

# BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

2002

## CLASS F – DESSERT WINES

Presented by an Unknown Member of BC Guild of Wine Judges

Dessert Wines are those to be drunk with the dessert course of a meal. This Class F **does** include Late Harvest, Botrytis Affected and Ice-wines, but **does not** include Sweet Sherries, Ports or Madeiras; nor any wines that have been fortified, baked etc. The BCAWA Class description appears below:

### Class F Dessert:

Wines to be drunk with the dessert course of the meal. Should be sweet and luscious, but with sufficient acid to prevent them from being cloying. Alcohol must have been developed by fermentation of the wine. These are NOT fortified wines.

Wines such as ports, sweet Sherries, Madeira types, and other wines that are fortified, baked or otherwise made using port, sherry, Madeira etc. processes do NOT belong in this class.

The Dessert Class has three style sub-categories:

- Botrytis Affected;
- Ice wine Style; and
- Other Dessert Styles (such as Late Harvest, etc.).

The style of the wine should be indicated on the Registration Form and/or bottle tag.

### Technical Characteristics:

	Botrytis affected	Ice wine style	Other
Ingredients	No restrictions		
Alcohol	12% - 14%	8.5% - 13.5%	8.5% - 14%
Colour	No restrictions		
Sugar	7.5% - 10%	Min. 8.5%	5.5% - 8.5%
Specific Gravity	1.024 – 1.034	1.028 – 1.048	1.028 – 1.048
Acid	Min. 8 g/l	9 g/l – 14 g/l	Min. 8 g/l
pH	3.1 – 3.9	3.1 – 3.9	3.1 – 3.9

All entries in this class will be considered for the AWC National Competition as AWC Class F, Dessert.

Typical commercial wines would include Barsac, Sauternes, BA Riesling, Auslese, Banyuls, Beerenauslese, Bonnezeaux, Cadillac, Cerons, Clairette de Die, Layton, Eiswein, Jurancon, Loupiac, Maury, Moelleux, Monbazillac, Montlouis, Trockenbeerenauslese, Vouvray, Vin de Paille, Vin Santo, Vindange Tardive, Moscato, Muscat, Picolit, Loupiac, Rasteau, Recioto, Rivesaltes, and even Vins de Liqueur and Vins Doux Naturels.

These wines are usually teamed up with complementary desserts to heighten the enjoyment of both the food and the wine.

According to Jancis Robinson, wines taste sweet mainly because of the amount of residual sugar or RS.

The impact on the palate is due to several factors that include the levels of acidity, tannins, and carbon dioxide and include the serving temperature. Other factors include ethanol, alcohol, glycols, pectins, aldehydes and esters. A dry Chardonnay with less than 2 g/l RS that is high in alcohol can taste quite sweet, while a sweet Vouvray from a cool region made from a naturally acidic Chenin Blanc may contain over 30 g/l RS can taste very dry while it is still very young.

According to Jancis, “a sweet Champagne may be a nice dessert wine”, but BCAWA would have it judged in the “Sparkling” class. Personally, I wouldn’t consider a Vouvray Moussant out of class in either category.

Because sweet wines have usually been traditionally a bit easier on the palate, many consider slightly sweet wines to be associated with a lack of sophistication. This is a mistake, often made by the poorly educated.

A Trockenbeerenauslese or very sophisticated Sauternes often are “acquired tastes”. You must learn to discern a difference between a “Country” wine and a “Dessert” wine, i.e. the structure due to the acids. Typically, a Country wine would have lower acid and lower astringency.

With the correct balance of Sugar/Acid a well-made Dessert Wine has no cloying sweetness. A very young sweet wine would in fact be more likely to leave the mouth with a feeling of excess acidity.

### HOW MUCH SUGAR IN DESSERT?

BCAWA has set parameters for the various styles of dessert wines, however it is best if the winemaker actually labels the style s/he intended to make.

The three sub-categories for dessert wines are **Botrytis Affected**, **Ice-wine**, and **Other** dessert (i.e. Late-Harvest) wines.

When Judges do not have this information made available to them, the less-experienced Judge will guess, and the more-experienced Judge could misjudge the style and mark a well-made Sauternes as a light bodied ice-wine.

### COMMENTS FOR WINE JUDGES

Judges of amateur wines do depend on as much information as possible, and the wise competitor will supply as much as the label will permit. This is especially valid in classes with no restrictions on the ingredients.

While our Judges are often very good and very experienced, mistakes in classes this broad are prevalent. Judges should err on the side of caution and be kind when deciding a wine is out of class. Be very sure you know it is out of class and determine which class the wine should enter, before possibly embarrassing yourself. The best question to ask yourself is “*In which class does this wine belong?*” If the answer is “*I am not sure*”, then it should stay where the winemaker entered it and you note the confusion on the marking sheet.

If possible, tell the winemaker how you marked the wine... i.e. as a Sauternes that lacked structure due to low acid, or as an Eiswein that lacked body due to low concentration of fruit.

If you cannot be confident in your decisions, you need more experience in that class. Arrange to get more contact with wines in that class by adding dessert wines to your own personal entertainment menus. Play a bit by pairing dessert wines with complimentary foods.

The range of technical characteristics is huge, with pH levels between 3.1-3.9, and acid ranges from 8 to 14 grams per litre.

## SAUTERNES

A distinct region within the Graves District of Bordeaux, where 5 communes make unfortified sweet white wines from 3 varieties. The region is called a mesoclimate, with several microclimates within it that affect each growth.

Semillon accounts for about 80% of the growth, and Sauvignon Blanc and Muscadelle share the balance. ***The use of the title Sauterne is allowed but refers to a generic sweet wine...a true Sauternes always ends with an "s"***. The Sauvignon attracts Botrytis earliest and gives the wines a solid structure with its high acids. Muscadelle contributes to the big fragrant nose, but it is a problem crop due to its frailty. Sales of Sauternes are recorded as far back as 1660. American President Thomas Jefferson was known to purchase wines from Sauternes most famous Chateau D'yquem in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

D'yquem is a classified first growth known for power, elegance and voluptuousness, and the fact that it continues to evolve and improve for more than 50 years after bottling. Sauternes will have a minimum of 13% alcohol. Unclassified growths such as Chateau de Fargues (owned by D'yquem), Gillette and Raymond-Lafon are often of first growth quality and price.

Sauternes produced between 1960 and 1983 were of questionable quality, due to economic factors, except for those traditional first growths from wealthy estates. 1983 was the return of the vintage quality for which Sauternes was famous. In 1985 Cryoextraction was introduced and created a real controversy. While it was a way to save that part of a crop that would normally not have been salvageable, it couldn't contribute to the complexity of the sweet nectars. Chaptalization was also not popular but allowed for lesser vintages, the sugar level is raised but the complexity of the wine is not enhanced. Years when the "noble rot" doesn't have ideal conditions for formation these alterations are deemed allowable to save a poor vintage.

## BARSAC

It is said that all the wines within the Barsac appellation of Bordeaux are entitled to use the appellation Sauternes, but the reverse is not true. Soil conditions combined with a microclimate peculiar to this part of Bordeaux help create a lighter, more elegant wine displaying the dried fruit flavours of peach, apricot and even apple and raisin.

## BOTRYTIS AFFECTED

Botrytis Cinerea is a fungus that attacks the grapes and reduces the moisture in the grapes and causes them to shrivel and rot. This natural process causes tartaric acids and sugars to concentrate and stimulates the production of glycerol that gives the wine its viscosity. The perfect vintage creates fruit with enough sugar to allow the fermentation to finish with 14% alcohol and a residual sugar level that is the equivalent of another 4-7 % alcohol. If the ferment doesn't finish on its own accord, it must be stopped with sulphur dioxide.

## CADILLAC

Another producer of sweet white wines, this appellation is just north of Loupiac in the Bordeaux. The chalky, gravel soil makes this area distinct. The wines deservedly have a separate appellation, but due to low prices the production of Sauternes and BA wines aren't justified although a few are made.

## CERONS

Located just north of Sauternes and Barsac, this appellation is a buffer zone between Barsac and Graves and produces both sweet and dry white wines. The dry wines are considered Graves and the sweet are the least important of the Bordeaux region. Soil content is high in clay content and the land is relatively flat, so the chance of Botrytis affecting the grapes is minimal. At best Chateau de Cerons can boast wine with vivacity.

## LOUPIAC

Located between Cadillac and St. Croix du Mont. Suitable soil conditions for the Sauternes appellation, but since the wines just do not get the higher prices there has been no investment in the meticulous winemaking practices of the wealthy first growth properties. Typically, a Loupiac has a deeper colour and is noticeably more full-bodied. Clay-limestone slopes leading down to the Garonne River have a perfect environment for Botrytis. Look for typical wines from the Domaine du Noble and Chateau Loupiac-Gaudiet.

## STE CROIX DU MONT

Most important of the sweet wine appellations are on the right bank of the Garonne, where at their best the wines resemble the Sauternes across the river. Topography and soil conditions are better here than for either Cadillac or Loupiac and the good economic conditions have prestige cuvees investing in new barrels and better cropping. Look for Chateau Loubens, Chateau la Rame and of course Chateau du Mont.

## VOUVRAY

The Touraine district of the Loire where the Chenin Blanc grape is treated to three styles totally dependent on the quality of the vintage. In a perfect year when conditions allow for Botrytis, a clean fruity, highly acid sweet wine is produced in steel tanks or in old barrels with no malolactic fermentation. These wines are expected to age slowly in bottles, with the best from Huet, Poniatowski, Champalou and Marc Bredif. Good vintages allow for a rich, sweet, golden nectar that is high in acidity and almost unpleasant to drink in their early years. Poor vintages are made into dry white wines and even sparkling wines. Vouvray Mousseux and commercial dry Vouvray wines are dry and high in acid.

## MONTLOUIS

Poor cousin across the river from Vouvray, soils are lighter and sandier, and the wines are lighter, less sharply defined and mature much earlier. Here the Chenin Blanc is also made in all three styles, and the Montlouis Mousseux is described as sturdy and full of character.

## **VIN DE PAILLE**

Also called Straw Wine, not to be confused with Vin Du Pays (country wines), these wines are made from grapes that are set out to dry on straw mats. This method makes a fungus-free concentrated juice and is not restricted to any particular grape.

The raisin wines are fermented to 14-18 % alcohol, this varies with the grapes used and Chardonnay typically produces an 18% alcohol in Jura, or a 14% in Alsace. There is a renewed interest in Vin du Paille from those who are looking for a different wine with no BA flavour. This style could be made by amateur winemakers for the dessert class.

## **TOKAY/ TOKAJI**

Fitting into this class perfectly is this nectar of Hungary, not to be confused with the fortified Tokay from Australia. This fragrant wine has been made since 1650, and fits into the BA section of Dessert Wines. While not affected by Botrytis every year, Hungarians have a rating system and are not beyond blending vintages to upgrade the Aszu (BA) to a price category closer to Essencia. The lowest category for the juice of the Furmint grape is Tokay ordinairium and contains no Aszu, then the blending of the (Hungarian equivalent of Muscadelle and Sauvignon Blanc) Harslevelu and Muskatalyos starts to elevate the classification of the resultant wines. Tokaji 3,4,5 or 6 Puttonyos (a special Hod that carries 45-55 lbs of Aszu Paste) reflects the sweetness levels of the Aszu paste that is added to the juice.

The highest price and rating are for Tokaji Essencia. It does not have paste added to the juice but is the free-run juice from the best of the Aszu grapes. Essencia is sweeter than 6 Puttonyos and requires a particularly strong yeast to ferment it, after which it must be aged in barrels for a minimum of 10 years. Topping up is discouraged as the Racodium Cellare fungus that lines the cave walls would have a distinct impact on the casked wines, thus there are evident Aldehydes and Esters that some might find and mis-identify as a fault.

There are distinct flavour differences and quality levels from one vineyard to the next.

## **AUSBRUCH (AUSTRIAN ASZU)**