



**A Champagne Holiday: A rare Champagne, luxury and style event**

**Place:** The WASHINGTON CLUB at the Patterson Mansion, 15 Dupont Circle, D.C.

**Date:** Nov 29, 2007 (Thu) **Cost:** \$129 per person

**Time:** 8:00 PM - 11:00 PM

**For more information** call 202-466-0808 or e-mail [dc@frenchwinesociety.org](mailto:dc@frenchwinesociety.org)

**SCOTT GREENBERG** *Vine Guy*

## The international appeal of dessert wines

Few things in the wine world deliver as much universal satisfaction as dessert wines, and with the holiday season upon us, now is a great time to think about spreading a little cheer with wines that play on

the sweeter side of the palate.

Dessert wine is really a misnomer. Given their unique and versatile properties, sweet wines can start any evening off with fanfare or end the meal with panache. They vary in style from rich and unctuous to light and seductive. Many wine-growing regions around the world have created unique methods dedicated solely to the art of producing these wines.

For example, the legendary dessert wines from the Sauternes region of Bordeaux rely on the fungus *Botrytis cinerea*, or "noble rot," to attack and dehydrate the grapes — typically Semillon — turning them into an unsightly cluster of shriveled, gray raisins. The remaining precious juice is

then vinified into an elixir of remarkable depth and balance.

Ice wines from Canada are made from grapes that literally freeze on the vines. When the frozen grapes are crushed, the watery ice is separated from the concentrated nectar, and the resulting wine is light, bright and wonderfully sweet. Grapes from warmer climates can be frozen in large commercial freezers and then processed in a similar fashion. While the latter is not considered a true "ice wine," the resulting product can offer a very good value.

The famed Tokaji (pronounced toe-ki) wines of Hungary also employ the *Botrytis* fungus — referred to as "Aszú" — to concentrate the juice. The wines are so highly cherished that they are even mentioned in the Hungarian national anthem. Tokaji employs a numbering system, using a scale of "puttonyos" to indicate the residual sugar in the wine. Three puttonyos is on the drier side, while six puttonyos rings the sweet tooth.

Of course, the fortified red port wines of Portugal are well-known throughout world for their incredible ageability — some lasting more than 100 years — and consistent house styles. Distilled grape spirits are added to the wine to interrupt fermentation before all the sugars can be converted to alcohol. The result is a hearty, sweet wine with an alcohol level hovering around 20 percent.

With so many great sweet wines to choose from, it's easy to see why it can be hard to pick a favorite. But because different wines lend themselves to distinctive pairings, you can pick and choose your selection based on the menu. Here are a few of my favorites, each representing a slightly different style — and remember, these wines are so rich that a little goes a long way, so look for half bottles to reduce your cost and the calories. Retail prices are approximate.

» **2003 Chateau Rieussec Sauternes, France (\$36/half bottle)**

Calvert Woodley in D.C.

One of my all-time favorite wines from this region, this vintage features wonderful notes of honeyed peaches, crème brûlée and candied orange rind. The abundant acidity makes this the perfect candidate for the classic pairing with foie gras — either seared or in terrine.

» **2001 Chateau Latour Blanche, Sauternes, France (\$40/half bottle)**



MacArthur Beverage in D.C.

2001 was an exceptional vintage in Sauternes, and this fine example exudes scents of brown sugar, vanilla and honeysuckle. Lush flavors of coconut, bananas foster and caramelized mango are kept in check by the bright acidity. This is the ideal accompaniment to enjoy with roasted peaches in crème caramel.

» **1999 Disz Tokaji Aszú 6 Puttonyos, Hungary (\$60/500-ml bottle)**

Chevy Chase Wine and Spirits in D.C.

This wine is beautifully smoky with flavors of candied apricot, honey-coated roasted nuts and white nectarine. The lengthy finish sits squarely on the palate for more than one minute. If you're looking for something to enjoy with Grandma's fruitcake, this is it.

» **2003 Inniskillin Oak-Aged Vidal Ice Wine, Niagara Peninsula, Canada (\$85/half bottle)**

The Wine Specialist in D.C.

Expensive? Try paying people enough money to pick grapes in sub-zero temperatures. But it's worth it to be able to enjoy the beautifully light but intense flavors of apple, apricot and white fig. Hints of cinnamon and clove on the bright finish make this a winner with baked apples in puff pastry.

» **2004 Bonny Doon Muscat Vin de Glaciere, Central Coast, California (\$20/half bottle)**

Calvert Woodley in D.C.

This is a great "ice wine" for a fraction of the price because the Muscat grapes are commercial-

ly frozen, but the resulting wine is bursting with bright honey, orange blossoms, dried pineapple and peach nectar.

» **Sandeman 20 Year Old Tawny Port, Portugal (\$50/bottle)**

Total Wine and More in McLean

Multilayered flavors of caramel, mocha, cherry syrup, brown butter and hints of ginger melt smoothly over the entire tongue. Serve it chilled alongside apple pie for a genuinely unique treat.

» **2003 Fonseca Vintage Port, Portugal (\$80/bottle)**

Schneider's of Capitol Hill in D.C.

Wow — this wine is not just for cigars anymore. It's capable of aging for many years, but if you're lucky enough to try it now, you'll be rewarded with powerful flavors of plum liqueur, black licorice, tobacco and dark chocolate. This is a classic match with Stilton bleu cheese.



Do you have a favorite bottle of wine? E-mail me at [scott@vineguy.com](mailto:scott@vineguy.com).

