



The International Wine Review

June 2011

Report # 27: Sweet Wines of the World

America's Best Sweet Wines



America's winemakers from California to Virginia are producing some of the finest sweet wines on the market. We tasted hundreds of sweet wines for Report # 27 **Sweet Wines of the World** and found a number of American wines that rank among the best in the world. Below we present the **International Wine Review's Ten Best American Sweet Wines**. The top ten include wines from California, Oregon, New York, and Virginia. American sweet wines are made from a large number of grapes-- Roussane, Trousseau Gris, Gewürztraminer,

Riesling, several types of Muscat, Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Petit Manseng, and others. They're also made in six different styles: [1] wines made from botrytis affected grapes, [2] wines made from dried grapes, [3] late harvest wines, [4] low alcohol Muscat, [5] icewine, and [6] fortified reds. Analyses of these and other sweet wine styles can be found in the full report, which is available online at www.i-winereview.com. Our Tasting Notes and Ratings on all the American sweet wines that we tasted are given below, organized by wine style.

International Wine Review's Ten Best American Sweet Wines

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Tasting Notes and Ratings

Botrytis Affected

Bonny Doon Vineyard 2007 Le Vol desANGES Arroyo Seco, Monterey County (\$30/375ml) 91

The 2007 Le Vol DesANGES is made of 100% biodynamic, botrytised Roussanne grapes, 30% of which are fermented in acacia barrels. Ripe pear, tangy apricot and orange zest aromas give way to a palate similar in fruit character with an added earth and herbal note. A delicious, rich and nuanced wine that finishes long and soft. Alc. 12.3%, RS 116 g/l, TA 7.1 g/l.

Carol Shelton 2006 Sweeter Caroline Trousseau Gris Late Harvest Russian River Valley (\$40)/375ml 91

This a delicious sweet wine made from 70% botrytised grapes, very late harvest, organically grown Trousseau Gris grapes. [Trousseau Gris used to be called Grey Riesling, for those old enough to remember the refreshing, dry Wente Bros. wine of the same name.] It's fresh and well-balanced with aromas and flavors of spicy, honeyed stonefruit with a note of marzipan. Alc 13%, RS 170 g/l, TA 6.8 g/l.

Grgich Hills Estate 2008 Violetta Late Harvest Napa Valley (\$85/375ml) 94

The Grgich Violetta ranks among the world's elite sweet, botrytis-affected wines in terms of its complexity of flavor, superb acid – sugar balance, and rich mouth feel. Honey, peach and orange blossom flowers show on the nose, while the palate shows apricot, marzipan, and orange marmalade. Finishes clean and very long. Absolutely superb! A field blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling and Gewürztraminer, biodynamically farmed. Aged 18 months in 75% new French oak. Alc 14.1%, RS 118 g/l, TA 7.5 g/l.

Konstantin Frank Vinifera Wine Cellars 2008 Bunch Select Late Harvest Riesling Finger Lakes (\$70) 93

This TBA styled, botrytis affected late harvest Riesling is one of the best American sweet wines we've tasted. Yellow gold in color, the nose is redolent of botrytis, orange peel and yellow raisins. The palate is superbly balanced with tropical fruit salad flavors. It's moderately sweet with superb balancing acidity. Absolutely delicious! Alc. 8.8%, RS 153 g/l.

Navarro Vineyards 2006 Gewürztraminer Cluster Select Late Harvest Anderson Valley Mendocino (\$29/375ml) 89

The harvesting of the light amber Cluster Select Late Harvest Gewürztraminer didn't finish until the day after Thanksgiving when the last botrytised bunches were picked. The wine has excellent acidity that balances the high sugar content. Lovely caramel and toasted almond show on the nose, while ripe stonefruit picks up on the palate. Delicious, although the wine is a bit reticent about its Gewürztraminer character.

Navarro Vineyards 2010 Muscat Blanc Cluster Select Late Harvest Anderson Valley Mendocino (\$29/375ml) 91

The Cluster Select Late Harvest Muscat Blanc is made only in those years when the climate is just right, and botrytised grapes can be harvested and made into one of California's most delicious sweet wines. The 2010 vintage is the first such vintage in five years; it shows spicy Muscat aromas of rose petal and a dash of white pepper. The palate is beautifully balanced with white peach and dried yellow fruit flavors. This is a medium sweet wine that would make a lovely, well-chilled aperitif. Alc. 8.2%, RS 20.9 g/l, TA 11.2 g/l

Navarro Vineyards 2006 White Riesling Cluster Select Late Harvest Anderson Valley Mendocino (\$29/375ml) 91

This medium amber gold beauty is made of White Riesling touched by botrytis. Butterscotch, honeyed raisins, creamy mangos and tangy dried stonefruit all make their appearances on the nose and palate. It has beautiful weight and viscosity, finishing clean and long with lingering stonefruit notes. Alc. 10.5, RS 20.2%, TA 12 g/l.

Wines from Dried Grapes

Barboursville Vineyards 2002 Malvaxia Passito Monticello Virginia (\$30) 91

With almost a decade under its wings, this wine has taken on a gorgeous golden apricot color. There's quite a bit of rancio character to this wine, and the aromas of golden raisins, apricot liqueur, roasted nuts and a note of resin are tantalizing. In the mouth, it's lush, soft, and moderately sweet with dried stone fruit flavors. Finishes clean and very long with a slight bitter note that complements rather than detracts from the wine. This wine doesn't have the acidity to hold up to really sweet desserts, so it's best drunk with nuts and cheese. If the afternoon tea ever makes a revival, this would do wonderfully with sweet biscuits.

Barboursville Vineyards 2005 Malvaxia Passito Monticello Virginia (\$30) 90

Amber straw in color, showing yellow raisins, dried yellow peach, butterscotch and caramel flavors and aromas. It's soft on the attack, viscous on the palate, and finishes almost dry with good length. Alc 13.9%.

Barboursville Vineyards 2006 Malvaxia Passito Monticello Virginia (\$30) 89

Medium dark amber color. Spicy orange citrus and apricot show on the nose, while golden raisins and dried yellow fruit are more prominent on the palate. This richly flavored wine is of light to medium sweetness. Made of a blend of Moscatel Ottonel and Vidal Blanc, air-dried and aged in oak for 24 months. Alc 13.9%, RS 120 g/l.

Bonny Doon Vineyard 2008 Vinferno Arroyo Seco Monterey County (\$20/375ml) 89+

The Vinferno is a wine made from grapes dried on mats for three weeks to concentrate flavors and sugars prior to fermentation. It's a 51/49 blend of Grenache Blanc and Roussane grown biodynamically. The wine shows dried stone fruit with herbal and citrus zest notes. It's quite light on the palate and not at all cloying despite the sugar with a bright note of ripe mango on the finish. Alc 13.7%, RS 136 g/l.

Late Harvest

Carol Shelton 2008 Sweet Caroline Late Harvest Trousseau Gris (\$15/375ml) 90+

Made with the Trousseau Gris (Grey Riesling) grape, the Carol Shelton Sweet Caroline has an exotic bouquet of fresh apricot, ripe apple, and tangerine zest. It offers a moderately sweet palate with very ripe fruit and herbal notes, finishing very long. Excellent. Alc. 13%, RS 70 g/l.

Carol Shelton 2008 Black Magic Late Harvest Zinfandel Sonoma County (\$20/375ml) 90

Dark ruby red. The Black Magic Late Harvest Zinfandel reveals ripe blackberry and plum aromas and flavors with a dash of cracked black pepper. The palate offers a creamy texture and is packed with flavor with additional notes of earth and tobacco. Aged 10 months in 50/50 new and used American oak. Alc 14.9%, RS 75g/l, TA 7.9 g/l

Muscat

Barboursville Vineyards Philéo Monticello (\$16) 88

This low-alcohol blend of Moscatel Ottonel and Traminer Aromático is easy drinking, the perfect wine for Sunday brunch. It has a perfumed nose of rose petal, tangerine skin, and lychee. Viscous and syrup like on the attack, the palate is clean and tasting of fresh, ripe pear. Nothing complicated here but quite delicious. Alc 10%, RS 80 g/l.

Quady 2009 Electra Orange Muscat Madera (\$14) 87

This is a low-alcohol wine with substantial sugar, a bit of effervescence and grapey-muscat and dried orange aromas and flavors. It's made from the Orange Muscat grape. Should be served very well chilled or over ice. Alc 4.5%.

Quady 2008 Elysium Black Muscat California (\$25/750ml) 88

Elysium is made from the Muscat Hamburg grape, also sometimes called Brown Muscat. The wine is ripe with powerful aromas of dried fig and dark cherry and flavors of red berry jam. Very good.

Quady 2008 Essensia Orange Muscat California (\$25/750ml) 89

Made from Orange Muscat, this is a sweet, fortified wine aged about 3 months in French oak. Beautiful golden orange in color, the wine is delicious, offering aromas and flavors of apricot and lychee with orange zest notes. Should be served well-chilled.

Icewine

Adelsheim 2008 Deglacé Willamette Valley (\$35/375ml) 91

This beautiful light salmon colored Willamette Valley wine has great balance, delicate cherry flavors, and a lightly sweet finish. A Pinot Noir based icewine is unusual, but winemaker Dave Paige has done the noble grape justice. It's only part icewine, with 57% of the juice from frozen grapes. Alc 10.2%.

Veritas 2005 Kenmar Dessert Wine Monticello (\$35/375ml) 89

This lightly sweet wine made from the Traminer grape (a Gewürztraminer hybrid) shows a nice bouquet of roses, apple and essence of orange. It has a delicate citrus flavor with a bitter orange peel note on the palate, which is almost dry despite the sugar. It needs food like a creamy cheese to show its best. This wine is a late harvest icewine made using cyro-extraction. Alc 14.5%, RS 150 g/l, TA 6 g/l.

Linden 2006 Late Harvest Petit Manseng Virginia (\$58/375ml) 92

Jim Law has a reputation as one of Virginia's best winemakers, and this wine shows why. Golden yellow in color, it has a perfumed nose and intensely flavored palate of mango, apricot, and earthy botrytis. It's moderately sweet with a long, intense finish. Goes superbly with blue cheese. Technically, this is an ice wine as the grapes were frozen and then pressed with only the first thawed juice used for the wine. Fermented slowly in old French oak. The fruit comes from the 1300' Hardscrabble Vineyard in Fauquier County. Alc 13.2%, RS 14%.

Pacific Rim 2007 Vin de Glaciere Riesling Selenium Vineyard Columbia Valley (\$14/375ml) 90

The medium gold Vin de Glaciere is a lovely, sweet, aromatic wine of tangy apricot, ginger, and pear. It's rich on the attack with excellent acidity and shows tropical fruit on the finish. Pairs superbly with foie gras, blue cheese, and crème brûlée. The fruit is diodynamically farmed and hand-picked from the Selenium Vineyard. Alc 10.4%, RS 160 g/l, TA 8.8 g/l

Fortified Reds

Carol Shelton 2005 Tawny Monga Old Vines Zinfandel Port Cucamonga Valley (\$33/500ml) 88

This Port-like Zinfandel is made from old vine, certified organic grapes of the Cucamonga Valley not far from the Los Angeles megalopolis. It offers a spicy, mulled plum nose and flavors of plum tart, caramelized apple, vanilla and coconut. A unique wine from a unique region. It ages 3.5 years in untopped barrels. Alc 18.4%, RS 80 g/l, TA 76 g/l

Miller Wine Works Teodoro Port Sage Canyon Vineyard Napa Valley (\$22/375ml) 88

The Miller Port has fruit rich plum aromas of very ripe, slightly cooked fruit and a medium weight palate. It's a flavorful wine that pleases without being showy. Made from the traditional Portuguese varietals Tinta Cao (60%), Souzao (30%), and Touriga Nacional (10%). The wine is a blend of several cuvees, aged in neutral oak an average of two years. Alc 22%, RS 8g/l.

Quady Winery NV Starboard Batch 88 California (\$24) 91

This wine is non-vintage but similar in style to a Reserve Port. It shows aromas of dried plum, raisin and chocolate and a flavorful palate of dried fruit, nuts and chocolate with spice notes. Made mainly from Tinta Roriz (Tempranillo). Very flavorful. Alc. 20%

Quady Winery 1996 Starboard Vintage Amador County (\$35) 89

Made from Tinta Cao (97%) and Touriga Nacional (3%), this delicious vintage Port shows aromas of cinnamon, clove, bitter chocolate and caramel. It's soft and lush on the attack with good depth of very ripe, jammy red fruit with chocolate and coconut notes. Ready to drink now. Made from the fruit of an 1800' vineyard located near Plymouth. Alc 20%.