



Brian Freedman Contributor

*I cover food, wine, drinks, travel; host dinners; and consult on wine*

Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

FOOD & AGRICULTURE 11/17/2016 @ 4:00PM | 240 views

## Dessert Wines Are Finally Catching On And Just In Time For The Holidays

Call it a heavy-food trifecta: This year, Thanksgiving falls on November 24th; exactly a month later, the first night of Hanukkah coincides with Christmas Eve. The cumulative effect of this month of turkey and stuffing, potato latkes and brisket, ham and pie and more, is likely to be a population sluggish, stuffed, and in desperate need of a break. Which is where sweet wines come in.

Every year around this time, late-harvest, fortified, and other sweet wines experience their annual uptick in attention. No wonder: They pair perfectly with the traditional foods of the season, and they work brilliantly as stand-ins for dessert: If you can't manage to eat any more food after the massive holiday meal but still want something sweet to end it with, a glass of wine higher in alcohol (good for digestion) and sugar (good for the soul) is a smart choice.

Fortunately for consumers, there is a vast selection of these wines to choose from, produced around the world, and at price points ranging from affordable to special-occasion-worthy.

Port, of course, is a classic option this time of year, the quintessential follow-up to the heartier main courses Americans tend to eat during the holiday season. Whether choosing a tawny (caramel, nut, and dried fruit notes) or a ruby (more primary fruit and spice notes), or popping the cork from a carefully cellared bottle of vintage Port (the best can age for decades), these styles are always a great option. According to the Instituto dos Vinhos do Douro e Porto (IVDP, the Institute of Wines from the Douro and Porto), sales of premium Port are up 3.1% between January and September 2016 in the United States.



### EMBA-Global





Shutterstock

AdChoices

Allora, di cosa hai bisogno?

For something lighter in color and a bit more honeyed, look to the sweet wines of Bordeaux. Sauternes is certainly the most famous, but there are other standout appellations where remarkable Sauvignon Blanc- and Semillon-based sweet wines are produced, too: Look for bottlings from Monbazillac, Cadillac, Loupiac, and more. One of my favorites is Barsac, home of Chateau Climens, which I had the great good fortune to taste several decades of this past March. What makes Climens so special is how easy the wines are to love in their youth, and how brilliantly they can age for decades. I swooned, for example, over the 2012, with its hint of savoriness against the flavors of cooked honey and flowers, as well as the 1976, with its juxtaposition of leather and sandalwood bumping right up against golden raisins, orange marmalade, and beeswax.

As delicious as these wines are with dessert, they also work in the context of appetizers and entrees, too. Berenice Lurton, proprietor of Chateau Climens, pointed out that, “These wines are not only dessert wines, and they’re not only foie gras wines.” Especially this time of year, with the sweeter and more aromatically spiced sauces of the holidays, plenty of opportunities exist for pairing high-end sweet wines with a meal, not just afterward. They also are great with cheese. Alexandra Cherniavsky, General Manager and Wine Director at Rarest, in Philadelphia, explained that “Sauternes has a creamy, caramel, nutty character that pairs well with the sharpness of a good cheddar.”

Less widely known but every bit as delicious is *passito di Pantelleria*, a stunning wine crafted from Zibbibo grapes that have been picked and then allowed to dry in the sun on the volcanic island of Pantelleria, 62 miles to the southwest of Sicily. The production of these wines is so unique, in fact, that UNESCO recognized the cultivation of this local version of the Moscato grape in 2014. The most famous bottling, and the one that most consumers will likely have access to, is the stunning Ben Ryé from Donnafugata. The 2008, with its concentrated notes of dried apricot and marmalade, is perfect with holiday fare, and the 1995, singing with pralines, dried figs, candied orange, and tobacco, is a show-stopper.

There are other great sweet wines from Italy, as well. Vin santo, of course, is one of the legends, and has plenty of name recognition, but others like the Tarasco Vino Passito, from the excellent Cornarea in Piedmont’s Roero appellation, stand out with its dried pineapple and apricot notes tempered by a distinct smokiness. Matteo Correggia, also from Roero, makes a still, sweet wine from Brachetto, which

is more well known as the source of sweet sparkling wines. Correggia's, however, called Anthos Vino Rosso da Appassité, is a winner, exotic with rose petals and candied raspberries.

Great sweet wines aren't limited to Europe, of course, and there are countless standout examples on this side of the Atlantic, too. One of the most eye-opening I've tasted this past year is the nonvintage Angelica from Napa Valley's Swanson Vineyards. Crafted from a vineyard of Mission grapes planted in 1856, this beauty is beguilingly rich and complex, with notes of maple, warm honey, dried figs, nuts, and licorice: With Thanksgiving pecan pie, it will be perfect.

Canadian ice wine is also a great option. The current release 2014 Riesling Ice Wine from Cave Spring is delicious: Sweet but not at all cloying, with flavors of peach and nectarine, cut through with lemon acidity for freshness.

The sweet-wine options are limitless. "Dessert and fortified wine is one of my absolute favorite categories—both with food and on its own," Cherniavsky explained. "I love fortified wines from Madeira for a lot of reasons. Madeira has enough sweetness to be satisfying, yet doesn't weigh you down at the end of your meal. It has a lovely caramel nuttiness that pairs well with so many dishes—cheese, nut based desserts, and even something as simple as vanilla ice cream." She also gravitates toward "sweet sherries like Cesar Florido's Moscatel Dorado...Lightly sweet, these complement cheese, and could also be a nice addition to something like the spice in pumpkin or apple pie. They're also incredibly affordable, so you don't have to break the bank to introduce your friends and family to something really special."

Whatever country it's from, and whether the bottling is sweet or just barely off-dry, now is the perfect time of year to explore this increasingly popular category. The options are seemingly infinite, and the prices are still, for many of them, remarkably approachable.

#### RECOMMENDED BY FORBES

[Taylor Fladgate And The Quality Revolution In Port Wine](#)

[Best American Dessert Wine Ever](#)

[The Great Wine-and-Cheese Inquiry](#)

[The One-Wine-Fits-All Thanksgiving](#)

[The Richest Person In Every State](#)

[WWE Survivor Series 2016 Results: News And Notes After Goldberg Defeats Brock...](#)

[The World's Highest-Paid Actors 2016](#)

[Stan Lee Introduces Augmented Reality For His Kids Universe](#)

---

This article is available online at:

2016 Forbes.com LLC™ All Rights Reserved