



GRAPES THAT BECOME ICE WINE ARE FROZEN ON THE VINE TO CONCENTRATE THE SUGARS.

"It is like drinking liquid gold. It's the perfect dessert in a glass."

Chilled to Perfection

BY BETH DEMMON

Served as a digestif or in a cocktail, ice wine is a decadent yet prudent choice for restaurant wine lists.

MADE FROM LATE-HARVEST GRAPES that have frozen on the vine, ice wine is a sweeter, slightly thicker drink generally enjoyed with—or as—dessert. Known as *eiswine* in German, this sugary concoction requires patience and remains notoriously difficult for winemakers to perfect, which bumps up the cost.

"Because of the lower and risky yield of grape musts and extreme difficulty of delicate, labor-intensive processing, ice wine can be costly," says Cate Banks, executive director of the Niagara Wine Trail USA.

These hurdles have kept ice wine from becoming a commonplace addition to many wine menus—but that's changing. "It is like drinking liquid gold," says Shari Gherman, president of the American Fine Wine Competition. "It's the perfect dessert in a glass."

Must-have varietals

Germany boasts the most expensive ice wines, but

there are plenty of affordable and delicious North American varietals available. Ohio, Michigan, and the Finger Lakes region of New York are home to ice wineries, but Niagara-on-the-Lake in Ontario, Canada, is particularly prized for its ice wine. The Inniskillin winery's somewhat unique process in making aged and oaked ice wines in Niagara-on-the-Lake results in more approachable selections, which can serve as gateways into the high-end ice wine world.

Brianna Needle, manager at The Wine Feed in Raleigh and Durham, North Carolina, lists Inniskillin as one of her top winery choices, along with Nigl from Austria and Jackson-Triggs Reserve from Canada. Since ice wines tend to work well as digestifs, she recommends offering them as an alternative to port, Moscato, or Sauternes. "It's a refreshing way to end



SIPS APPEAL

Ferrante's Vidal Blanc Ice Wine

After they're frozen on the vine, Vidal Blanc grapes are pressed immediately upon harvest to create a wine that is sweet with honey and tropical flavors. Wine-maker Nicholas Ferrante recommends serving this wine with pungent cheeses like gorgonzola, but it also makes a delightful bellini paired with sparkling Riesling and mango nectar.

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a meal, especially if you've just eaten something rich or heavy," Needle says.

Restaurants are beginning to recognize this growing demand, offering varietals beyond the typical Riesling and Vidal grapes. "Many vintners, especially from the New World, are experimenting with making ice wine from other varieties: whites such as Seyval Blanc, Chardonnay, and Gewürztraminer and reds such as Merlot, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, and many others," Banks of the Niagara Wine Trail says.

Money-saver

There's more for restaurants to gain than simply cashing in on the trend. It can be a bottom line lifesaver—even with its hefty price tag. Matt Cassavaugh, winemaker for Casa Larga Vineyards, explains: "Ice wine ages exceptionally well, which allows restaurants to cellar the product to add value. It also alleviates the concern of having to sell the product quickly."

Casa Larga's wholesale brand ambassador Leslie Arduser-Brogan adds, "Offering an ounce of ice wine on the beverage menu provides an opportunity to upsell a 'dessert' to patrons who would otherwise not be inclined to indulge."

Perfect pairings

Ice wine's rich and unique flavor can really shine when paired with a surprisingly wide variety of menu items. Camille Zess, media consultant for Casa Larga Winery, suggests complementing savory foods such as blue cheese, smoked salmon, or pâté with ice wine.

Needle of The Wine Feed also recommends fruit-forward desserts like tarts. "The fresh fruit and acidity naturally found in fruit is a wonderful companion to flavors of honey, ripe apricot, and tropical fruits found in the ice wine," Needle says. Several more experts mention dark chocolate as a tasty companion.

Cool cocktails

Mixologists are even starting to use ice wine in cocktails. Stephen Ward, head of the ice wine and food pairing program at Jackson-Triggs and Inniskillin wineries, shares one of his favorite festive recipes.

"A simple drink is a chocolate strawberry ice wine martini, made with Inniskillin Tempranillo ice wine, vodka, and crème de cacao. The ingredients are combined in a martini

shaker, shaken over ice, strained into a bittersweet-cocoa-rimmed martini glass, and garnished with a bittersweet Belgian chocolate-dipped strawberry."

Banks of the Niagara Wine Trail has also dabbled in ice wine cocktails, creating a half-and-half Sparkling Ice Wine with equal parts sparkling wine or Champagne (she recommends the 2015 Sparkling Riesling from Leonard Oakes Estate Winery or Tiny Bubbles from Schulze Vineyards & Winery) and ice wine, served in a Champagne flute. She's also created her own ice wine martini using frozen, seedless green grapes, ice wine, and vodka from Niagara Craft Spirits. She first purées the whole frozen grapes with the ice



BASED IN FAIRPORT, NEW YORK, CASA LARGA HAS BEEN MAKING ICE WINE SINCE 1974.

wine and vodka, then strains off the skins, and pours the mixture into an ice-filled cocktail shaker. She'll shake that well and strain it again into a chilled martini glass, with frosted, sugared grape halves as garnish.

Don't be misled

With ice wine's adaptability, long shelf life, and increasing consumer demand, it's shaping up to be the next big thing for restaurants and bars. When sourcing, however, be sure to only opt for labels that include the words "ice wine," not "iced wine" or "icebox wine." These signify inferior products that won't hold up to authentic ice wine's reputation. ■