

http://www.vinography.com/archives/2008/03/food_and_wine_pairing_is_just.html

03.12.2008

Food and Wine Pairing is Just a Big Scam

By Alder Yarrow

Did I just say that? Yes I did. And increasingly I'm hearing it from wine professionals that I know -- spoken, of course, in hushed tones and off the record. Most professional sommeliers and wine writers wouldn't be caught dead uttering such terms in public, let alone publishing them. So I guess it's up to us bloggers to spread the word: wine drinkers around the world, you've been hoodwinked. Tricked. Bamboozled. Conned.

Before you throw that glass at your monitor, let me explain.

Wine has always gone with food. In fact, one of the first reasons that wine became popular as a beverage was not for its flavor, but because the alcohol helped kill the nasties that often infected pre-refrigerator-technology cuisine. The surest recipe for an unpleasant evening was to forget to drink a bit of wine, usually diluted heavily with water after gnawing on that side of beef that had been hanging in your medieval "kitchen" for weeks.

It didn't take long for the cultural practice of drinking wine with meals to be cemented as part of civilization, and it's stuck for, oh, the last four thousand years or so. Of course, it didn't hurt that wine also gets us drunk. Don't underestimate the power of fun as a driver of cultural traditions.

Along the way to its peak of popularity, wine started tasting a lot better, especially as winemakers learned more about chemistry, viticulture, and aging wine. At some point, most people started drinking wine more for the pleasure of its flavors than for its digestive benefits, not to mention the fact that, yes, it gets us drunk.

I guess at some point, people started forming opinions that not only was a proper meal incomplete without a bottle of wine, certain wines actually tasted better with certain foods and vice versa.

And that was where everything started to go downhill. Because, on a certain level, these folks were absolutely right. Most people will agree a nice crisp white wine goes better with butter sautéed snapper than a massively tannic red. Such common sensibilities are ultimately what is responsible for the incredible traditions of winemaking and cultivation around the world. Curious wine lovers might wonder just why it is that Tuscan red wines are so brawny, but perceptive wine lovers that have ever had an authentic Florentine steak and grilled vegetables quickly find out that the answer is the same reason that the coastal region of Southern France around Marseille produces such lovely, crisp pink and white wines.

These wines just taste better with what people eat in these places most of the time. Over their centuries of evolution, the regional cuisines of the wine producing areas of the world and the people responsible for their creation have "settled" on the wines that work best for them.

So that's all good, of course. But just like cancers that can grow from seemingly benign cells, these basic sensibilities planted the seeds of a poisonous idea, one that has grown to the point that every evening around the world, wine lovers stand paralyzed in the aisles of grocery stores and in the halls of wine stores, trying desperately to choose the "right" wine for whatever they are making for dinner that night. Many also tremble at the thought of taking responsibility for ordering a wine for an entire table of guests, for fear of choosing a wine that they imagine the sommelier will arch their eyebrows at and ask with a sneer, "are you sure you want to drink THAT with your chicken, Sir?"

The perception that there are "proper" wine pairings is so pervasive now that in addition to the countless books that exist to help the helpless figure out exactly what to cook to match their Albariño, there are now even several wine brands whose sole existence consists of "eliminating the guesswork."

On the other end of the price spectrum from the crappy wines that are brazen enough to call themselves "Goes With Beef" lay the fine dining restaurants of the world, with sommeliers that work hard to put together 8 course flights of wine pairings for \$125 to accompany your tasting menu. These pairings, which at the best restaurants are both artfully done (i.e. tasty) and opportunities to try interesting wines, serve to further reinforce a universal belief in three fundamental falsehoods when it comes to pairing food and wine:

Lie #1: For any given food/dish there is a "perfect," "ideal" or "correct" wine pairing.



Lie #2: There are a ton of mistakes and pitfalls out there -- lots of wines just "don't go" with certain foods and vice versa.

Lie #3: Because of #1 and #2, food and wine pairing is an art that is hard to learn, requires deep knowledge, and generally is best left to experts.

And these lies, dear reader, are tacitly supported by the wine establishment around the world, quite possibly because there's a lot more money to be made if everyone acts as if they are true.

I've had a lot of fancy wine pairings, done by people with fancy initials after their names, and six figure salaries in fine restaurants that prove these folks know their s*** when it comes to wine (and they most certainly do). But I tell you honestly, for every one of those wine and food combinations that have been great, there have been just as many that were simply ordinary. That's right. The hit rate is really around fifty percent.

And why is this the case? Because the single most important variable in the success of wine and food pairing lies completely out of the control of every sommelier and chef in the world. And that variable is me, you, and every single person that sits down to a mouthful of food and a swig of wine.

We each bring our own unique sensory apparatus to the process of tasting. If everyone in the world could possibly take a bite of one big apple, each of us quite literally tastes something different. What we "taste," -- that is, the story we tell ourselves as our individual, complex, and completely unique brains interpret the signals that they are getting from each of our individual, complex and unique sensory nervous systems -- is ours and ours alone. The biochemical and bioelectrical processes that combine to create the thought, "Hey, this wine goes great with pepperoni pizza" are so staggeringly complex, not to mention situational, that the idea that someone can actually know what they are doing when they prescribe a specific wine with a specific dish is laughable.

Have you ever listened to several serious wine experts share their tasting notes about a wine that you yourself are tasting at the same time? I've had this experience several times, tasting wines with Robert Parker, Karen MacNeil, Andrea Robinson, Anthony Dias Blue, Frank Prial, and more. And every time not only are my tasting notes different from theirs, all of theirs are different from each other. Some taste chestnuts, some taste tobacco, some cedar, and some espresso. So if the world's foremost wine experts can't even agree on what an individual wine tastes like in a controlled setting, how on earth could someone suggest they will know what it will taste like with rosemary and garlic rubbed lamb shank with new potatoes and sautéed Swiss chard?

I hear what you're saying. You're saying, "sure, they might not know exactly what it will taste like for me, but they know that it will generally go well together, don't they?"

And I'm here telling you, yeah, they can probably say that, about to the point of being able to suggest that a nice crisp white will go better with butter sautéed snapper than a massively tannic red. The rest, my friends, is just luck.

So here's what I want you to remember when it comes to wine and food pairing:

Principle #1: There are no right answers. Even the crisp white with fish is bulls*** if you don't like crisp white wines. When in doubt, always drink what you like to drink and you'll probably enjoy your food and your wine better than you would if you worried about matching them.

Principle #2: Take advice only when you feel like it, and don't expect it to be right even when the person is some sort of expert. You might like someone's pairings, and you might not. But just because someone else thinks that Gruner Veltliner is the perfect pairing for steamed asparagus with butter and salt, doesn't mean you will.

Principle #3: Since this is all about you (yeah baby), experiment! Try different things and figure out what works for you.

And I guarantee what you'll discover, in the course of these explorations, is that for any dish, there are a million and one wines that will taste great with it, and for any wine, there are just as many foods that would be perfect accompaniments. All of which will make you happy, and also prove my point.

Go forth and break free from your chains. The only answer to what to drink with what you eat is, in the end, is everything and anything.

Mixing cheese and wine

News flash: wine isn't a really good match with many cheeses. Natascha Mirosch asked the experts how to pair cheese and wine

May 23, 2006, Australian Courier Mail newspaper

IN THE 1960s, Australia produced around 20 varieties of cheese, often eating them with a Mateus rose or a rough chianti. Today we produce more than 100 cheeses and have a wine industry worth six billion dollars.

Not only are we fortunate to have a huge choice of domestic wines and fine boutique cheeses, but we can choose to furnish our cheeseboards with fresh buffalo milk mozzarella flown in from Italy, a roquefort from France or a piquant Spanish sheeps cheese.

In Australia, we eat more than 12 kilos of cheese and drink about 24 bottles of domestic wine per person each year. And while they've been consumed together for centuries, a recent study by the University of California's Dr Hildegard Heymann found that cheese was actually not a good match with wine.

Heymann's results showed that cheese suppressed almost every flavour in wine, including astringency, berry and oak, leaving participants unable to taste the difference between cheap and premium wines.

Master of Wine Peter Scudamore Smith says the study is flawed because it was too limited.

"It used only a small selection of different cheeses and only paired them with red wine," Scudamore Smith says. "What it did prove was that wine and cheese pairing needs to be approached more carefully – any old table wine isn't going to go with every cheese."

Anecdotal evidence suggests that consumers still labour under the misconception that red wine should always be served with cheese, but Scudamore Smith says it should never be an automatic assumption. "Some cheeses are too delicate for red, and some, like a blue mould or washed rind, are too strong."

Chalk and Cheese retail manager Cameron Bacon agrees that there is still a lot of confusion. "There are so many conflicting opinions, it can be very challenging. While there are generally some guidelines we go by, trying to give a customer direction is a matter of establishing their own personal taste. Really, it's just trial and error."

According to Scudamore Smith, one of those guidelines is the search for balance. "With reds, you want something that will cut through the fat, but is not so drying on the tongue that it causes a tasting 'blind spot'. Basically you need to find wines that will not overpower the cheese or vice versa. Stronger cheeses need bigger, more tannic wines to match their intensity, while the more delicate the cheese the smaller number of wines you can choose from."

It takes time, but Scudamore Smith says with practise it becomes evident which are good matches.

CHEESE TIPS

ASK your bottle shop for wine and cheese recommendations.

Let your tastebuds be your guide. Experimentation is the key to finding out what appeals to you and what you don't like.

Ask for the cheesemonger's advice regarding the best/ripest cheese at the time.

Have one sensational cheese on a plate with the perfect wine and accompaniments, rather than clutter the palate with too many flavours.

Don't store cheese with meat or strong smelling vegetables (onion) as it will take on those flavours.

THE PERFECT CHEESE PLATTER

SOME people believe that less is more and offer only one or two cheeses. Others favour a wider choice.

Marcia Lewis from Rosalie Gourmet Market suggests the following to make the perfect cheese platter . . .

Brie: Such as a triple cream Fromage d'Affinois (France) or Jindi (Australia).

Blue: Roquefort (France) or Valdeon (Spain) or for the fainthearted a creamy Shadows of Blue (Australian)

Cheddar: Such as Ilchester Farmhouse or Quickes (English), Maffra Cloth Wrap (Australia) or Whitestone Totara (New Zealand).

Norris says these are the basic three but you could also include a wedge of aged sheeps milk cheese from Spain or New Zealand and some ashed goats cheese from Milawa or Woodside.

She recommends varying the size and shape of the cheeses and accompanying them with fruit pastes, like apple and quince from Tasmania which complement the flavour of the cheese. Fresh grapes or strawberries are also good for adding colour. Muscatels on the vine, candied clementines and saffron vanilla dried pears are other tempting additions.

TRIED AND TESTED FAVOURITES

Peter Scudamore Smith (MW)

"A very runny brie, Australian or French, and a great white burgundy (chardonnay)."

Brie/camembert: Try a dry chardonnay, chablis, or white burgundy

Washed rind: Botrytis white, Vin Santo, Amarone

Stilton/blue vein: Old fungal reds, fortifieds

Gruyere: Highly aromatic whites, pinot gris, Alsace, gewurztraminer

Cheddar: Riesling, never red as it clouds the flavours due to tannin block

Goats cheese: Piquant whites; wooded whites, pinot, beaujolais

Roquefort: Fortifieds, muscat, Spanish Pedro Ximenas

John Macdonald, Palatable Partners

Parmigiano reggiano: Good champagne.

Aged English farmhouse cheddar: Luscious South Australian shiraz.

Ripe Milawa Gold washed rind: Rutherglen muscat

Kervalla ash chevre: Cool-climate pinot noir

Tony Harper. Wine Emporium

"I love the zing of Roquefort and a 2001 Chateau de Fargues Sauterne."

Thierry Galichet, Montrachet Paddington

Roquefort or gorgonzola: Beaume de Venise

Babak Hadi, Black Pearl Epicure

Cropwell Bishop Stilton: Bortoli Noble One

Chris Ganzer, cheese maker, Kingaroy Cheese

Triple Cream Brie: "With a Ballandean Estates Sylvana and a cold night by the fire – you just can't beat it."

Cameron Bacon. Chalk and Cheese

Kingaroy Cheese's Bunya Black (ashed brie): "It goes beautifully with Stella Bella Pink Muscat from Margaret River, Western Australia."

CHEESE 101

WHAT is the best way to store cheese?

It depends on the variety. Fresh cheeses, such as ricotta and bocconcini will only keep for a few days and should be purchased for immediate use. Hard cheeses such as parmesan or cheddar will store for several weeks in the correct manner. Generally it's best to buy as needed and use within a few days. Cheese should be stored in cheese paper or foil in a separate airtight container in the warmest part of the fridge. (Narelle Tognini)

What should you look for in well-made cheese?

Predominantly, it should be creamy, with a clean aftertaste. Brie should be complex, with a rich mushroomy flavour. Fetta and softer styles should be slightly zingy or lemony (a technical term for balanced acid). The complete exception is washed rind. It will smell like old boots, but the flavour will be creamy with a long length, great with a Pinot. (Chris Ganzer)

At what temperature should you serve cheese?

Most cheese should be served at room temperature for optimal flavour – approximately 18-20C. However, during our very hot summer, one must be careful not to allow cheese to be exposed for a long time at room temp if it is over 30C. Ideally, in milder weather, take the cheese plate out about 20 minutes before you wish to eat. (Narelle Tognini)

When should we serve cheese?

In France they serve before dessert, in the UK and Australia it's usually the last thing served. I tend to serve it at the same time as dessert, so people have an alternative if they don't want sweets. (Narelle Tognini)

What's the difference between the cheeses such as brie you can buy at the supermarket and those from specialty cheese makers or delis?

The terminology used by cheese makers is that supermarket style cheese is "stabilised", which really is just the use of different cultures that help to maintain the texture consistently through the life of the cheese. The downside is there is limited flavour development so it can be pretty boring. Unstabilised cheeses will mature over an eight-week period and become softer and more flavoursome. (Chris Ganzer)

Can you freeze cheese?

You can freeze anything, but it's not highly recommended. Basically the thawing process will make the cheese lose moisture, so it will tend to be dry and crumbly and a texture that is quite different from when it went into the freezer. (Chris Ganzer)

How much cheese should you serve per person?

Use two or three different varieties of cheese, allowing approximately 80 grams per person in total. (Narelle Tognini)

What are good accompaniments for cheese?

Keep it simple and the flavours clean so the cheese is not overpowered. Fresh pear, quince paste, figs, grapes and candied cumquats are good. Serve with plain biscuits such as water crackers, falwassers, oat cakes and lavash. Fruit bread is good with blue cheese.

Narelle Tognini is co owner of Tognini's Delis.
Chris Ganzer is Cheesemaker at Kingaroy Cheese

INTRODUCTION

The old wine merchant's tenet is that when you buy wine, taste it with apples, as it will be at its worst, and sell wine when buyers taste it with cheese, as it will be at its best. What is it about wine and cheese that creates such a positive gastronomic response?

In its simplest role, wine acts to cleanse the palate. This occurs due to a basic "washing" action as well as increased saliva production caused by tannic wines and ethanol (alcohol). This cleansing process minimizes sensory fatigue. Alternating wine with food helps to freshen the palate for more wine.

Further, the fat, proteins, and acid inherent in cheese combine with acids and tannin in wine to soften the impact of acid, bitter, and astringent sensations that are typical of most

white and red wines. The dilution of alcohol when wine is consumed with food in general and cheese in particular is thought to promote the release of wine aromatics and create a more pleasant finish.

Despite these characteristics (or perhaps in part because of them), the main reason people consume wine and cheese together is that they enjoy the combination. Artisanal cheese makers and knowledgeable restaurateurs create an opportunity for us to maximize this enjoyment. The following description by Etienne Boissy of his experience in the French competition *Meilleur Ouvrier de France* provides an interesting example not only of the innovative process used in cheese production and service but also of pushing the envelope in a competitive environment.

Aperitif | Cheese, an Inspiration and an Education

Le Concours du Meilleur Ouvrier de France is an annual competition in France that has as its goal the search for professional excellence, bringing together individual performance and economic adaptation. The competition, whose name literally translates as "the contest of the best workmen in France," is a symbol of excellence and is held every three years, with over two hundred trades represented. Values that are rewarded in this contest include manual skills, intelligence, imagination, taste, technicality, courage, and perseverance.

The category of "trades of the mouth" includes cuisine, pastry, baking, and cheese. Etienne Boissy is the coordinator of pedagogy and a professor of table arts at the Paul Bocuse Institute near Lyon, France. He received a *Meilleur Ouvrier de France* award in cheese in 2004. For the competition, Etienne included a variety of cheeses made from cow's, goat's, or sheep's milk as well as a variety of styles (fresh, semisoft, hard, blue). Below he describes the theme and creative process he used to create his winning presentation for the competition.

"The competition that I won in order to become *Meilleur Ouvrier de France de Fromage* 2004 [Best Cheese Craftsman in France 2004] was based on the subject of time. What better theme is an invitation to think deeply about fine cheeses? It is this reflection about time that finally led me to create the cheese installation that ultimately became the winning entry.

"In order to imagine this winning structure, I turned first toward clock faces for inspiration and second toward the two materials insisted upon by the 2004 competition: beech wood and Plexiglas.

"When speaking of cheese and its history, time and the maturation process are key, given that, the period of maturation varies according to the type of cheese. It is both human factors and storage conditions that allow a cheese to assert itself owing to the lactic cultures, mold, fungi, and yeasts that form. The changes are apparent with each passing day: the color, the texture, the smell and the taste become stronger, the whole cheese develops toward excellence—over time. In thinking about time, I was aware that time and space have long been understood to be relative and, in a sense, unified. The solar system in which our planet moves situates the earth in a wider galaxy appropriately known as the Milky Way. This enormous Milky Way and all that it represents brings us to the heart of the subject: the ability of man to work in harmony with nature and her cycles in the transformation of milk into cheese during time.

“I chose to retain the materials imposed by the competition—beech wood and Plexiglas—in order to give the structure a contemporary design. The wood brings a certain warmth; its roughness and its natural aspect invites us to look back to a rural and natural past. The Plexiglas affords a certain luminosity and transparency. As the product of modernity, it sends us forward to the future. This juxtaposition is successful owing to the inherent contrast of elements such as can be found in various gastronomic partnerships today.

“In the past, tradition held that the earth was the center of the universe. Once created, the earth had to be organized into days, months, seasons, and years. The seasons, thereafter, are naturally associated with vegetation, nature, and life cycles, not least with regard to spring and the associated notion of rebirth.

“It was my intention to present the notion of renewal represented by the seasons in the context of cheese. In the display, each season was illustrated by a subtle change of color, by nature’s shifting symbols, and by appropriate extracts from the world of literature.

“As time passes, the tick-tock of the pendulum counts out the seconds. This idea of motion is illustrated by the presence at the center of the room of clock parts placed on a plinth that slowly turns clockwise. As cog wheels transmit their movement from one to the other, so we see a representation of the transmission of knowledge and know-how between generations of cheese producers. Finally, the notion of movement reaches its apogee in the form of a model solar system mounted at the top of the structure as a representation of the planets’ cycle in time around the sun.

“In order to illustrate time in a historical way, I have chosen to illustrate the passing of time via developments in the equipment used in the production of cheese, notably the changes in the manufacture of cheese vats during the centuries, be they pottery, wood, iron, aluminum, or plastic.

“Finally, as label holders for each cheese, I chose wood-base hourglasses, through which time passes slowly in homage to the best of my cheese samples. For the smaller cheese examples, I was inspired by antique pocket watches. On the label, besides the name of the cheese and its origin, is the duration of the maturation, which is stressed.

“Each of the three different colors of paper used to make the labels represent a different milk, be it cow’s, goat’s, or sheep’s.”

As you can see from this description, winning a competition of this stature requires substantial thought and planning in regard to not only the cheese but also additional elements that relate to its production, innovation, and ultimately enjoyment. The creative and innovative process can be inspiring and educational for all for the participants (including the competitors).

WINE AND CHEESE PAIRING

This chapter focuses on cheeses and pairing them with wine. Many people assume that all wines go with all cheeses—but do they? If this is not the case, do red wines taste better with most cheeses or do white wines? This chapter answers these questions by providing some basic guidelines in wine and cheese pairing and dividing cheeses into general categories that are relevant to overall wine-friendliness.

In many cases, wine and cheese have a couple of things in common that create a natural match. First, both are created by using a fermentation process. This process creates a variety of attributes in cheese that relate to their components, texture, and flavor. In cheese, this

Etienne Boissy is the coordinator of pedagogy and professor of table arts at the Paul Bocuse Institute. The description of the competition was written in collaboration with Yvelise Dentzer, professor of history and social psychology of the food at the Paul Bocuse Institute.

process may create a salty, tangy, sweet, or bitter product. The texture can vary from smooth and velvety to hard and crumbly. Cheese flavors vary substantially from mild to sharp, subtle to intense, grassy to spicy and pungent. These differences may be the result of either the fermentation and ripening process or the aging process, but usually involve both. A second similarity of wine and cheese is that they are both living things that change substantially during aging. These changes take place as they are aged (or not) by the producer as well as when they are in their final package waiting to be consumed. This situation creates wines and cheeses that range from fresh, young, and simple to aged, mature, and complex.

As with other foods, there are no hard-and-fast rules to pairing; much is based on personal preferences. A number of people believe that red wine goes best with cheese, but many wine professionals disagree with this assumption.¹ In two recent studies, the ideal match in wine and cheese pairing was put to the test. King and Cliff found that in general, white wines were judged as closest to an ideal match across a variety of cheeses.² Red wines and specialty wines such as ice wines, late-harvest wines, and ports were more difficult to match with a spectrum of artisanal cheeses. Harrington and Hammond tested the relationship between the elements of six wines (Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Merlot, and Cabernet) and the food elements of four types of cheeses (soft, firm, hard, and blue-veined). In their study, Pinot Noir was shown to be the most cheese-friendly of the reds, and an off-dry Riesling was the most cheese-friendly of the whites. The hard cheese (Gruyère) was the most wine-friendly of the four cheese types.³ A consistent finding across both studies was a substantial amount of variation in perceived level of match across the panel of trained judges—which supports the notion that personal preferences have a substantial impact on perceived level of match when tasting wine and cheeses.

Similar to the theory “red wine with meat and white wine with fish,” an old adage of wine and cheese pairing is that “red wines go with hard cheeses and white wines go with soft cheeses.”⁴ Just as there are exceptions to the “red wine with meat” rule, there are also exceptions to this rule. In her book *The New American Cheese*, Laura Werlin recommends white wines with a variety of artisanal cheeses produced in the United States. Some of her specific suggestions include:

- Pairing light white wines with light cheeses, such as goat’s or sheep’s milk cheeses with a Chenin Blanc
- Pairing high-acid white wines with high-acid cheeses, such as an aged chèvre with a cool-climate Sauvignon Blanc
- Pairing low-acid wines with lower-acid cheeses, such as a Gouda with a California Chardonnay
- Pairing strong wines with strong cheeses, such as aged cheddar with Syrah or Rhône reds
- Pairing dessert wines with strong, salty cheeses, such as blue-veined cheeses and Sauternes or Port⁵
- Pairing wines and cheeses from the same region

These rules are a good starting point, but cheeses and wines are constantly changing due to aging, vintage, and processing techniques. Therefore, our own judgments should be a guide through this maze of matching uncertainty. Fortunately, the natural affinity between most wines and cheeses allows a match to work most of the time, but additional experimentation will need to be done to achieve an ideal or synergistic match.

The main goal is to create a balance and harmony between the cheese and the wine. You should aim to create similar intensity levels, matches using interesting contrasts, and simple-to-simple or complex-to-complex relationships. There are several categories of cheese, and within these categories, styles can range from delicate to mushroomy to downright funky.⁶ The following wine and cheese suggestions range from very general to very specific and are intended to provide a variety of wine and cheese choices. This is particularly

valuable when serving a variety of cheeses on a cheese board. You can minimize any wine and cheese clashes when serving multiple cheeses by selecting a wine that is generally cheese-friendly, selecting cheeses that are generally wine-friendly, or selecting cheeses that are different styles but a good match with the wine being served.

One final note regarding wine and cheese has to do with serving temperature. As suggested earlier, cold temperatures can mask tastes and flavors from our senses. This is particularly true of cheeses. To fully enjoy the nuances in cheese, it is best served at room temperature. Second, be sure not to overchill your white wines. Lighter sweet wines are best served between 41 and 50°F (5–10°C); light and dry white wines should be served between 46 and 54°F (8–12°C).

CHEESE CATEGORIES

There are a number of ways to categorize cheeses, such as country of origin, type of milk used, aging or ripening procedure, fat content, and texture. For the purposes of wine and food pairing, it seems logical to create a classification scheme that maintains a (relatively) consistent focus on components (saltiness, sweetness, acidity, and bitterness), texture (fattiness and body/power), and flavor (intensity, persistence, and types). To achieve this, cheeses are classified as fresh, semisoft, soft ripened, firm, hard, or blue-veined.⁷

Each section discussing cheese categories includes a table that outlines some of the common cheeses by type along with descriptions of their texture, flavor, and color. The last column in each table provides some examples of wines that could be served successfully with these cheeses. Some cheeses have a wide range of wine possibilities and are very wine-friendly, while others are more limiting in pairing relationships, but please do not limit your possible wine selections to only these recommendations. The recommendations are intended to give you some examples, but you are encouraged to try any of the numerous other possibilities.

Fresh and Soft Cheeses Fresh cheeses are relatively mild and creamy and are neither cooked nor ripened (Table 12.1). These cheeses have a high moisture content, 40–80 percent, and should not taste overly acidic or bitter. Many fresh and soft cheeses are not intended to be served as part of a cheese course but instead are used as an ingredient in other cold or hot food items. Cottage cheese, cream cheese, fromage blanc, mascarpone, Neufchâtel, and ricotta usually fall into this category. Cheeses in this group usually can be matched effectively with lighter, dry to off-dry whites and some low-tannin, higher-acid reds. The level of match depends on the aging of the cheese and any flavorings that have been added to it. For instance, aged chèvre works well with a high-acid Sauvignon Blanc. In this match, the acidity levels cancel each other out and allow the creamy, sweet taste of the cheese to shine through. As you make each wine and cheese matching decision, consider the following questions: What are the key elements of the cheese (sharpness, tanginess, intensity, etc.)? What are the key elements of the wine (sweetness, acidity, tannin, body, intensity, etc.)? How will these interact? Is there a harmony between the two?

Semisoft Cheeses These cheeses, whose origin can generally be traced back to monasteries of the Middle Ages,⁸ include a variety of mild, buttery types that have a sliceable texture. The moisture content of this style of cheese ranges from 40 to 50 percent, and the cheeses can be mild to funky. This category provides a lot of versatility from a pairing perspective.

This group of cheeses retains a buttery flavor and, in many cases, takes on some nutty character. The texture is semisoft and in most cases not as pungent as other general styles. Semisoft cheeses are relatively wine-friendly as long as the wines do not overpower them.

Table 12.1 Examples of Fresh and Soft Cheeses

Type	Milk Used and Color	Components, Texture, and Flavors	Wine Suggestions
Boursin (France)	Cow's Cream to pale yellow, no rind	Triple-cream, smooth, creamy. Usually flavored with herbs, garlic, and pepper.	Dry white wines, such as Sancerre; fruity low-tannin reds such as Beaujolais, Lemberger.
Chèvre	Goat's White	Usually tangy (good acidity), soft to crumbly. May be flavored with ash, herbs, or peppercorns. When aged, it can be quite pungent and intense.	Sauvignon Blanc, Fumé Blanc, Pouilly-Fumé, Sancerre, Vouvray, Chablis, Beaujolais Cru, Pinot Noir.
Cottage	Cow's White	Mild, low salt, low tanginess, soft and moist.	A dry or off-dry white. Cottage cheese is rarely eaten on its own and the wine choice is likely to be determined by what accompanies it.
Cream	Cow's White	Mild, slightly tangy and slightly sweet, soft and creamy.	Cream cheese is rarely eaten on its own and can be part of savory or sweet food items. The wine choice will be determined by what accompanies it.
Feta	Sheep's, goat's or cow's White	Tangy and salty, soft and crumbly. Can have intensely sharp flavor.	Feta can be eaten by itself or as part of a food item. Try a dry Greek wine such as those made from the Muscat grape in regions such as Samos or Lemnos of the Aegean Islands. Or try some classic reds (Merlot or Bordeaux Rouge) or Manzanilla Sherry.
Fromage blanc	Cow's White	Mild and tangy, soft and slightly crumbly.	Used similarly to cream cheese.
Mascarpone	Cow's Pale yellow	Slight tanginess, soft and smooth, buttery.	Off-dry Champagne or sparkling wine, Moscato d'Asti, most dessert wines.
Montrachet	Goat's White	Slightly tangy, soft and creamy. Moderately intense with some pungency.	White or Red Burgundy, cool-climate Chardonnay or Pinot Noir.
Mozzarella	Cow's or buffalo's White	Mild, ranges from tender to elastic. Sometimes smoked.	New World Chardonnay, Gavi, young Barbera.
Neufchâtel	Cow's White	Slightly tangy, soft and creamy, mild.	Semi-dry Riesling, Fendant.
Queso Oaxaca	Cow's White	Mild, slightly tangy, and slightly salty. Smooth and semisoft with a stringy texture. Sometimes blended with herbs, spices or chiles.	If plain, the wine choice should be more subtle, such as dry white wine. If flavored with herbs or spices, it can be contrasted with an off-dry Riesling or create a similar match with a dry Alsace Riesling.
Ricotta	Cow's White	Mild, soft, ranges from moist to grainy.	Ricotta is not generally eaten by itself and can be part of both savory and dessert food items—wine choices will reflect this.

Table 12.2 Semisoft Cheese Examples

Type	Milk Used and Color	Components, Texture, and Flavor	Wine Suggestions
Bel Paese (Italy)	Cow's Light yellow	Mild and semisoft. A light, milky aroma, ranges from bland to buttery and young to earthy depending on the age.	As an appetizer, it works well with Chardonnay and fruity whites. It is also served as a dessert and goes with dried-grape and late-harvest dessert wines
Brick (U.S.)	Cow's Light yellow	Mild to moderately sharp depending on the age. Semifirm in texture, elastic.	New World Chardonnay.
Doux de Montagne (France)	Cow's Pale yellow interior with brown wax	Semisoft texture. Mellow, slightly sweet, buttery and nutty flavor. May be studded with green peppercorns.	Ales, light sparkling wines, dry rosé, Sancerre.
Edam (Netherlands)	Cow's Pale orange/yellow	Semisoft to firm with a smooth texture. Mellow and nutlike in flavor.	Riesling, dry sparkling wine, Pinot Noir.
Fontina (Italy)	Cow's or sheep's Medium yellow	Firm, elastic and smooth. A nutty flavor and strong aroma. May have a slightly grassy flavor.	Sangiovese, light fruity Pinot Noir, Pinot Grigio, Nebbiolo, Barolo, or Barbaresco.
Havarti (Denmark)	Cow's Medium yellow	Mild, creamy, and mellow. May be flavored with garlic and herb, dill, jalapeño, caraway, or chives.	Sauvignon Blanc, fruit-forward New World Merlot or Cabernet Sauvignon, red Bordeaux, Rioja.
Livarot (France)	Cow's Orange rind with golden yellow center	Semisoft, pungent, intense flavor and slightly piquant.	Tokaji, Pinot Gris from Alsace, Pinot Grigio, Riesling, young Bordeaux from the Pomerol district, New World Merlot.
Muenster (Germany)	Cow's Yellow-tan surface and cream-white interior	Mild to mellow, semisoft texture. May become more pungent with age.	Gewürztraminer, a variety of full-bodied reds, Beaujolais, Zinfandel, beer.
Port du Salut (France)	Cow's Creamy yellow with an orange rind	Ranges from mellow to robust and is semisoft, buttery and smooth.	Rosé sparkling wine or Cabernet Franc–based wines such as Bourgueil and Chinon from the Loire Valley in France.
Taleggio (Italy)	Cow's Light yellow	Creamy, semisoft texture that turns runny as it ages.	Vin Santo (Tuscany), young Merlot, dessert wines such as late-harvest Riesling or Sauternes.

As shown in Table 12.2, most of these cheeses can be served with many whites, reds, and dessert wines.

Soft Ripened Cheeses This category of cheese is ripened from the outside in. This cheese type can be very firm when young and turn soft and runny when mature or ripe. Double- and triple-cream versions can be described as “goosey.” The thin skins and creamy centers make these cheeses some of the most popular. The fat content ranges from 50 to 75 percent as a rule, but double-cream cheese has at least 60 percent fat content and

triple-cream has at least 75 percent. Soft ripened cheeses ripen quickly and are generally at their peak for just a few days.

Many of the cheeses in this group originate in France. It is difficult to truly appreciate the French passion for cheese. For the French, cheese is more than just a product—it also represents a region’s geography, climate, history, culture, and cuisine. In discussing the difficulties of governing France, the late President Charles de Gaulle expressed the regionalism and diversity of the French culture when he stated, “Nobody can simply bring together a country that has 265 cheeses.”⁹

The soft ripened cheeses have a texture that is smooth and rich. The flavors can be mild to intense depending on the aging process. Because of their sometimes gooey consis-

Table 12.3 Soft Ripened Cheese Examples

Type	Milk Used and Color	Components, Texture, and Flavor	Wine Suggestions
Boursault (France)	Cow’s Off-white	Rich and very creamy. Triple-cream is the consistency of thickened sour cream, slight acidity. Buttery, sweet, and slightly nutty flavor. Takes on the aroma of mushrooms as it ages.	Sparkling wines, Muscat, Riesling, Syrah/Shiraz, spicy Pinot Noir, ice wine.
Brie (France)	Cow’s or goat’s Pale yellow with white exterior	Soft and smooth. Buttery to pungent.	Blanc de Blancs Champagne, other sparkling wines, unoaked California Chardonnay, sweet Sherry, Merlot.
Brillat-Savarin (France)	Cow’s Gray-white exterior and light yellow interior	Triple-cream, rich.	Champagne, other sparkling wines, wines of Bordeaux, Fronsac, Saint-Emilion, red Burgundy.
Camembert (France)	Cow’s or goat’s Pale yellow with white exterior	Soft and creamy, slightly tangy. A slightly more robust flavor than Brie.	Rich aged Chardonnay, sparkling wines, Chenin Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon.
Limburger (German)	Cow’s Brown exterior with light yellow interior	Soft, smooth, and waxy. A very strong aroma, sharp, salty, and pungent.	Beer.
Pavé Affinois (France)	Cow’s Pale yellow interior, white-gray exterior	Smooth with runny texture, double-cream; slightly grassy finish.	Sauvignon Blanc, Sancerre.
Pont l’Evêque (France)	Cow’s Pale yellow color with a white-orange rind	Rich and soft cheese with full-bodied flavor and intensity; slightly piquant.	Merlot with deep and dark fruit flavors, Pinot Noir, reds from Pomerol or Saint-Emilion, late-harvest Riesling, Sauternes.
Saint-André (France)	Cow’s White exterior with pale yellow interior	Triple-cream, rich, smooth, and buttery.	Champagne, other sparkling wines.

tency, the cheeses in this group have a tendency to coat the mouth. The classic match for these cheeses is Champagne. The high acidity and bubbles in Champagne refresh the palate and cut through the fat of these cheeses. In addition to Champagne and other sparklers, these cheeses can be successfully matched with regional red wines and some dessert wines.

Firm Cheeses This category of cheese is probably the most wine-friendly. Similar to classic wine styles, these cheeses generally have subtlety, a refined texture, and a pleasant, lingering finish (persistence). They vary in their degree of mildness or sharpness depending

Table 12.4 Firm Cheese Examples

Type	Milk Used and Color	Components, Texture, and Flavor	Wine Suggestions
Cantal (France)	Cow's Light yellow	Mild to sharp with a slight nutty flavor. Hard texture.	Red French Burgundy, Oregon Pinot Noir.
Cheddar (England)	Cow's White to medium yellow /orange	Hard texture, mild to sharp.	Mild: Champagne, other sparkling wines, Chardonnay. Sharp: dark beer, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet/Shiraz blend, Rioja, Ruby, Tawny, or Vintage Port, Sauvignon Blanc.
Cheshire (England)	Cow's Light to medium yellow, sometimes with blue marbling	Hard texture and mellow to piquant. Tangy with a crumbly texture.	Riesling, ale, Cabernet Sauvignon.
Double Gloucester (England)	Cow's Yellow/orange	Firm texture. Smooth, creamy, and full-flavored.	Ice wines, other syrupy dessert wines.
Emmenthal (Switzerland)	Cow's Pale yellow	Hard texture, mild flavor, smooth, slightly sweet and nutty.	Beaujolais, Châteauneuf-du-Pape.
Gjetost (Norway)	Cow's or goat's Pale brown	Hard texture, slightly tangy, sweetish, buttery, and caramelly.	Lightly oaked Chardonnay.
Gouda	Cow's Pale yellow	Firm texture, smooth, mild, creamy, and slightly nutty.	Riesling ice wine, late-harvest dessert wines, older Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel.
Gruyère (Switzerland)	Cow's Pale yellow or tan	Hard texture, full-flavored, with sweet nuttiness.	Côtes du Rhône, Syrah, Champagne, Fino Sherry, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc.
Jarlsberg	Cow's Pale yellow	Hard texture, sharp and nutty flavor.	Light reds such as Lemberger, a variety of whites.
Manchego (Spain)	Sheep's Light yellow	Elastic to hard texture. Mellow but persistent.	Older Spanish Ribera del Duero, Amontillado Sherry, Rioja, Merlot.
Provolone (Italy)	Cow's Pale yellow or brown	Elastic to hard, salty, mild to sharp flavor. May be smoked.	Chianti, Chianti Riserva, Syrah, Barolo, Chardonnay.
Zamarano (Spain)	Sheep's Yellow interior	Firm to hard texture, nutty and flavorful.	Aged Sherry, Rioja, Sangria.

on the aging process. The flavor of these cheeses can range from nutty in cheeses such as Cantal or Jarlsberg to buttery and caramel in cheeses such as Gjetost.

Cheddars are very adaptable with wines. Much of the match will be based on level of sharpness—mild cheddars with light wines and sharp cheddars with full-bodied wines. Gruyère, Jarlsberg, and Gouda are also very wine-friendly in this group.

Hard Cheeses This group is sometimes referred to as the “grating cheeses,” and they owe their flavor to extended periods of aging. The moisture content in these cheeses is around 30 percent. The most famous hard cheeses are from Italy (Parmigiano Reggiano, Asiago, Romano, etc.) and can be served as a part of a cheese board, with a salad, or grated and used as an ingredient to finish pasta and other dishes. The texture of these cheeses is hard and many times granular and crumbly. Flavors vary but are usually sharp, nutty, pungent, and piquant. The wine suggestions are a mix of regional white and red wines from Italy. The hard cheeses are very wine-friendly and versatile.

Blue-Veined Cheeses This group, with its distinctive appearance, smell, and taste, has a tendency to be quite pungent and salty compared to other cheese categories. This has a strong impact on wine pairing decisions.

The molds of *Penicillium roqueforti* or *Penicillium glaucum* create the variegated blue-green appearance in blue, Roquefort, Gorgonzola, and Stilton cheeses. During the curing process, the cheese curds are inoculated with pure cultures of these molds, which penetrate the interior of the cheese, creating a unique appearance, flavor, and aroma.¹⁰

Classic matches pair many blue-veined cheeses with fortified and dessert wines. Sauternes and Roquefort is a classic marriage, as is vintage Port and Stilton. These full-bodied and sweet wines complement the full-bodied cheeses and contrast the salty and peppery elements in the cheese with the sweet elements in the wine. Gorgonzola is sharp and peppery and matches well with a classic Amarone. Danish Blue Castello has a softer texture and goes surprisingly well with lighter white wines such as Chenin Blanc and even an off-dry Riesling. Maytag Blue is a famous Wisconsin cheese that can be successfully paired with light and simple white wines such as Austrian Grüner-Veltliner as well as full-bodied dessert wines such as Madeira.

Table 12.5 Hard Cheese Examples

Type	Milk Used and Color	Components, Texture, and Flavor	Wine Suggestions
Asiago (Italy)	Cow's Pale yellow	Semisoft to hard texture, mild to sharp flavor.	Pinot Grigio, Tocai Friulano, dry rosé.
Parmigiano-Reggiano (Italy)	Cow's Pale yellow	Hard and granular texture. Sharp and nutty flavor.	Nebbiolo, Barolo, Barbaresco, Barbera.
Pecorino (Italy)	Sheep's Pale yellow	Hard, dry, and crumbly texture. Very sharp flavor.	Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, a variety of whites and medium-bodied reds such as Barbera.
Ricotta Salata (Italy)	Sheep's Cream-white	Hard texture and pungent.	Medium-bodied crisp and dry whites, Frascati.
Romano (Italy)	Cow's, sheep's, or goat's Creamy white	Hard granular texture and a sharp piquant flavor.	Chianti, Chianti Riserva.

Table 12.6 Blue-Veined Cheese Examples

Type	Milk Used and Color	Components, Texture, and Flavor	Wine Suggestions
Blue (Bleu) (France)	Cow's White interior with blue streaks	Semisoft texture, sometimes crumbly, tangy and peppery.	Tawny Port, Madeira, Sherry.
Cambrazzola (German)	Cow's Light yellow interior with blue marbling	Semisoft and fairly smooth texture. Buttery, tangy, and peppery. A cross of Camembert and Gorgonzola.	New World Merlot, Italian Sangiovese, Chardonnay.
Blue Castello (Danish)	Cow's Creamy white with blue marbling	Semisoft texture. Strong, sharp, rich, buttery and mushroomy flavors.	Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling.
Gorgonzola (Italy)	Cow's Creamy white interior with blue-green veins	Semisoft texture, pasty, tangy, sharp and peppery.	Amarone, any big Italian red.
Maytag Blue (U.S.)	Cow's Yellow with blue streaks	Hard and crumbly texture. Strong flavor and salty.	Allegrini Recioto, Austrian Grüner-Veltliner, Madeira.
Oregonzola (U.S.)	Cow's Creamy white with blue- green veins	Semisoft texture, creamy and buttery. Sharp and tangy with fruity characteristics.	Syrah, Pinot Noir, buttery Chardonnay, full-bodied Champagne or sparkling wine.
Roquefort (France)	Sheep's Creamy white interior, blue marbling	Semisoft and crumbly texture. Sharp, pungent, and slightly peppery.	Sauternes.
Stilton (England)	Cow's Creamy white with blue- green streaks	Semisoft texture and more flaky than blue. Piquant and milder than either Gorgonzola or Roquefort.	Vintage Port.

SUMMARY

This chapter provides a detailed description of the categories within the exciting world of cheeses and wines that match them. As you might imagine, an entire book could easily be written on the variety of cheeses around the world. This chapter focused on the most prominent cheese types and the wine and food pairing principles that tie them together. This format provides you with tools that can be used in making pairing decisions in the future.

Wine and cheese have two main things in common that help to create a natural match: both are created by a fermentation process, and both are living things that change substantially during the process of aging. As with other foods, there are no hard-and-fast rules to pairing wine with cheese; much is based on personal preferences. Cheeses can be categorized by a number of characteristics that impact its elements, such as country of origin, type of milk used, aging or ripening procedure used, fat content, and texture. Cheeses are classified here into six main categories: fresh, semisoft, soft ripened, firm, hard, or blue-veined. This classification scheme is consistent with the various components (saltiness, sweetness, acidity, and

bitterness), texture (fattiness and body/power), and flavor (intensity, persistence, and types), and provides guidelines for satisfying food-and-wine pairing decisions.

The adage that red wines go with hard cheeses and white wines with soft cheeses has a number of exceptions. Some additional guidelines for wine and cheese pairing include pairing light white wines with light cheeses, pairing high-acid white wines with high-acid cheeses, pairing low-acid wines with lower-acid cheeses, pairing strong wines with strong cheeses, pairing dessert wines with strong salty cheeses, and pairing wines and cheeses from the same region. However, constant changes in cheeses and wines due to aging, vintage, and processing techniques will affect the quality of each match. Therefore, these rules provide a good starting point for determining good matches, but your own judgment should also help guide you. Basically, the common thread in all of these guidelines is to create balance and harmony between the cheese and the wine: similar intensity levels, matching using interesting contrasts, and similarity relationships such as simple-to-simple or complex-to-complex.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the six categories of cheese?
2. Describe the typical wine styles that are appropriate for each cheese category.
3. What types of cheeses are easiest to pair with wine?
4. What cheese elements limit wine choices?

EXERCISE 12.1

WINE AND CHEESE MATCHING

For this exercise, you may select cheeses or wines from the list in Table 12.8 or you can make additional selections to suit your interests if you wish to expand the exercise. Use the Food Sensory Anchor Scale (Figure B.1) and Wine Sensory Anchor Scale (Figure B.2) to create basic reference points for the components, texture, and flavor when using the Wine and Food Pairing Instrument.

OBJECTIVES

To distinguish and rank differing levels of elements in each cheese and wine sample; to compare wine and cheese profiles to predict match level, and then do a mixed tasting to determine the perceived level of match.

Mise en Place: Things to Do Before the Exercise Review Figures 11.2a-c and Figure 11.4. Ensure that the cheese and wines are served at the optimal tasting temperatures.

CHAPTER 13

THE GRAND FINALE: DESSERT AND DESSERT WINES

CHAPTER OUTLINE:

Introduction
Aperitif: Niagara's Wine Region
Dessert Wine Categories
Dessert Selection and Wine Pairing
Dessert Categories
Summary
Exercises

KEY CONCEPTS:

- Ice wines
- VQA
- Botrytized wines
- Noble rot
- Ports
- Sherries
- Marsala, Madeira, and Muscats
- Balance and harmony between wine and cheese
- Beware of excessive levels of sweetness, richness, bitterness, or acidity in desserts
- The impact of fruit type: berries, orchard, citrus, tropical, and dried

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on desserts, dessert wines, and the associated pairing principles. Extravagant desserts and opulent dessert wines can provide some of the most memorable dining experiences.

The opening Aperitif highlights the Niagara wine region in Ontario, Canada. This region features a unique mesoclimate

and has a reputation for the variety of quality wines and foods it has to offer. Jeff Stewart, professor and coordinator of the tourism programs at Niagara College, shares his thoughts on changes that have taken place in the region and ideas on how food and wine can be integrated not only across a particular program but also across an entire college.

Aperitif | Niagara's Wine Region

The Niagara wine region has seen vast change and growth in the last twenty years. With over a hundred wineries, it is still growing, and the region's humble beginnings bear little resemblance to its current reputation for wines of high quality. Longtime residents of the region will remember famous brand names such as Baby Duck, Brights' President, and even Jordan Sherry, made mostly from *Vitis labrusca* grapes such as the Concord and the regional namesake grape, the Niagara. The Niagara wine industry's reputation for providing "foxy" wines has been replaced with a reputation for producing quality vinifera wines, and the famous brand names of the past have been replaced by names such as Inniskillin, Cave Spring, Stratus, Hillebrand, and Malivoire.



Vineyards at Niagara College Teaching Winery, Niagara, Ontario (courtesy of Niagara College).

Several factors caused the shift from quantity to quality production in the Niagara wine region. In the early 1980s, European *Vitis vinifera* grape plantings, pioneered by the Inniskillin Winery and Donald Ziraldo, were viewed with skepticism because of the Canadian climate. The introduction of the Vintner's Quality Alliance (VQA) system, which is similar to other European quality control systems such as the AOC and DOCG, also assisted in this transition, albeit much later. Ontario was acknowledged for its wine quality for the first time at the 1991 Vinexpo in Bordeaux, France, when a 1989 Inniskillin ice wine stole the show and helped to put Canadian and Niagara wines on the map. The acknowledgement of Inniskillin ice wine gave Canadian wines, and more specifically Niagara wines, the

clout they needed to be recognized throughout the world.

Ice wine is not unique to Canada. To make ice wine (or, as the Germans call it, Eiswein), grapes are left long after harvest to freeze on the vines. Once frozen solid to a temperature of at least -10°C (about 14°F), the grapes are picked and crushed while still hard as marbles. The tiny bit of juice rendered from the delicately preserved extra-late-harvest fruits is so concentrated and so sweet that it is more like syrup than juice. In Canada, the minimum sweetness at the time of harvest must be 40° Brix to be officially called ice wine. The original ice wines in Niagara were made from German grapes such as Riesling and hybrids such as Vidal, but as techniques evolved, new varieties came to be used, including Gewürztraminer and even red grapes such as Cabernet Franc, which has a distinctly strawberry aroma. These ultra-premium, elixir-like wines accordingly carry high prices.

One advantage of planting vinifera in Canada versus other vinifera growing regions is that without exception, Canada is guaranteed to have winter temperatures cold enough to allow for a successful harvest of ice wine grapes. As a result, Niagara ice wines are available to consumers on a consistent basis. In more

temperate regions, if the temperature is too warm, the grapes will not freeze completely or, even worse, they will rot on the vine, falling prey to molds, mildews, and volatile acidity that make the grapes unusable.

Aside from its production of ice wine, the Niagara wine region has also become famous for its other wine products and unique wineries. Canada's first and only college with its own self-contained vineyard and winery is Niagara College, which includes the Niagara College Teaching Winery (NCTW) (see www.niagarac.on.ca). The first NCTW vintage in 2000 was released with much fanfare and was the first of many vintages that helped to build their reputation for producing quality wines. With their 2000 barrel-fermented and aged Chardonnay, described by critics with compelling adjectives such as *complex*, *vanilla*, *creamy*, *toasty*, and *tropical*, it is no wonder Niagara College is making a name for itself.

Beyond the winery at Niagara College, the philosophy of this institution is one of integration, much like the nature of the wine and hospitality business. The college boasts a fifty-acre vineyard, a complete winery, greenhouses, gardens, culinary labs, a fine-dining restaurant, and technologically advanced classrooms.

"The idea is simple synergy," says Jeff Stewart, professor and coordinator of the tourism programs at Niagara College. "The sum of the parts is almost always greater than those parts taken individually, so what has been created here is not just a mini-business or series of businesses but a mini-economy. Understanding the interconnectedness of these businesses is only one part of what we do here that makes us unique.

"A world-class food-and-wine pairing is not as simple as just having two flavors that work well together. To be truly world-class, it involves the coordination of many entities that may appear to be only slightly related, but which when brought together create something that is truly unique, pleasing to all the senses. . . . The vision at Niagara College is learning through the complete supply chain, or 'farm gate to consumer plate.' This unique learning opportunity is being conceptualized, experienced, and managed by both the students and faculty," says Stewart.

The synergistic concept he describes is evident in the integrated approach on Niagara College's campus. Horticulture students are working in the college greenhouses and landscaping the campus grounds and gardens. Their herbs, lettuces, and flowers from their brand-new Chef Gardens are used in the college's fine-dining restaurant at the School of Hospitality and Tourism. Winery and viticulture students study, experiment, and work in the college vineyard and produce up to five thousand cases of wine annually in the winery, as well as running the retail store and tasting bar. Their wines are also the cornerstone of the wine list in the fine-dining restaurant. The School of Hospitality and Tourism has a newly created four-year bachelor's degree in hospitality operations, two-year management diplomas in culinary arts, hotel and restaurant management, and tourism, and one-year certificate programs in chef training, special events, and hospitality and tourism. Niagara College truly brings something unique to education that demonstrates the complex nature of the business world.

Jeff suggests you try a true Niagara Classic, the Ice Wine Sparkler, for your next special occasion. "Combine your favorite glass of dry (brut) sparkling wine, preferably from Niagara, with a ½ oz dosage of Niagara ice wine added at the end. Pairing ice wine with food can be a challenge, as ice wine with its sweetness and wonderful aromas can be difficult to pair with anything other than rich dishes such as foie gras or opulently sweet desserts. The ice wine sparkler still allows you to enjoy the smells and tastes of ice wine but with a nice amount of crisp acidity from the bubbly. The added effervescence allows for more interesting texture and feel on the palate. All by itself, an ice wine sparkler is a world-class combination, but think of the options for food-and-wine pairing. What would you match with it?"

DESSERT WINE CATEGORIES

The dessert wine category is an area that contains some of the most opulent wines made. This category of wines can be divided into several different types. One type is sparkling

Jeff Stewart is a professor in the School of Hospitality and Tourism at Niagara College, where he is also coordinator of the tourism programs. A Canadian native, he is a well-respected chef and wine educator.

wine that can be served with desserts. Sparkling wines were discussed in depth in Chapter 6 and therefore will not be covered in any great detail in the dessert wine section of this chapter. They are included where appropriate in the sections on desserts and wine pairing.

There is a wide range of dessert wines produced in regions all over the globe. The discussion here only scratches the surface of this wine category, but it provides a good framework for categorizing dessert wines regardless of where they are produced. General categories include frozen-grape wines, late-harvest wines, dried-grape wines, and fortified wines.¹ However, you will notice that dessert wines are also created by combining two or more of these techniques.

Frozen-Grape Wines As discussed in the Aperitif, the traditional frozen-grape wine is created by leaving the grapes on the vine until they are frozen, then picking and pressing them while still frozen. Because the grapes have been left on the vine for a longer period (reducing the water content and increasing the sugar content) and a lot of the water is left behind as ice when they are pressed, the remaining juice is exceptionally sweet, with concentrated flavors.

Classic examples of wines made using this frozen process are German Eiswein and Canadian ice wine. Ice wine and other frozen wines are also produced in the United States (mainly in northern areas such as Washington, Idaho, Ohio, and New York) and in the colder locations of New Zealand. In Germany, Canada and Austria, the grapes are required to be frozen naturally;² Some ice wine producers in other regions, such as Oregon, California, and warmer areas of New Zealand, create ice wines by placing grapes in the freezer prior to pressing. This process, referred to as cryoextraction (mechanical freezing), is more reliable and less expensive, but it is considered “cheating” by ice wine purists and generally results in wines of a lower quality. Frozen wines produced in this manner cannot be labeled as ice wine; rather, they are labeled using a variety of terms such as *iced wine*, *vino gelato*, *cryo-cluster*, *frostbite*, and *vin de glacière*.

Table 13.1 provides a list of typical regions that produce frozen-grape wines. The standard grape typically used for frozen-grape wines varies by region. The classic grape is

Table 13.1 Frozen Grape Examples

Primary Regions	Primary Grapes	Typical Producers
Canada—Niagara (over 90% of Canada’s ice wine is produced in Ontario) and Okanagan	Vidal Blanc, Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Cabernet Franc	<i>Ontario:</i> Château des Charmes, Henry of Pelham, Kittling Ridge, Pillitteri, Reif Estates <i>Okanagan:</i> Gehringer Brothers Estate <i>Both Ontario and Okanagan:</i> Inniskillin, Jackson-Triggs
Pacific Northwest—Washington, Oregon, and Idaho	Chenin Blanc, Gewürztraminer, Riesling, Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir	<i>Oregon:</i> Argyle, King Estate, Ponzi Vineyards <i>Washington:</i> Chateau Ste. Michelle, Covey Run, Kiona, L’Ecole No. 41, Preston, Terra Blanca <i>Idaho:</i> Sawtooth Winery
Ohio and New York	Vidal Blanc, Riesling	<i>Ohio:</i> Chalet Debonne, Ferrante, Firelands, Heineman <i>New York:</i> Hunt Country, Wagner.
Germany (mainly from the Rhine and Mosel Valleys)	Riesling, Huxelrebe	Helenenkloster, Selbach-Oster
Austria	Bouvier, Blaufränkisch (also known as Lemberger), Gewürztraminer, Grüner-Veltliner	Heiss Winery, Gsellmann and Gsellmann Winery
New Zealand	Riesling, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc	Brightwater Vineyards, Mission Estate, Nobilo, Selaks

Riesling, which is used predominately in German Eiswein. The majority of grapes used in frozen-grape wines are white, while a much smaller proportion are created from Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir, and even Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. Wines made from white grapes range in color from straw yellow to deep amber. The red varieties range from a pink color (similar to rosé) to a light burgundy.

A quality ice wine retains the character of the grape, with crisp acidity to balance the sweetness and awaken the palate. Without high acidity, ice wines taste cloyingly sweet and dead on the palate. Locally, Canadian ice wine is described as “winter’s gift to wine.”³ The temperature must drop well below freezing for the grapes to be picked, a process that is usually done by hand, mainly at night. The nectar that is pressed from these frozen nuggets is then fermented very slowly for several months. The resulting wines are outstandingly rich and of high quality.

The mark of a good frozen-grape wine is that it creates a balance between substantial sweetness and brilliant acidity along with a clean finish. Frozen wine flavors may include tropical fruits, lychee nuts, apricot, peach, mango, melon, or other sweet fruits as well as honey, fig, nuts, and sweet spices, depending on the climate, soil, grape, and process used. Recent research provides evidence that not all ice wines are created equal and that there are substantial sensory differences among German Eiswein, Ontario ice wine, and Okanagan ice wine. In this scientific study, German ice wines had the highest acidity and a nutty/oily character. Ontario ice wines had the highest fruity and floral aromas and a golden copper color. Okanagan ice wines were sweeter and had a stronger body and a more intense after-taste.⁴

Late-Harvest Wines Late-harvest grapes can be used to produce dessert wines as well. Leaving the grapes on the vine past the normal harvest period creates grapes that are riper, higher in sugar content, and lower in moisture content. These late-harvest grapes may also turn into raisins; get attacked by mold, or both. As grapes shrivel on the vine, they become richer and sweeter. The resulting wine tastes stronger, is sweeter, and may have flavors of dried fruits.

Late-harvest grapes that have been attacked by a mold called *Botrytis cinerea* have a pleasant taste often described as honeyed or mushroomy. Often referred to as “noble rot,” it is called *Edelfäule* in Germany and *pourriture noble* in France. The botrytis mold shrivels the grapes into raisins, increasing the sweetness levels and concentrating the flavors and texture. Ultimately, this process alters the grapes’ acid balance, creates a syrupy texture, and imparts a honeyed or mushroomy flavor. (It is important to note that mold can be disastrous to a vineyard, destroying part or the entire crop, if it is not achieved under the right conditions.)⁵

Late-harvest wines are most frequently achieved in cool and moderate climates. Growing conditions that provide fair weather, temperate days, and cool nights well after the main harvest period are ideal. For the noble rot to take place, the grapes must remain dry during this period except when they receive moisture from the morning dew. These conditions encourage the growth of the botrytis mold. Most wine-growing regions have a few areas where conditions for growth of the noble rot are favorable, but the most famous locations are in Germany and France. The most notable regions in France include Bordeaux, the Loire Valley, and Alsace. The districts in Bordeaux that excel in sweet wine are prone to these autumnal mists and have soils with high mineral content. Bordeaux subdistricts known for producing these late-harvest wines include Barsac, Cérons, Sauternes, and Ste-Croix-du-Mont. Germany’s most notable regions that produce late-harvest wines include Nahe, Mosel, and Rhine. Late-harvest wines are also available from Austria and Hungary as well as New World countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Hungarian Tokaji is an especially famous late-harvest wine that gets its character from noble rot. Tokaji is rated by the amount of botrytis-affected grapes used to make the wine; it can range from 3 to 6 *puttonyos* (the number of 20-liter containers of botrytis grapes used to make the wine).⁶ The sweetest and richest is Tokaji Eszencia.

Some grapes are more susceptible to the mold than others due to their thin skins and tight grape clusters that retain more moisture. The most susceptible varieties include Chenin Blanc, Riesling, Zinfandel, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Sauvignon Blanc. Moderately susceptible grapes are French Colombard, Gewürztraminer, and Sémillon. Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are some of the least susceptible. It should be noted that while some red grapes are susceptible to the botrytis infection, essentially, all grape varieties used in production of botrytized wines are white varieties. Using white varieties avoids the brown coloration in wine from infected red grapes. When found, the red grapes are either rejected in the field or later in the winery through a process of inspection and sorting.

Late-harvest wines may use grapes with some incidence of botrytis in them, use only affected fruit, or use only affected fruit with some fully raisined. While there is not a nationwide agreement on label terms for late-harvest wines in the United States, winemakers have developed some recommended industry standards. In the United States, wines that use some affected fruit are generally termed “late harvest” and are similar to Spätlese and Auslese wines in Germany (residual sugar content less than 11.5 percent). U.S. wines that use only affected fruit may be termed “select late harvest” and are similar to German Auslese and Beerenauslese wines (residual sugar usually between 11.5 percent and 15 percent). U.S. wines labeled “special select late harvest” use all affected fruit with some of the fruit raisined and are similar to German Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese (residual sugar usually more than 15 percent).⁸

Dried-Grape Wines Many wine-growing regions use a planned “raisining” approach to achieve results similar to those that take advantage of noble rot or freezing. In the raisining approach, grapes are harvested, then allowed to dry under controlled conditions. A typical method is to dry the grapes over straw mats or screens. Italy’s *passito* wines are prepared this way, as are *Strohwein* in Germany and *vin de paille* in France (the last two names both mean “straw wine”). Other common dried-grape wines include Greece’s Muscats, dessert wines of southern France, Tuscany’s Vin Santo (for which clusters of grapes are hung to dry), and some Australian dessert wines. Beginning in the 1950s, California winemakers Myron and Alice Nightingale developed a process to induce the botrytis mold in harvested grapes that were spread on drying trays. They inoculated the drying fruit with botrytis spores and simulated an environment required for noble rot to attack successfully.

Not all dried-grape wines are sweet. A classic example is Amarone della Valpolicella (Amarone for short) from the Venetian region of Italy. There are two subgroups in this Italian category: Recioto (a sweet dessert wine) and Amarone (a dry, full-bodied red wine). Both of these wines are made with grapes that have been dried on racks to intensify their flavor. Recioto and Amarone wine are made from the Corvina Veronese, Rondinella, and Molinara grapes. Amarone is one of the most popular wines in Italy, with sales behind only Chianti, Asti, and Soave. The term *amarone* is said to mean “bitter” in Italian, and while some types of Amarone can be bitter, many are very fruity in flavor. Usually, the wine has flavors such as licorice, tobacco, and dried fig. This full-bodied wine goes particularly well with game and ripe cheese.

Table 13.2 provides a few examples and descriptions of some of these dried-grape wines. The examples provided are from the Old World, but New World producers create these wines as well.

Fortified Wines Fortified wines are strengthened with the addition of wine spirits. Generally, a neutral grape brandy is made by distilling wine to concentrate the level of alcohol. The neutral brandy is added to the wine before the fermentation process is complete. The additional alcohol halts fermentation, and the remaining sugar offers a sweet taste in the finished fortified product. The taste of fortified wines is a vivid sweetness of the ripe grapes along with a full-bodied texture from the added alcohol and tannin if red grapes are used.

The tradition of fortifying wines comes from areas of hot climates, where it originated to preserve the wine while shipping it to England. Countries such as Spain, Italy, and Por-

Table 13.2 Dried Grape Wine Examples

Country	Regions	Wine & Type	Primary Grape(s)	Characteristics
Italy	Veneto	Amarone Red table wine	Corvina, Rondinella, Molinara	Big, full-bodied with high alcohol (15–16 percent), oak aged. Port-like body with bitter chocolate, dried fig, mocha, and earthy flavors.
Italy	Veneto	Recioto di Soave Dessert wine (sparkling and fortified versions are available)	Garganega, Trebbiano	Rich and syrupy.
Italy	Sicily and Piedmont	Moscato di Pantelleria Passito and Moscato Passito White dessert wine (available sparkling)	Moscato (Muscat)	Honeyed with grapey fruit flavors balanced by clean acidity and fragrant floral aromas.
Italy	Tuscany, Umbria, Veneto and Friuli-Venezia-Giulia	Vin Santo	Tuscany: Trebbiano Toscano, Malvasia, and Canaiolo are most common, followed by Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Merlot. Veneto: Garganega and Gambellara	Generally sweet but some are off-dry or dry. Viscous texture, high alcohol, smooth, and intensely flavored.
France	Côtes du Jura	Vin de Paille	Jura: Chardonnay and Savagnin	Honeyed flavors, sweet, medium-bodied, dried exotic fruits, and balanced acidity.
Austria	Burgenland	Strohwein	Grüner Veltliner, Muller Thurgau, Blaufränkisch	Full-bodied, sweet and good acidity. Typical examples using Grüner Veltliner, Muller Thurgau grapes have flavors of nectarines, apricots, and sweet spices. Blaufränkisch (Lemberger) is a red grape and provides a cleansing, slightly astringent finish.
Greece	Santorini	Visanto Dessert wine	White and red Mandilaria	This can be aged for up to 20 years before being released and have characteristics similar to a Tawny Port. Or it can be aged 3–4 years and have rich and complex character.
Greece	Samos	Samos Nectar Dessert wine	Muscat	Sweet with balanced acidity and alcohol. Complex with interesting flavors.

tugal have a long tradition of producing fortified wines. Adding wine spirits make fortified wines microbiologically stable, preserving them for transport, and also protecting them from exposure to air. Fortified wines have distinct styles, including Port, Sherry, Madeira, and Marsala. More recently, many New World locations have been making wines modeled after these Old World wines. Australia, South Africa, California, Washington, Oregon, and Florida are known for their versions of these classic fortified wines.

Port originally comes from Portugal and is named for the city of Oporto there. Within the Port category, there are three major styles: Ruby, Tawny, and Vintage. Ruby and Tawny are ready to drink when they are released. Vintage Port is intended to be aged in the bottle for twenty or more years before drinking. Ruby Port is bright red in color, fruity, and young, with a rich, sweet taste. Tawny Port is brick red to brown in color and is less fruity with more oakiness. It comes in several varieties and ages with rich, sweet, and full-bodied tastes

and textures. Vintage Port has been aged in neutral oak barrels for two to four years prior to bottling and is deep red and fruity when released. Vintage Port is a classic after-dinner drink that is intended to be savored. Port is also made using white grapes, in which case it is known as White Port. White Port ranges from dry through off-dry to sweet and is usually served chilled as an aperitif or after dinner (if it is the sweet style).

Sherry is traditionally produced in Spain and has the defining characteristic of being deliberately oxidized. There are two basic types: Fino and Oloroso. Yeast is used in the production of Fino Sherry and gives it a distinct bouquet. Manzanilla and Amontillado Sherries are variations of the Fino type. Manzanillas are dry, pale yellow in color, and crisp and apple-like. They are frequently enjoyed with seafood and are great to use as an ingredient in the preparation of seafood dishes. Amontillados are aged longer than other Finos and have a darker color, supply more toasted flavor, and are less pungent. They are light brown in color and range from dry to medium-sweet.

Oloroso Sherry is oxidized without yeast. It is generally sweet, dark brown, elegant, and complex. Currently, Spanish Olorosos provide some of the great fine wine bargains. They are intended to be sipped after dinner with toasted nuts and salty cheeses. A sweet Sherry that falls within the Oloroso group is Pedro Ximénez (PX) Sherry. This dessert Sherry is made from the Pedro Ximénez grape, and it is often sweet, dark, and dense. The grape can also be used to slightly sweeten dry Sherries; it is served dry as an aperitif as well.

A substantial amount of Sherry is produced in California. Most of these Sherries fall somewhere between the flavor and color extremes of Spanish Fino and Oloroso Sherries. They range from light-colored and nutty to richer, darker, and toasted. California Sherries have three general sweetness levels: dry (1–2.5 percent residual sugar), medium (2.5–3.5 percent residual sugar), and cream (7.5–10 percent residual sugar). Inexpensive wines generically labeled as Sherry, Marsala, and Madeira have little resemblance to those produced using traditional techniques and are made using a baking process to mimic the natural oxidation effects.⁹

Madeira is named after the island where it is made, which is located in the mid-Atlantic off the coast of Morocco. Similar to the development of Port and Sherry, Madeira owes much of its success to the primitive shipping conditions of the seventeenth century. Pipes (barrels) of Madeira were put in the hold of ships as ballast as they voyaged to all parts of the world. Early Madeira was exposed to constant rocking and extreme heat as the ships passed through the tropics, turning an otherwise light and acidic wine into a wine with softness, depth, and a pleasant burnt flavor.

Marsala is the best-known fortified wine of Italy and is named for the town in Sicily that produces it. It is used similarly to Sherry and Madeira. Marsalas are graded according to their sweetness, color, and age. The driest Marsalas are called *secco*, medium-dry ones are called *demiseco*, and the sweetest are called *dolce*. It comes in three colors: *oro* (golden), *ambra* (amber), and *rubino* (ruby). And there are five types based on aging: *fine* (aged a minimum of one year), *superiore* (aged in wood two years), *superiore riserva* (aged in wood four years), *verGINE* (aged in wood for five years), and *verGINE stravecchio* (aged in wood for at least ten years).

Some other important fortified wines include Vermouth, Orange Muscat, Muscat Hamburg, and Floc de Gascogne. Vermouth is a fortified wine that has been flavored with sugar, herbs, roots, flowers, and spices. It is best known as an ingredient in several cocktails, including Manhattans and martinis. There are two main types: dry vermouth and sweet vermouth. It can be served as an aperitif and is also used in sauces that accompany seafood. Orange Muscat and Muscat Hamburg (sometimes known as Black Muscat) are made from a mutant of the Muscat grape. Fortified Muscats are very special dessert wines. Orange Muscat has aromas of orange, orange blossom, and apricot. Muscat Hamburg has aromas reminiscent of roses with a lychee nut character to its flavor. These wines are sweet, rich, and concentrated, with crisp acidity. California and Australia are good producers of these two fortified wines. Floc de Gascogne is a popular fortified wine served in southern France as an aperitif. During a recent visit to Toulouse, I found Floc de Gascogne to be sweet,

sensual, and captivating. Floc is produced using a combination of fresh grape juice and strong young Armagnac. It can be made with red or white grapes and has appealing young and fruity flavors.

The family of fortified wines can either be very expensive or provide some of the best values in the wine market. They range widely in color, intensity, flavor, and sweetness levels. Fortified dessert wines that are sweet, strongly flavored, and high in alcohol are intended to be served in smaller portions than table wines for sipping after the meal or with cheeses and desserts. Many higher-alcohol fortified wines such as Ruby Port, Tawny Port, Floc, and Oloroso and Cream Sherries can be kept for several days or even weeks without deterioration. Fino Sherries, Vintage Ports, and Muscats are more delicate and should be consumed shortly after opening to minimize any loss in quality.

Floc, Olorosos, Cream Sherries, Marsala, Madeira, and Ports are generally served at a cool room temperature. Fino Sherries and fortified Muscats are served chilled. Fortified wines are often served in small cordial glasses, but during the ceremony of contemplative sipping, they are best served in small wine or regular wineglasses so their aromas can be appreciated.

DESSERT SELECTION AND WINE PAIRING

Individual preferences for sweets vary from person to person and among cultures. For example, I have a sweet tooth and don't see a problem serving sweet desserts and sweet dessert wines together. However, in planning a dessert course, you must use care to ensure that the majority of your guests enjoy the combination you have selected.

Many sweet foods can be as high as one-fourth sugar, whereas dessert wines rarely have more than 10–15 percent sugar content. This situation requires that care be taken to avoid a mismatch in sugar content—remember the rule of thumb that foods are better matched with wines when food sweetness level is less than or equal to wine sweetness level. I vividly remember a case where I did not follow this rule and paid the price. I had a bottle of Muscat Cannelli (a moderately sweet wine) and served it with ice cream and a chocolate dessert. It was a disaster—the dessert was way too sweet and rich for the wine and ended up making the wine taste thin, bitter, and acidic.

Fruit-based and moderately sweet desserts are the best matches for the spectrum of dessert wines. The following sections classify desserts into five categories and provide suggestions for dessert wines to try within each category. Of course, many other options are possible, and you are encouraged to experiment with your favorite desserts and wines.

DESSERT CATEGORIES

Just as categorizing dessert wines and cheeses is not a straightforward task, categorizing desserts is not totally straightforward either. As you are aware, desserts are frequently a combination of items—fruits, custard, chocolate, and nuts could easily be part of one dessert. The point of separating them into categories is to determine likely matches with individual elements. When multiple dessert elements (fruit, custard, chocolate, etc.) are combined, layers of components, texture, and flavors are created for a wide variety of similar and contrasting elements. This process provides some basic rules to follow in the dessert and dessert wine pairing process, which can be expanded to multiple dessert element situations.

As with the other pairings throughout this text, there are a few tools at your disposal. First is the general rule that the wine should be as sweet as or sweeter than the dessert. Second, excessive food elements such as bitterness, sweetness, acidity, and richness may

present pairing problems. Desserts that are only moderately sweet and have fruit or acidic elements are the easiest to use in creating good or great matches. Finally, as with other menu pairing decisions, you will need to determine which is the star, the dessert or the wine. Fine, complex, and mature dessert wines need to be paired with simple desserts that will flatter the wine. Sweet and rich desserts should generally be paired with more moderately priced dessert wines.

The following sections break desserts into five general categories: custards, chocolate, fruit, nuts, and baked desserts. Each of the following sections presents issues relating to each category, suggestions for combinations, and specific wine suggestions.

Custards A wide array of classic desserts are based on a custard: crème brûlée, bread pudding, ice cream, mousse, pastry cream, and pumpkin pie, to name a few. A standard vanilla custard dessert is fairly easy to match with dessert wines as long as the dessert is not too sweet. Desserts such as panna cotta and crème brûlée seem to flatter many dessert wines. Any fruit, berry, nutty, or caramel-flavored dessert wine will complement this type of dessert. When pairing dessert wines with custard desserts that include fruit ingredients, a safe bet is to select dessert wines with fruit flavors that match the actual fruits in the dessert. Also, custard and fruit desserts pair up with dessert wines high in acidity. For example, lemon custard or lemon soufflé pairs well with Canadian ice wines or cool-climate botrytis-affected wines. More intense and dried fruits in a custard dessert pair well with wines of similar character, such as date pudding and PX Sherry. Figure 13.1 provides a framework for decisions involving custard-based desserts and dessert wines.

Custard desserts that include chocolate call for dessert wines with attributes that go well with chocolate: orange, caramel, nuts, and so on. Dark chocolate calls for more powerful

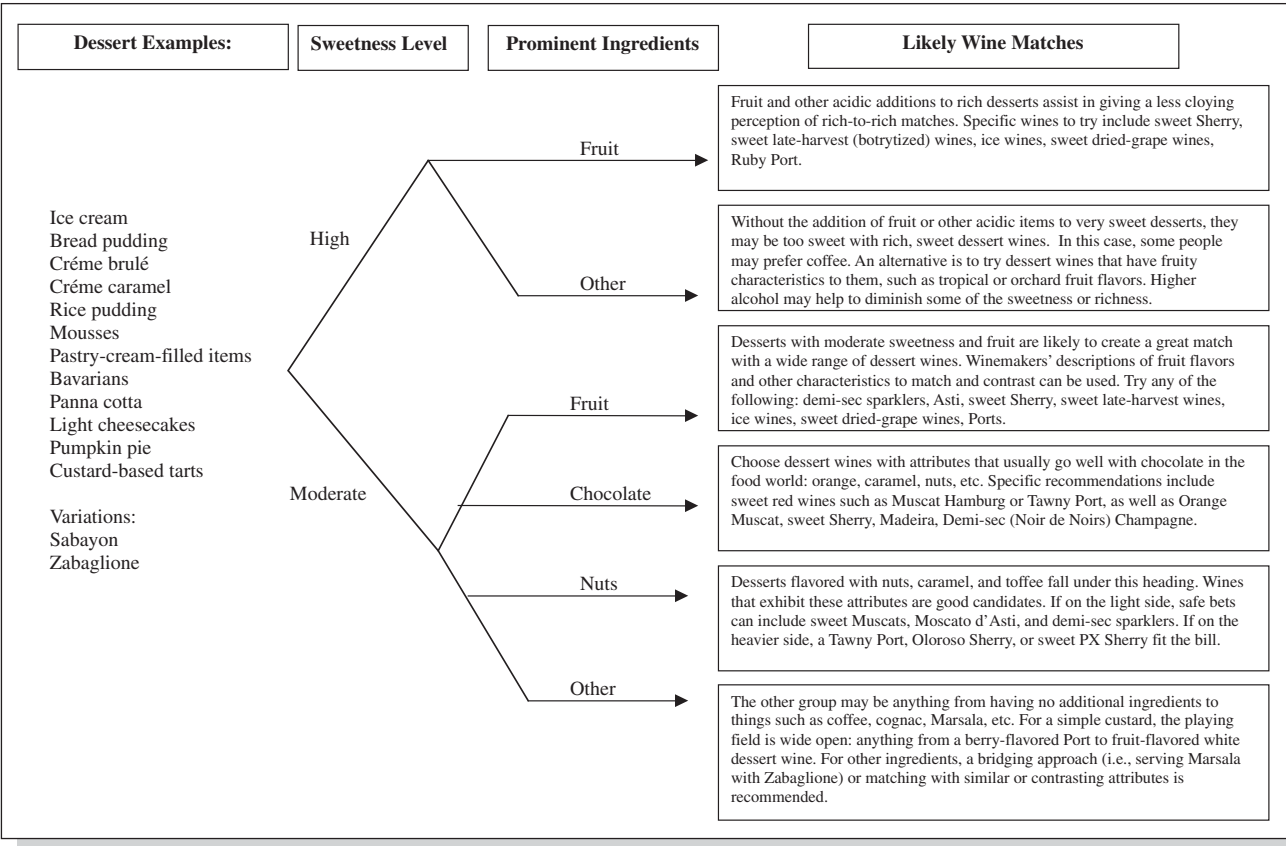


Figure 13.1
Custard-Based Dessert Pairing Decision Process

dessert wines. Specific recommendations include sweet red wines (such as Muscat Hamburg or Tawny Port) as well as Orange Muscat, sweet Sherry, Madeira, and demi-sec (Noir de Noirs) Champagne. A white chocolate bread pudding would be more likely to pair well with sweet dessert wines such as Sauternes, ice wine, or sweet white Port. If the custard/chocolate dessert is light and airy (mousses and soufflés), sweet (or demi-sec) sparkling wine, Champagne, or Vouvray provide a good texture match.

Many other custard desserts integrate items such as nuts, caramel, and toffee. Wines that exhibit similar attributes are good candidates for pairing with these desserts. If the dessert is on the lighter side, a good choice would include sweet Muscats, Moscato d'Asti, or demi-sec sparklers. If the dessert is on the heavier side, you should select fuller-bodied and stronger-flavored dessert wines such as Tawny Port, Oloroso Sherry, or sweet PX Sherry.

There are many custard desserts that don't quite fit directly into any of these categories, including desserts containing coffee, spice, and alcohol-based ingredients (Cognac, Marsala, Cointreau, etc.). Custard desserts infused with coffee flavors, such as Tiramisu, work with sweet white dessert wines (late-harvest wines, botrytis-affected wines, and Muscats). Pumpkin pie is an example of a heavily spiced custard dessert. It pairs well with ice wine, botrytis-affected Sémillon, and (particularly if made using brown sugar) Tawny Port. Variations on the custard dessert category are desserts such as sabayon and zabaglione, which are prepared using fortified wines. Basically, the bridging technique works here—sabayon made with Sauternes is paired with Sauternes, zabaglione made with Marsala is paired with Marsala.

Chocolate and Chocolate Desserts Many believe that there are no safe choices when pairing with chocolate. It is particularly problematic if you have a chocolate dessert of the rich, gooey, and molten kind. At the other end of the spectrum, others believe that chocolate is good with just about everything. Of course, there are some limiting factors inherent in chocolate, such as its mouth-coating and palate-deadening effects due to richness (cocoa butter) and sweetness. But chocolate can be successfully paired with wine when several basic guidelines are followed. First, you should always avoid serving complex or aged wines with chocolate. Wines of this nature deserve a food partner that allows them to shine. Second, wines with higher alcohol content, such as Port or Sherry, are more compatible with chocolate than lower-alcohol wines. Finally, only moderately sweet chocolate desserts are truly compatible with dessert wines. Therefore, it is assumed during this discussion that the chocolate dessert is only moderately sweet rather than highly sweet and rich. If a chocolate dessert is at the extreme levels of sweetness, a better match might be coffee or a flavored liqueur to cut through the richness.

Another factor to consider is the type of chocolate used. Dark chocolate is less sweet and more bitter, while milk chocolate is sweeter and more mouth-coating as a rule, and white chocolate is sweet and buttery. For all chocolate items, fruit and other acidic additions assist in diminishing some of the richness. Sweet wines are generally best with chocolate desserts. Specific wines to try with chocolate and fruit desserts include sweet Sherry, sweet late-harvest (botrytized) wines, ice wines, sweet dried-grape wines, and Ruby Port.

If there is no addition of fruit or other acidic items to chocolate desserts, an alternative is to try dessert wines that have fruit, berry, orange, caramel, and nutty characteristics to them. These items work with chocolate in the food world and should also provide a match in the chocolate-to-wine world. Specific recommendations include sweet red wines such as Muscat Hamburg, Tawny Port, or Zinfandel Port as well as Orange Muscat, sweet Sherry, Madeira, and demi-sec (Noir de Noirs) Champagne. If you are simply having pure dark chocolate alone, I find Cabernet Sauvignon or Amarone enjoyable with it (or, from the beer world, even a bottle of stout), but this combination is not appreciated by everyone.

Desserts made with milk chocolate seem to work better with higher alcohol and/or higher acidity in dessert wines. Winemakers' descriptions of fruit flavors and other characteristics to match and contrast with milk chocolate desserts can provide strong clues to likely

matches. Try any of the following: sweet red wines, Orange Muscat, sweet dried-grape wines, or Ports.

As mentioned above, white chocolate desserts can be sweet and rich but with more of a buttery flavor than dark or milk chocolate. If the white chocolate dessert is on the lighter side, some safe bets include sweet Muscats, Moscato d'Asti, and demi-sec sparklers. If a white chocolate dessert is on the heavier side, try sweet white Port, sweet late-harvest (botrytized) wines, ice wines, or sweet dried-grape wines.

Figure 13.2 outlines the pairing decision process for chocolate-based desserts. The other group within this framework may include chocolate desserts having no additional ingredients or items such as custard, other chocolates, cookies, and nuts. In most cases, such a dessert will be sweet and rich. Possible matches include berry-flavored Ports, fruit-flavored white dessert wines, and sweet sparkling wines. Here again, the match should be based on similar or contrasting attributes, and the likelihood of a successful match will be increased by following the guidelines presented above.

Fruit and Fruit-Based Desserts Fruit desserts can take on a wide range of forms: fresh plain berries, poached pairs, fruit compotes, fresh fruit tarts, fruit pies, and classical fruit deserts such as Bananas Foster, Peach Melba, and Crêpes Suzette. All of these dessert types require slight differences in the type of wine selected.

A simple solution to matching wines with fruit is the old bridging concept. Wine included as an ingredient of the fruit dessert can then be served with the dessert with an assurance of success. Classics such as ripe peaches in Champagne, strawberries in a fruity red such as Beaujolais, or poaching fruit in wine (pears or plums poached in red wine) are good examples of this technique. Additionally, ripe fruits in a salad can be paired with light,

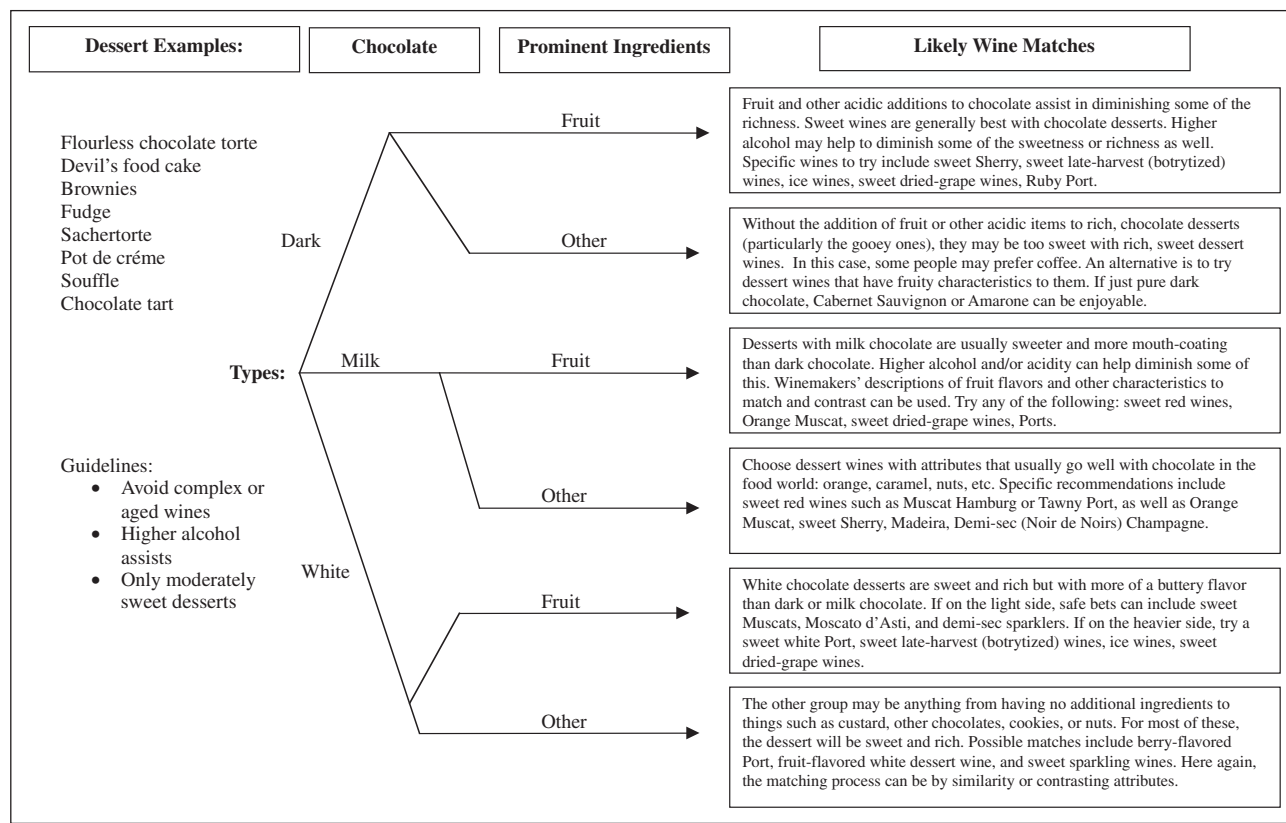


Figure 13.2

Chocolate-Based Dessert Pairing Decision Process

fruity, and fresh wines such as Moscato d'Asti or Asti Spumati. This pairing brings together the fresh fruit with the fruit flavors inherent in these Moscato grape sparklers.

Figure 13.3 provides a framework for pairing decisions based on prominent fruit type. Fruits vary in both ripeness and type. Ripe orchard fruits and berries are moderately sweet. Tropical and dried fruits are sweeter and more care must be taken when pairing these items with the proper wines.

Fruit desserts provide a refreshing sensation due to the acidity/sweetness balance, and this refreshing sensation is particularly evident in citrus desserts. Dessert wines that match this acidity level provide a lighter ending to a meal. Cool-climate dessert wines with higher acidity are likely candidates. The addition of custard, cream, or meringue to citrus desserts levels out the tanginess. Specific wines to try with citrus desserts include sweet late-harvest (botrytized) wines, ice wines, sweet dried-grape wines, and Orange Muscat. For lemon-flavored desserts, late-harvest Riesling or sweet Vouvray can generally cope with the tanginess of this dessert type. Orange-flavored desserts are not as tangy as a rule and can be paired with a variety of dessert and fortified Muscats.

Fresh berries can be a light dessert on their own and become even more wine-friendly with the addition of cream. Strawberries served au naturel are great with Moscato d'Asti. If served with cream and sugar (or shortcake), late-harvest Sémillon or Sauternes is a good selection. Dark berries such as blackberries, loganberries, and blueberries can have a substantial amount of sharpness to them. Late-harvest Riesling or Riesling ice wine should stand up to the challenge; adding cream or custard to the dessert opens up additional pairing possibilities. If berries are used as a base for a dessert, a variety of sweeter wines can be utilized, such as sweet late-harvest (botrytized) wines, ice wines, Muscat Hamburg, and demi-sec sparkling wine.

Desserts of moderate sweetness that include orchard fruits are likely to create a great match with a wide range of dessert wines. Winemakers' descriptions of fruit flavors and other characteristics can be used to match and contrast with tree fruit desserts. As with other

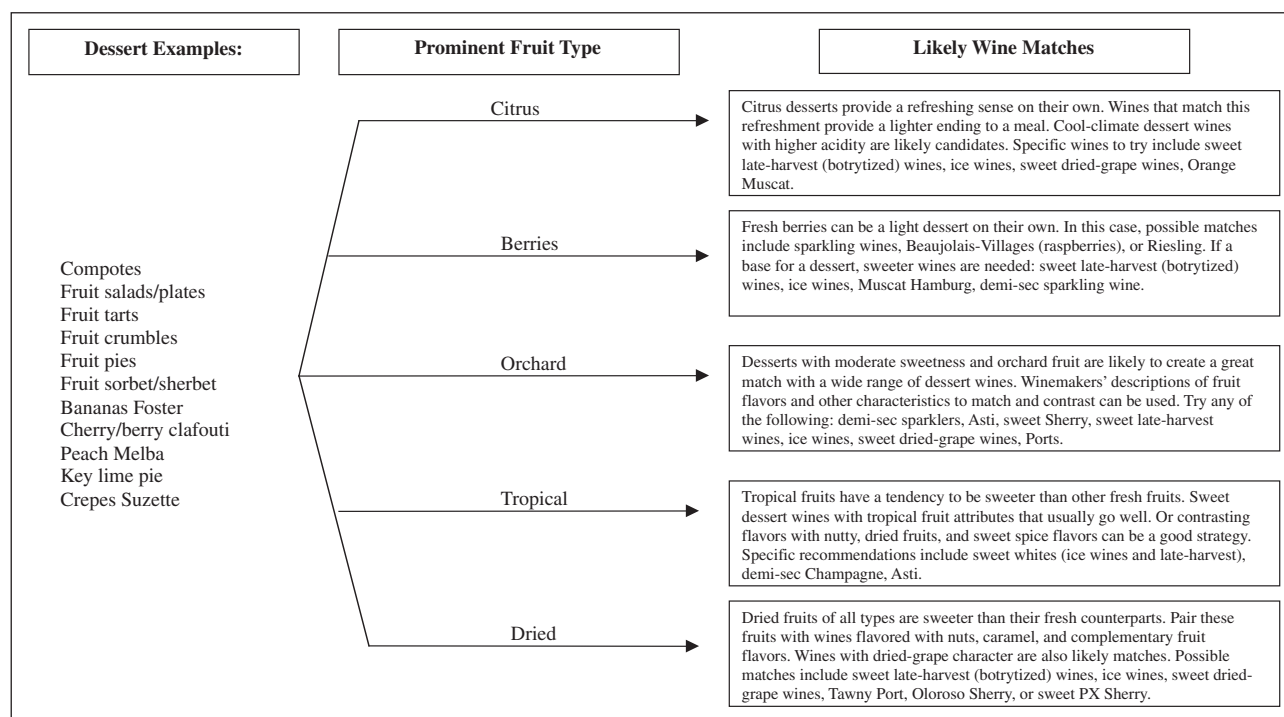


Figure 13.3

Fruit-Based Dessert Pairing Decision Process

foods, it is useful to remember other items that are paired with these fruits in the food world, namely, honey, cream, caramel, and nuts. Selecting dessert wines with these characteristics is a great starting point for pairing decisions. Try any of the following dessert wines with orchard fruit desserts: demi-sec sparklers, Asti, sweet Sherry, sweet late-harvest wines, ice wines, sweet dried-grape wines, and Ports. Here are some specific recommended matches: blackberry and apple crumble with late-harvest (botrytized) Riesling, plum tart with Muscat Hamburg, poached pears in Muscat de Beaumes with Muscat de Beaumes, and apple tart (flavored with butter, rum, and cinnamon) with demi-sec Champagne.

Tropical fruits have a tendency to be sweeter than other fresh fruits. Sweet dessert wines with tropical fruit attributes usually go well with tropical fruit desserts. An alternative pairing selection is to combine contrasting flavors of nuts, dried fruits, and sweet spice flavors in the dessert wine with the tropical fruit dessert. General recommendations include many sweet whites (ice wines, late-harvest wines, and dried-grape wines) and sweet sparklers (demi-sec and doux Champagne, Asti, sparkling ice wine, etc.). A specific recommendation is the combination of lychee and coconut milk sorbet with late-harvest Gewürztraminer.

Dried fruits of all types are sweeter than their fresh counterparts. Dried fruits have an affinity for wines flavored with nuts, caramel, and complementary fruit flavors. Wines with dried-grape character are also likely matches with dried fruits and dried fruit desserts. Some possible matches include sweet late-harvest (botrytized) wines, ice wines, sweet dried-grape wines, Tawny Port, Oloroso Sherry, or sweet PX Sherry. Dried fruits such as raisins, figs, and dates work particularly well with many of the fortified wines, including Tawny Port, sweet Oloroso Sherry, and sweet Madeira. A simple combination that works in this category is dried prunes paired with Tawny Port.

Nuts and Nut-Based Desserts Nuts provide a range of pairing opportunities. Figure 13.4 provides a framework for decisions in this category of desserts.

Almonds, hazelnuts, and walnuts eaten with wine can create a good combination. Walnuts with a fine and mature fortified wine is a simple combination that allows the fine

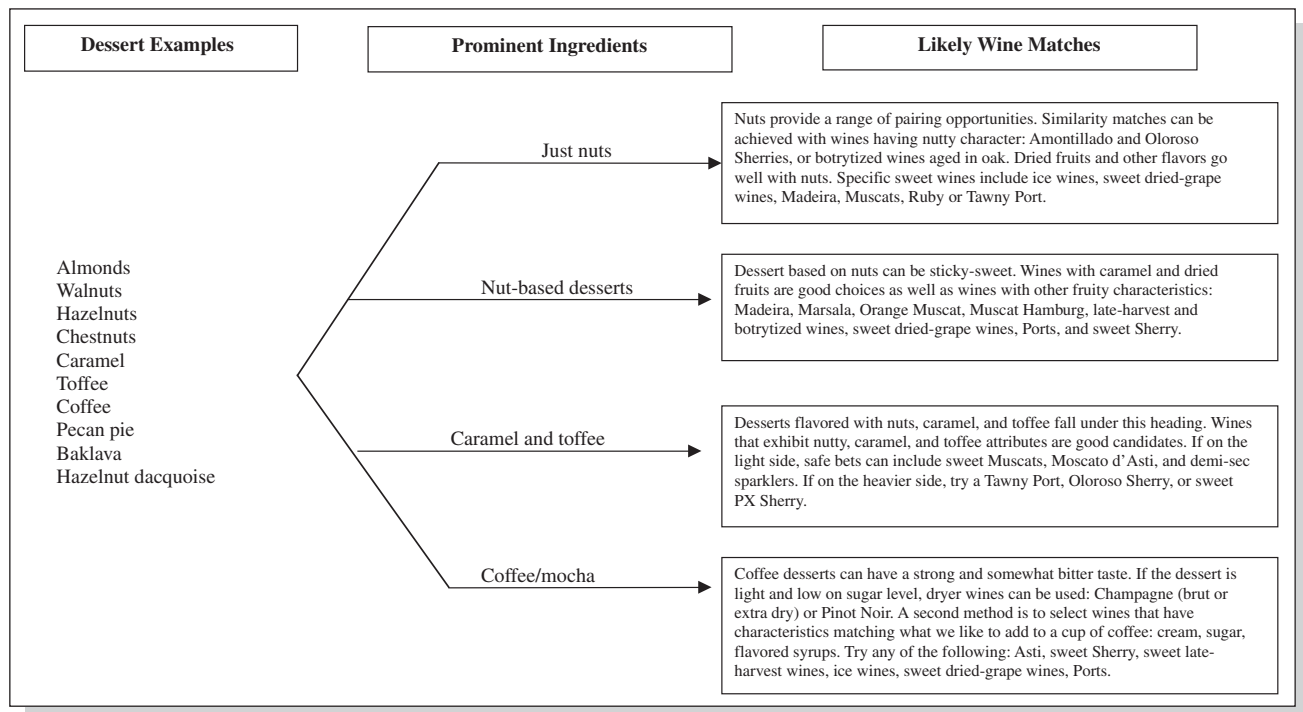


Figure 13.4

Nut-Based Dessert Pairing Decision Process

wine to shine. Similarity matches can be achieved with wines having nutty character: Amon-tillado and Oloroso Sherries, or botrytized wines aged in oak take on slightly nutty character. Dried fruits and other flavors go well with nuts. Specific sweet wines include ice wines, sweet dried-grape wines, Madeira, Muscats, and Ruby and Tawny Port.

Desserts based on nuts can be sticky-sweet (e.g., baklava and pecan pie). Fortified wines with caramel and dried fruit characteristics are good choices, as are those with other fruity characteristics: Madeira, Marsala, Orange Muscat, Muscat Hamburg, Ports, and sweet Sherry. Pecan pie with a little whipped cream and a glass of Canadian Vidal ice wine is a decadent treat indeed.

Many of these desserts are flavored with nuts, caramel, or toffee (or various combinations). If these desserts are on the lighter side, safe bets can include sweet Muscats, Moscato d'Asti, and demi-sec sparklers. If they are heavier, a Tawny Port, Oloroso Sherry, or sweet PX Sherry should fit the bill.

Coffee-based desserts can have a strong or a bitter taste. If the coffee-based dessert is light and low in sugar level, dryer wines can be used. Brut or extra-dry Champagne or even a Pinot Noir can be a pleasant partner. A second approach to pairing wines with coffee-based desserts is to select wines that have characteristics matching what we like to add to a cup of coffee: cream, sugar, flavored syrups. Try any of the following based on the dessert's characteristics (power and flavor intensity): Asti, sweet Sherry, sweet late-harvest wines, ice wines, sweet dried-grape wines, and Ports.

Baked Goods: Cakes, Cookies, Pastries, and Dessert Breads

Baked goods is a diverse category of desserts and can be combined with a range of ingredients. The decision framework for this group of dessert items is shown in Figure 13.5. Simple cakes such as sponge, pound cake, and angel food allow sweet wines to bask in their glory. Cakes filled or topped with vanilla, butter, or citrus flavors can be paired with cooler-climate late-harvest wines, ice wines, and sweet sparkling wines such as Moscato d'Asti. Cakes with richer items (chocolate, coffee) or sweet spices can be paired with botrytized wines, demi-sec sparklers, sweet Sherry, sweet dried-grape wines, Port, and Madeira.

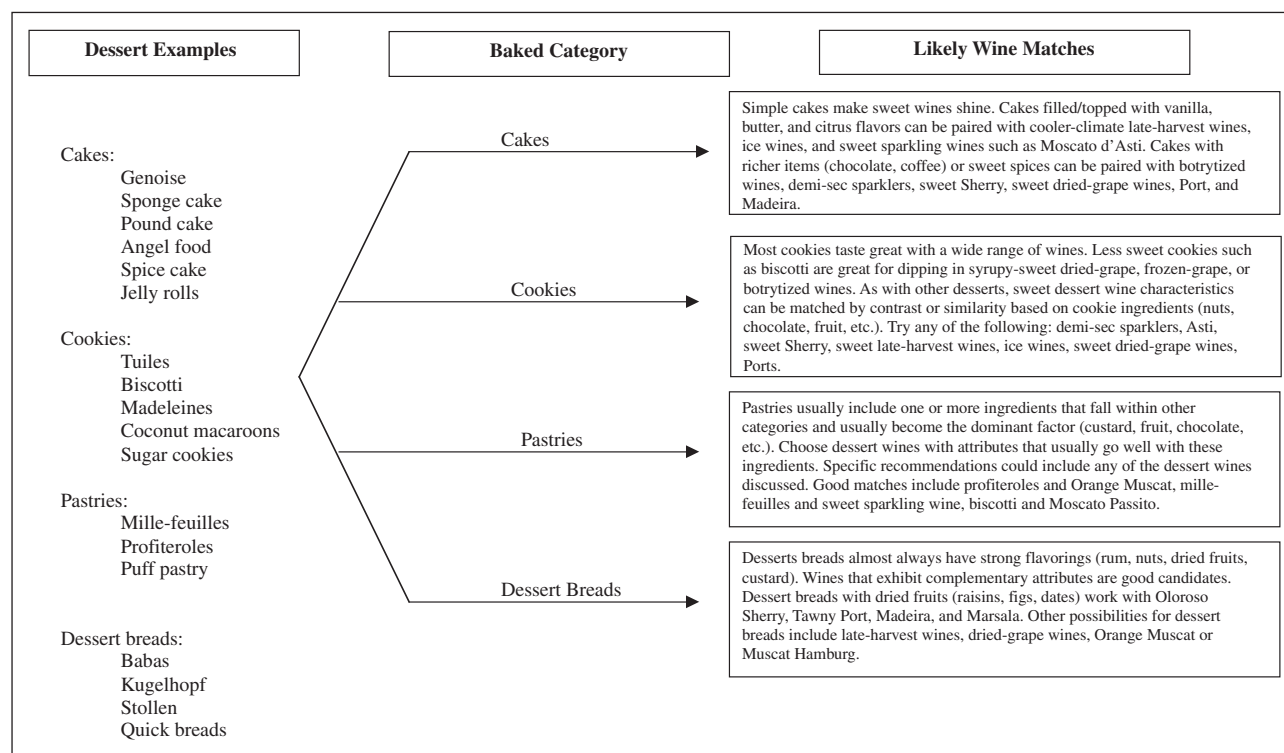


Figure 13.5

Baked Good Pairing Decision Process

Cassati alla Siciliana (sponge cake frosted with ricotta and filled with candied fruits) pairs up well with a dessert Moscato such as Moscato di Pantelleria Passito. Cakes with richer items (chocolate, almonds paste, coffee) or sweet spices can be paired with botrytized wines, demi-sec sparklers, sweet Sherry, sweet dried-grape wines, Port, and Madeira.

Most cookies taste great with a wide range of wines. Cookies come in a variety of forms, from a range of North American types (peanut butter, chocolate chip, sugar) to biscotti, tuiles, and madeleines. Less sweet cookies such as biscotti are great for dipping in syrupy-sweet dried-grape, frozen-grape, or botrytized wines. As with other desserts, sweet dessert wine characteristics can be matched by contrast or similarity with cookie ingredients (nuts, chocolate, fruit, etc.). Try any of the following dessert wines with your favorite cookies: demi-sec sparklers, Asti, sweet Sherry, sweet late-harvest wines, ice wines, sweet dried-grape wines, and Ports. Higher-alcohol dessert wines usually work better with cookies that are loaded with rich ingredients such as butter, chocolate chips, and nuts. The higher alcohol content seems to assist in diminishing the overly rich character of rich cookies.

Pastries are usually prepared with additional prominent ingredients that will factor into the pairing decision. Choose dessert wines with attributes that usually go well with the ingredients found in pastries. Specific recommendations might include any of the dessert wines discussed. Good matches include profiteroles and Orange Muscat, mille-feuilles and sweet sparkling wine, or biscotti and Moscato Passito.

Dessert breads are a much smaller subgroup. Dessert breads with dried fruits (raisins, figs, dates) work well with Oloroso Sherry, Tawny Port, Madeira, and Marsala. These dessert wines are a good match with Christmas fruitcake as well (to my mind, this dessert is more of a bread than a cake). Other possibilities for dessert wines to pair with dessert breads include late-harvest wines, dried-grape wines, Orange Muscat, or Muscat Hamburg. Hungarian Tokaji, Greek Muscat, and Moscato di Pantelleria Passito would be good matches with dessert breads.

SUMMARY

This chapter provides a detailed description of the categories within the exciting world of dessert wines and desserts. This chapter focused on categories most prominent within dessert wines and desserts to provide a framework for making pairing decisions in the future.

The Aperitif at the beginning of the chapter provides an account of how Niagara's wine region has evolved over time and established a strong global reputation for its opulent dessert wines. The evolution of the wine industry has also had an impact in the education arena as more and more institutions embrace the growing demand for wine and food professionals with no end in sight. Niagara College, with its Niagara College Teaching Winery (NCTW), is one of a growing number of schools embracing a synergistic approach to experiential learning across the campus.

There is a wide range of dessert wines produced in regions all over the globe. The discussion in this chapter only scratches the surface of this wine category but clearly describes the main dessert wine categories: frozen-grape wines, late-harvest wines, dried-grape wines, and fortified wines.

The final section of this chapter tackles pairing various categories of desserts with dessert wines. The general rule that the wine should be sweeter than the dessert holds in this case, as it has throughout the other pairings you have explored. Desserts with excessive bitterness, sweetness, acidity, and richness can create pairing problems. Desserts that are only moderately sweet and have fruit or acidic elements the easiest to pair with dessert wines and typically yield good to great matches.