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Report # 27: Sweet Wines of the World

Introduction



For most wine lovers, sweet wines are an exciting new world offering a range and intensity of flavors not found in other wines. Some wines have the flavors of fresh fruit, while others show very ripe, even

jammy fruit. Some wines are light in alcohol and fresh tasting, while others are fortified and high in alcohol. Some taste of dried fruit, especially apricots, while others have the nutty, caramel tones of sherry. Some show the complexity and pungency that comes from botrytis, while others show the intense sweetness, viscosity and freshness that results from grapes freezing on the vine. The variety of sweet wines and styles can be intimidating to even the most seasoned expert. In this report we attempt to clarify and make sense of the world of sweet wines.

While many countries and most wine-growing regions make sweet wines, with few notable exceptions the best sweet wines come from Europe, especially Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Spain. These wines are often made in special appellations, like Beaumes de Venise, Quarts de Chaume, Recioto della Valpolicella, Montilla-Moriles, Moscatel de Setúbal, Vinsanto (Santorini), etc. each of which stipulates the rules and regulations for making the wine. Outside Europe, sweet wines tend to be given generic names—late harvest, icewine, straw wine—and one may need to read the back label (if there is one) to learn about the level of sweetness and flavors. Within the New World, Canada has established a reputation for icewines, Australia for botrytised and fortified wines, and South Africa for Chenin Blanc based sweet wines.

We identify seven categories of sweet wines from the lightly sweet and highly aromatic wines perfect as a well-chilled aperitif to the rich, fortified reds that pair with Stilton cheese, chocolate, and pecan pie. For each category of wine, we explain in detail where and how the wines are made, stylistic differences in the wines, and our recommendations for food and wine pairing. We

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also discuss some of the history of these wines, which were highly sought out through the ages by royalty, inspired artists and sung about in at least one national anthem.

While sweet wines offer a new world of pleasure, they are also challenging to taste. This report gives special attention to drinking sweet wines, especially when in the meal to drink them, how to serve in terms of temperatures and glasses, and what foods, if any, best complement the wines. Whenever possible, our tasting notes report alcohol, residual sugar, total acidity and how the wine was made to provide the consumer with as much information as possible to guide purchasing and food pairing.

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