

BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES
 2009
CLASS F – DESSERT WINES
 Presented by Sam Hauck (Mainland Chapter)

OBJECTIVE:

After completing this session, you should know:

- The description and technical characteristics of BCAWA Dessert Wine Class F and its three sub-categories;
- Typical varietals used to make dessert wines;
- Some wine-friendly desserts;
- Proper serving temperatures for dessert wines;
- Several ways that sweet wines are made; and
- Why you should try dessert wines more often.

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.

NOTE: "Technically, in the US a wine is classified as a dessert wine if it has an alcohol by volume (ABV) level of 14%-24%" regardless of what the BCAWA Class rules state. France, Australia and other countries also make some of these Muscat type wines in the same manner, i.e. stopping fermentation and fortifying.

Most people know very little about dessert wines. Some have had early bad experiences with sweet wines. Unfortunately, many people never give them a second chance. Keep an open mind. The truth is, some of the finest wines in the world are sweet wines (Chateau d'Yquem Sauternes, TBA, etc.) Dessert wines are a wonderful way to end a meal either with or without dessert. Remember, if you are enjoying a glass with dessert, make sure the dessert isn't too sweet. The wine should always be the sweeter of the two. Some wine-friendly desserts include:

- Fruit tart
- Crème brûlée
- Almond cookies
- Apple tarts
- Poached fruit
- Puff pastry
- Biscotti
- Pound cake
- Shortbread
- Roquefort cheese
- Walnuts, almonds, etc

One thing most people have never tried is having sweet wine with savory food. Be daring, be adventuresome; you just might be pleasantly surprised. Sauternes was the wine served with fresh oysters in the 19th century. Sweet wines also go very well with cheese, especially hard and aged cheeses such as cheddar and aged Gouda, blue cheeses such as Roquefort and Gorgonzola and some goat cheeses. Also, consider dessert wines with cheese-flavoured foods – soufflés, quiche or grilled cheese sandwiches. Fois gras is another dish that pairs well with sweet wines.

While sweet wines can be expensive, many of them are remarkably good buys. They can offer great depth and complexity for a fraction of the price of a good quality, complex dry wine, especially a Burgundy or Bordeaux, which commands a far higher price. In addition, for a variety of reasons, dessert wines are difficult to make and often have painfully low yields, so give these underappreciated wines a try.

Since dessert wines are very rich, they are usually bottled in half (375 ml) bottles. Likewise, they should be served in smaller glasses than you would usually serve wine in and never filled more than 2/3 full. A serving temperature of between 43° and 53° F (6° to 11° C) will allow you to enjoy them at their best.

Sweet wines are made everywhere wine is made and have a long history. The ancient Egyptian and Greek wines were very likely sweet wines. Sugar acts as a preservative, so sweet wines are good for storing and can last a long time. Sweet wines were popular during the 1700's. They got a back reputation shortly after the repeal of prohibition in the United States during the early 1930s. Little table wine was produced at this time. Most wines were sweet, fortified and poorly made from poor quality grapes and sported nonsensical generic names such as "Hearty Burgundy", "Mountain Chablis", "Muscatel", "Sherry," "Port", etc. The time has come to forget the torrid past and look at sweet wines, the well-made ones, in a new, appreciative light. Here is a brief list of examples of sweet wines and the countries where they are produced.

France - France makes many different styles of sweet wines from many different regions

- Sauternes
- Barsac
- Muscat Beaumes-de-Venise
- Vouvray
- Vin de Paille

Italy

- Asti Spumati
- Moscato d' Asti
- Vin Santo
- Recioto
- Vin Passito

Germany

- Auslese
- Beerenauslese
- Trockenbeerenauslese
- Eiswein

Hungary

- Tokaji (Tokay)

Canada

- Ice wine

THERE ARE SEVERAL BASIC METHODS FOR MAKING SWEET WINES:

1. Fermentation can be stopped before all the sugar is consumed by yeast. This is done with SO₂ and filtration.
2. Grapes that are very high in sugar will stop fermenting when alcohol levels reach about 14%.
3. Grapes can be left out in the sun to dry and raisin, thus concentrating sugars.
4. Grapes can be left to hang on the vine to concentrate sugar levels.
5. Wines can be affected by botrytis cinerea, which concentrates sugars.
6. . Grapes can be left on the vine until they freeze. When the grapes are crushed, the solid water crystals are removed; the remaining juice is high in sugar.

For a detailed description of the various styles of dessert style wines please read the extensive 2007 dessert wine notes on the guild web site. (Author unknown, if you know please who compiled these notes please contact me.)

POST-TASTING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which wine was the most expensive?
2. Which wine was the oldest?
3. Which wine(s) were late-harvest?