent to Yquem, and one of the great wines of Sauternes.

Taste Profile

Sweet, Apricot, Honey, Full-bodied

Vintage	NI (5 pts.)	FI (25 pts.)	FC (10 pts.)	B (5 pts.)	L (5 pts.)	Sum	+ 50	Final

Dessert, Port, Sherry Sweetness Level: Dry, Off-dry, Semi-sweet, Sweet

Flavors: Caramel, Nuts, Honey, Dark Fruit, Red Fruit, White Fruit, Other: _____

Acidity: High, Medium, Low

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Date Tasted: _____

Notes:

Total Wine
& MORE