

# DESSERT WINE DIGEST

## Vol. 22 No. 1, November 1, 2006

### New Wines from Quady

In January we introduced Deviation, our new after dessert wine made by infusing Damiana, (used in ancient and modern Mexico as a fertility treatment) into Orange Muscat. Last week our local Channel 30 produced a clip which aired on television nationally. For information and to view the clip visit: [www.quadywinery.com](http://www.quadywinery.com). In June of this year we bottled about 80 cases of our new and soon to be released amontillado sherry, **Palomino Fino**. Details are in last year's newsletter at [www.quadywinery.com](http://www.quadywinery.com).

### Quady North

Herb and Meloney Quady live in the Applegate Valley in Southern Oregon. Last spring 11 acres of Syrah, Cabernet Franc, and Viognier were planted on a south facing slope. Viognier, (from purchased grapes) will be for sale next year.

### Vancouver BC dessert competition

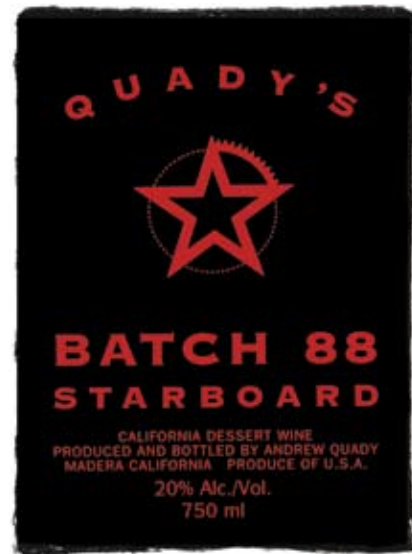
31 competitors entered our annual Western Canada Dessert competition vying to make the best dessert to enjoy with Essensia. **Hibiscus Poached Pear and Pistachio Cream Tart with Bay Leaf Panna Cotta and Granite**, the creation of Scarlett Smith, North West Culinary Academy in Vancouver was awarded first place. Recipe at [www.quadywinery.com](http://www.quadywinery.com). As her prize, Scarlett and a guest joined the Quadys on a horse pack fly fishing trip in the Ansel Adams Wilderness.



Vancouver Pastry Chef Scarlett Smith at Hemlock Crossing, September 2006.

### Terroir wine ~ Starboard<sup>1</sup>

When a wine shows characteristics resulting from the climate and soil where it was grown, that wine is said to have "terroir". We make two port wines, *Starboard Batch 88* and *Vintage Starboard*. *Batch 88* grapes are grown around Madera where the climate is warm and the soil rich. The rich soils produce soft grapy wines and the warm climate brings out fig, chocolate and raisin flavors. In contrast *Vintage* comes from grapes growing near the 1800 foot elevation in Amador County on well drained slopes with light granitic soil. This results in smaller berries. Also the climate, particularly at night, is cooler which enhances fruit intensity. Dark and concentrated, *Vintage Starboard* takes years of bottle age to show its potential. The current release, 1996, is beginning to soften and develop a fine bottle bouquet.



### Dessert and aperitif wines – time and place

Quady has a special relationship with Johnson and Wales University. We provide dessert and aperitif wines for their hospitality degree program and, once each year on each of the four campuses, a seminar

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<sup>1</sup> "Starboard" (nautically on the right) is Quady's euphemism for "port" which besides being a wine, is as every sailor knows, the left side of the boat.

introducing the world of dessert and aperitif wines. The following is a synopsis of our presentation.

Among Johnson and Wales students and readers of Dessert Wine Digest we hope to inspire action - enjoyment of this group of underappreciated wines **in new ways**. With this goal in mind (instead of the usual approach by geography or production method) we use the milieu (time, place, social setting) as our organizing basis and group wines by style. The assumption is that dessert wines are enhancements to particular sorts of life experiences. Concepts such as sweetness, body, alcohol, grape varieties, viticulture and winemaking are included such that the “introduction to the world of dessert wines” is complete.



Laurel Quady at Providence Campus of Johnson and Wales Inset, with Dept. Chairman Edward Korry.

### What is a dessert wine

We use the term “dessert” to imply sweetness, and not necessarily that the wine is to be used for dessert. Also, we make no distinction between “sweet wine” and “dessert wine” even though depending on the context, the words do mean different things.<sup>2</sup>

Alcohol and sweetness levels vary enormously among sweet wines, much more than in dry table wines. Alcoholic content in table wines varies from about 10% to about 16% and in sweetness from zero to about 3%. Alcoholic contents of dessert (or sweet) wines range from very low, Quady Electra for example (4%), to the highest levels found in any wine:

<sup>2</sup> My use of the term dessert wine, based on sweetness, is different from that proscribed by the branch of the US government which controls the contents of wine labels. By US statute, “dessert wine” means...for tax purposes...wines having more than 14% alcohol, regardless of their sweetness. And, on a wine label “dessert wine” cannot be used on wines having less than that alcohol level. Sweet wines with less than 14% alcohol are “sweet table wines” but this term never appears on labels thus the consumer must rely on other hints from the wine shop or shelf position to know whether a table wine is sweet or not.

20.5% alcohol in port wines. Sweetness also varies widely from just noticeably sweet 3% (some German wines for example) to a few extremely sweet sherries and malagas with over 20% sugar. If a wine is obviously sweet, it is considered here to be a dessert wine.

Alcohol and sweetness are key determinants of a wine’s mouth feel, the impressions perceived by the taste buds in the mouth. Low alcohol wines taste light (soft). High alcohol wines taste heavy or full bodied (thick or hot). Sweetness interacts with the taste of alcohol. A high alcohol wine lacking sweetness tastes unpleasantly hot. In low alcohol wines, sweetness balanced to fruit acidity leaves a fresh fruit impression. Low alcohol wines without sweetness will taste unpleasantly thin and tart.

### Wines for Mid-Afternoon

Most people are working at 3 pm and can’t stop work to enjoy wine. But there are 2 days off every week plus holidays and vacations. This is the time to enjoy certain low and light alcohol wine styles especially those sweet wines typically made in northerly climates and having only 7% to 10% alcohol. Wines from Germany: Spatlese, Auslese, Beerenauslese, and Trockenbeerenauslese (in order of increasing sweetness) and another special type, “ice wine” - made from the scented Riesling variety, make up an important but underappreciated wine style. The considerable acidity in these wines works to balance their noticeable sweetness. In the sweeter examples where the berries of the grape become concentrated in flavor due to shriveling (either by the effect of botrytis mold or simple dehydration), the wines are quite sweet, having 10% and higher sugar concentrations, but due to their excellent fruit acidity leave a balanced not cloying taste impression. These delicate wines can be tricky to match with food. If served at the end of the meal they would not be properly appreciated because the diner’s palate becomes sated. But, as an afternoon treat when the palate is sharp and without food accompaniment or with a simple food such as biscuits (sweetness adjusted to match the wine), the luxurious complex flavors of late harvested and botrytis affected Riesling can be appreciated to the fullest, as one of the great examples of winemaking art.

In countries where these wines are made, they tend to be used for special occasions and are typically brought out when guests arrive. Light alcohol, fragrant, and sweet is ideal for mid afternoon

entertaining. If the weather is nice the group might assemble outside, where fresh air, scenery, and growing plants enhance the experience. And it is unnecessary to break the bank. A well made Spatlese is moderately sweet, has loads of Riesling perfume, excellent balance, and a moderate price. A well made Auslese would be sweeter, have some botrytis character, and cost half again as much. Because of their rarity and the difficulty in making them, ice, Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese wines are luxury priced and suited to special occasions. Our own Electra wine, at 4% alcohol would also work very well at this time of day.

Botrytis wines are also made in Bordeaux France, (Sauternes, Barsac, Cadillac, Loupiac) where the varieties Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc are grown. Sauternes and Barsac wines are sweeter and more intensely botrytis flavored. Although the German styles (based on Riesling and with bright acidity) tend to work very well in the afternoon, this is also the time to enjoy the moderately sweet Cadillac or Loupiac Bordeaux or perhaps a moderately sweet Graves Superior. Tokay, a sweet wine from Hungary is another type made in a range of sweetness (explained below). For the mid afternoon reception, the lighter dessert wine styles – preferably with a good level of refreshing acidity - make a better choice than a totally dry wine, which without food can be a bit too bracing.

In luxury resort hotels or cruise ships with a captive audience, it would be useful to create an “occasion”. For example: **Light Sweet Wines to enjoy with the View, at 3 pm.**

### **Wines made from dehydrated Botrytis affected grapes and Ice Wines**

In Germany, Austria and Hungary and in other places with a suitable climate, it is the custom to make sweet wines from Botrytis affected grapes, harvested late in the season, thus the term: late harvest. Special terminology: Spatlese means late harvested; Auslese means selected; Beerenauslese refers to the selection of individual berries and parts of clusters; and Trockenbeerenauslese the selection of dried berries (making Trocken wines the sweetest) is used on labels to indicate sweetness in the Germanic countries.

The fungus, Botrytis Cineria which occurs naturally on grapes when the humidity is high and temperatures cool can act in a beneficial way. Instead of the moldy flavor contributed by most fungi, botrytis has

a pleasant honey apricot flavor. Wines made from Botrytis infected grapes which have this distinctive and easily recognizable flavor can taste very good. In addition, the mycelium of the botrytis penetrates the skin of the berry and the mold utilizes some of the grape’s malic acid thereby reducing acidity. If damp weather is followed by a dry spell, berries lose moisture through the perforated skins and sweetness as well as flavor is concentrated. To make sweeter botrytis affected styles pickers select those bunches or parts of bunches having shriveled berries. The less sweet wines contain higher percentages of unaffected grapes.

Due to low yields and cost of labor, sweeter wines from botrytis affected vineyards are expensive. The level of botrytis flavor varies according to vintage year. Occasionally if the vintage is very warm, dehydration occurs without botrytis and the wines although sweet, lack honey character having instead a more concentrated ripe grape flavor.

The sweet wine from Hungary known as Tokay is made from the Furmint grape variety and graded according to “puttonyos”. A puttonyos is a bucket of botrytis affected grapes added to a batch of normally ripe grapes. The more puttonyos, the sweeter. The sweetest of all and very rarely seen is called “essencia” or “eszencia” (not to be confused with our own wine “Essencia” which we will discuss later).

Ice wines are very special because they can be made only in years with freezing cold early winter conditions. Juice flowing from a wine press containing frozen grapes is higher in sweetness because the water is retained in the press as ice. Besides Germany and sometimes Austria, ice wine is made in Canada and, rarely, in the USA. Grape varieties other than Riesling are also used and from the province of Quebec there is a very fine apple ice wine. Canadian ice wines tend to be very sweet but also very high in acidity, whereas in Germany where botrytis is more common, and because of the effect of botrytis on malic acid content, ice wines tend not to be so high in acidity.

Wines from botrytis affected grapes are made throughout the world. “Late Harvest” on the label usually indicates that the wine was made using botrytis affected grapes. At Quady we are working on *LahBom* (Late Harvest Botrytis Affected Orange Muscat).

## Picnic Wines

An occasion where it may not be desirable to contend with the effects of alcohol on the brain is the picnic. Fortunately there is a wine style (low alcohol sweet wines, in the 4-6% range) for picnics. Quady makes two picnic wines, Electra and Red Electra, (4 % and 5% alcohol respectively) which make good accompaniments to assorted cold cuts and fruit desserts and are particularly useful where a higher alcohol wine might interfere with after picnic activities (volleyball?). Made from the Orange Muscat grape, Electra has its own unique sort of Muscat fragrance, somewhat like orange blossom and apple. The Electras are sweet but their light effervescence and good acid balance is refreshing on the palate. Other wines made in this style are marketed as “moscato” types.

Moscato is the name given to wines made from Muscat varieties with low or moderate alcohol levels, medium sweetness, and dissolved carbon dioxide (spritz or frizzante). Moscato d’Asti from Northern Italy tastes a little sweeter, is a little higher in alcohol and more bubbly than Electra.

### Making Moscato style wines

Muscat varieties have an aroma like flowers and fruit. Muscat derives from the Greek, “musk” meaning perfume. Most moscato wines are made from Muscat Blanc (also called Muscat Canelli) whereas Quady uses Orange Muscat for Electra and Black Muscat for Red Electra. In making these wines, the juice is fermented at a very low temperature, approximately 40F for a couple of months, preserving the fruit and floral characters of the Muscat grape. After 4% or so alcohol has been formed, the fermentation is arrested by chilling and filtration. The CO<sub>2</sub> “spritz” comes from residual CO<sub>2</sub> dissolved in the wine from the primary fermentation.

### The Hour of the Aperitif

Aperitif comes from the Latin, *aperire*, to open. This time of day has different meanings depending on the social setting. Normally it marks the end of work and the beginning of the evening’s relaxation, unless of course if one has not been working then it is the beginning of getting ready for the evening meal. It is usually the first alcoholic beverage of the day. The mind is ready to relax. Conversation flows. In any culture where alcoholic beverages are used there is usually some sort of aperitif. This occasion is arguably the most important of all.

The particular aperitif depends on culture. In many cultures beer is the most common drink at this time. In the romance cultures of France, Italy, Spain, and Argentina special aperitif products are enjoyed which sharpen the appetite for the meal to follow. Some are wine based, Vermouth for example, and others spirit based but all are made with aromatic plants which impart stimulus to the appetite. In the United States with our cocktail culture aperitif wines are largely ignored. But Quady, with the introduction of Vya Vermouth, is out to change that. Vermouth, an aromatized wine (aromatic plants infused into wine), is an excellent aperitif because the herbs which have varying degrees of bitterness “wake up” the taste buds. Sweet vermouth is bitter and sweet while dry vermouth is fresh and aromatic. A blend of the two “French Kiss” or “Duplex” is a delicious wine aperitif cocktail.

Many sweet fortified wines: (ruby ports, sheries, madeira, white ports, tawny ports) are drunk commonly, especially in France, as aperitifs rather than as dessert. Dry Sherries: finos, amontillados, and dry olorosos; and madeiras make excellent aperitifs. Sherries have a delicate salty taste and nutty character and are good with olives, ham and salted nuts. A medium sweet sherry is appropriate on a cold winter day. A fine Madeira has a different sort of aroma, ethereal and haunting which is very special. As aperitifs, a glass of ruby or tawny port is a particularly French custom whereas white port, served chilled, with or without ice, is drunk in Portugal where it is regarded as refreshing in hot weather.

Medium sweet dessert wines: Sauternes, Barsac, Cadillac, Loupiac, especially the ones which are not too sweet (and expensive) and do not have quite the acidity and lightness to be a mid afternoon wine make excellent aperitifs. In France, rich meat hors-d’oeuvres, pates, and terrines, often presented at aperitif time, are especially good with medium sweet wines. The related aperitif wine, Lillet, a brand of sweet white Bordeaux flavored with botanicals, is used in the same way.

### Making aperitif wines, sheries, Madeira, and ports

Aperitif wines from aromatic plants, notably vermouth, are made by infusing the plant materials into a wine base. In the case of sweet vermouth a reverse sort of distillation is also employed. The wine containing the herbs is heated in a still and the “bottoms” of the distillation, after the alcohol has been driven

off by heating, are collected, fortified with the concentrated alcohol fraction, and used as a base.

Sherry owes its unique flavor to the bland low acid variety Palomino and the unique production methods involving exposing the wines to air either with or without the presence of a specialized micro organism, the flor yeast. A pleasant light saltiness in Sherry results from the addition of calcium sulfate (plaster) to the grape must added to correct pH and acidity. The most important Sherry flavor, rancio, results from aging the wine underneath a yeast film called a “flor”. The flor yeast, adapted to growing on the surface of fermented sherries, converts alcohol to acetaldehyde adding at the same time unique and complex aroma notes. Sherries aged under the flor are finos. If bottled while the wines are young the sherry is labeled: fino. If the flor dies and drops to the bottom of the barrel, the wine is then an amontillado. Aged sherries can be complex wines. If the sherry seems early in its life to be in a heavier style, the winemaker fortifies the wine so it will not develop a flor. Those sherries, aging without a flor are named “Oloroso”.

Madeira, an underappreciated wine style, derives its unique flavor from long aging in casks, is always fortified to about 18% alcohol and is made in certain styles: Sercial, Bual, Verdelho, and Malmsey (in increasing order of sweetness). Sercial, Bual, Verdelho and Malmsey also happen to be the names of grape varieties used in Madeira, an island belonging to Portugal. There is a big quality difference between good and cheap Madeiras. The cheap ones taste burnt and “dirty”. The good ones are expensive and have an “ethereal” aroma and a taste which goes on forever. Madeira is sometimes confused with Sherry but the two wines are very different. The acidity of the grape varieties used in Madeira is much higher than that in the Palomino variety. Lower pH is undoubtedly a factor in the development of Madeira’s unique aroma profile. Another difference is that there is no flor yeast involved in Madeira.

Ports (usually from Portugal, hence the name) are made by adding alcohol (fortification) to a fermenting tank of usually red grapes and bottled with just over 20% alcohol. Since yeast cannot tolerate more than 15% alcohol (depending on sweetness), fortification serves to arrest the fermentation. The resulting port is stable against re-fermentation. The port is aged further in cask or bottle (bottle aged typically becomes vintage port) until judged ready to drink. A successful port has a good balance between alcohol,

sweetness, tannins, and flavor. The tannins should not be too high or the port will taste harsh. The sweetness should be high enough to be in balance with the alcohol, otherwise the port will taste hot.

### **Accompanying the first course with a sweet wine**

The first of a multi course menu is frequently a good opportunity for enjoying wines with medium levels of alcohol and sweetness – more alcohol and sweeter than one would want in the afternoon, and sweeter than one would want for an aperitif. Some sweet wine and food matches for the first course are considered classics. If the first course is foie gras, this is considered the proper time to open up a sweet Sauterne, or Barsac. There is a definite harmony between the oily texture and rich flavor of foie gras and the complex luxuriousness of great sweet whites. Quady Essensia, served well chilled, can also accompany foie gras and leaves a pleasant fruity aftertaste in the mouth. If the foie gras is served with a sauce involving red fruit, Quady Elysium would be a good choice.

In the 1800s, Sauternes were de rigor with the fish course. If this is tried, a medium sweet Sauterne should be selected and the fish itself should be on the rich side and served with a sauce with a matching level of sweetness. If the first course is a meat based soup broth, consommé for example, serve a dry or slightly sweet amontillado or oloroso sherry, or a dry madeira, flavored with a dollop of the same wine. If the course is a salad with a sweet dressing, try Quady’s Electra or Red Electra, especially if there is fruit in the salad. If blue cheese forms an important part of the flavor of this course, as with blue cheese crumbled on a salad, then any of several dessert wines would be useful: Sweet Sauternes or Barsac, or Sweet Muscat – Essensia or Elysium. Elysium is an especially good accompaniment to blue cheeses.

### **Intermezzo**

Consider making a sorbet or granite from Electra. With only 4% alcohol, Electra freezes beautifully. Electra can also be used as a base for a fruit soup.

### **Main Course**

This is normally the time to serve dry table wines but for a special experience, why not a dessert wine? The key is normally the sauce which should be sweet enough. Essensia and Elysium make good accompaniments to fruit flavored sauces. The wines can

be reduced and incorporated into the sauces. Rich foods such as wild boar, lobster, and pork lend well to a sweet sauce. Think sweet and sour oriental style dishes or Peking Duck. One of the classic taste experiences is cold rare prime rib of beef, sliced very thin served with a great white Bordeaux such as Chateau d'Yquem. This, according to gastronome Jeremiah Tower, is the ultimate d'Yquem food match.

### **Dessert Course**

Desserts can be constructed to accompany practically any dessert wine but if the wine isn't very sweet, the dessert shouldn't be either. Modern desserts, not as sweet, are particularly amenable to pairing with dessert wines. Many of the old fashioned American desserts are too sweet to be accompanied by anything other than coffee. On the palate, when the dessert wine is less sweet than the dessert, the taster doesn't enjoy the wine, it begins to taste dry.

Our Essensia and Elysium dessert wines have assertive flavors allowing them to be used with desserts which would otherwise overpower a more delicate wine. Chocolate desserts go well with either. Almond or peach works with the Essensia, and red fruit or vanilla with Elysium. Our recipe book has more information on pairing. Botrytis affected wines are more difficult to pair with food. A great Chateau d'Yquem is best served by itself, as dessert.

### **A brief summary of the world of Fortified Muscat Wines**

In France the primary variety for fortified Muscat wine is the Muscat Blanc (Muscat Canelli, Muscat Petit Grains) and the important appellations are: Muscat Beaumes de Venise, Muscat Frontignan, Muscat de Minervois, and Muscat de Lunel. In Spain and Portugal the Muscat of Alexandria is more commonly grown. Australians, who like to refer to their dessert wines as "stickies" grow the Muscat of Alexandria (also called Muscat Gordo) and age it a long time in wood where it develops considerable complexity. From Southern Italy comes Malvasia de Lipari with a honeysuckle aroma. French muscats can pair well with sweet desserts or can be the dessert. Lower in acidity than Essensia, they are not good accompaniments to tart fruit. Spanish and Portuguese versions tend to be quite sweet. Malvasia de Lipari, Malvasia de Pantelleria and other sweet wines from the boot of Italy are typically paired with pastries. Marsala which comes in dry as well as sweet versions

can be used to accompany as well as flavor a zablione and is interesting to try with chocolates.

Muscat grape varieties are well suited to warm climates such as California's central interior valley, especially the regions around Madera and the delta areas. In these regions Quady has worked with two underappreciated Muscat varieties, Orange Muscat and Black Muscat (Muscat Hamburg). Orange Muscat depending on when the grapes are picked and how long the juice remains in contact with the skins has a character of oranges, orange blossom, apricot, melon, pear, or peach. It is also higher in tannin than other white grapes and imparts a "tea like" character to the wines. Black Muscat has a character of rose, litchi, and strawberry depending mainly on the vintage year. A cool year has more strawberry and less litchi flavor.

Essensia and Elysium and other fortified muscats are made by fortifying partially fermented Muscat grape juice (Orange Muscat for Essensia and Black Muscat for Elysium) to about 15% alcohol followed by ageing in French Oak barrels. A short period of maceration results in high levels of extractives from the Muscat grape skins, the source of the "tea" character.

### **After Dinner Wines**

Although ruby ports make a good accompaniment to chocolate (we particularly enjoy our Starboard Batch 88 this way), the port category in general is best as an after dinner or after the meal wine. At the Factory House in Oporto, the gentlemen who run the port firms and who meet there for lunch every Wednesday retire to a separate room to enjoy their vintage port away from the aroma of the luncheon food.

Port has a high alcohol level, usually 20% and a dry port would taste unpleasantly hot. Even with 10% sugar, port can be a little fiery. The best food to serve with port is Stilton cheese, which is about 75% butterfat, and works like a salve in the mouth when drinking port. The taste buds become coated with fat and the port tastes much smoother.

Quady has recently introduced a new sort of after dinner wine. *Deviation*, (refers to deviating from normal winemaking practice) consists of Orange Muscat laced with aromatic rose scented geranium and with damiana, (an herb with reputed aphrodisiac properties). This love potion is seductively perfumed and would make a good choice for a romantic evening.

## Styles of Port

A bottle of “vintage port” indicates the year in which the grapes were harvested. These long lived wines spend only about 18 months in barrel before bottling. Vintage ports throw a crust (deposit in the bottle), retain their fruit flavors, and develop complexity until at 20 years or more the bottle is opened, usually for a special occasion. These single vintage ports are only bottled from the lots from the best vintages. When the majority of port producers decide to bottle a vintage port, that vintage is said to be: “declared”. Even in those years however, the bulk of a winery’s production is kept in barrel, becoming a “wood port.” In undeclared years producers may bottle “Vintage Port” with a vineyard designation. For example: Taylor, a famous port producer, may bottle a vintage Taylor port one year and the next a Taylor Vargellas port with a vintage date, Vargellas being the name of Taylor’s most famous vineyard.

Tawny ports have designations such as “10 years old” and spend their life in barrel where they lose their red color, hence the name. They have a nutty flavor and tend to be softer than vintage port, and are very good with nuts. The age refers to the average age of the wine in the bottle since the vintages are blended back and forth to produce a consistent style.

Vintage character ports, like Quady’s Starboard Batch 88, are blends of high quality wood ports. They are fruity, moderately complex, and value priced. Batch 88 is a blend of several different vintages with an average age of about 5 years. Most of the wine coming from the Tinta Roriz variety is grown in the Madera area. The warm climate in Madera brings out rich fig, chocolate, plum, and raisin characters in Batch 88, which is made in a soft easy to drink style.

Ruby, the least expensive style of port, is not seen so much since Vintage Character has taken its place. An exception is France where they are enjoyed as aperitifs.

LBV or late bottled vintage is something else. This is a wine all from one year which has received more than two years barrel age. The idea is to have a vintage style wine which can be drunk young. They lack the fruit and complexity of vintage port but the best ones do improve in bottle and their lower price makes them good candidates for “by the glass”.

Colheita is a term used by the Portuguese port makers (as opposed to the British Port makers...

Sandeman, Taylor, Grahams, etc...) who don’t produce traditional “vintage” port. Aged in cask until the time of bottling, their bottles have a vintage date but lack the word “vintage”. The wines vary in style from vintage character to tawny. They lack the dark color and intense fruit of the vintage ports produced by the English houses. It is useful to think of them as vintage dated tawnys.

## Handling dessert wines

Dessert wines vary considerably in their susceptibility to loss in quality due to oxidation upon contact with air following the opening of the bottle.

Old Vintage ports, which have spent a long time bottled up without air will change noticeably and sometimes quickly after the bottle is opened. If the whole bottle cannot be drunk at that time, the headspace should be filled with nitrogen or the bottle placed in the refrigerator to preserve the aroma characteristics. A lower temperature will slow dramatically the changes which take place in wines, especially older reds, after opening. Young Vintage ports can be left open at room temperature and may improve after opening as air quickly ages the wine. Sherries (except finos), Madeiras, Austrian stickies, Marsalas, tawny ports, and fortified muscats which are amber or tawny in color can be left open at room temperature because the wine was oxidized already before bottling.

If the dessert wine is light in color, a white, refrigerate it. If it is low alcohol, below 14%, refrigerate it. Other wines can be managed based on their aroma. If the wine smells like fresh fruit or flowers, it should be refrigerated. This includes our Elysium. If the wine smells nutty or has no aroma, leave it at room temperature, with the bottle closed.

A percentage of all wines sealed with natural corks have what is known as “corky” taint, an unpleasant moldy aroma which hides the natural wine character. Dessert wines are not exempt from this problem. Professional wine servers often pour a little of each bottle of wine opened, to smell it for the “corky” problem before serving to the customer. This is a valuable service because many customers do not recognize the “corky” smell as defective and instead suffer in silence with a bad bottle.

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