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Incredible Ice Wine

Retailer's Shelf

Ask Tasters Guild

Incredible Ice Wine

By Michael Schafer

Ice wine is incredible. Seriously, it's ridiculously delicious.

Difficult to produce, available in miniscule quantities and quite expensive, ice wine is luxury in a glass. If you haven't had it, you must try it at least once. If you've already enjoyed a glass or two you know how delectable it is.

What Ice Wine Is Not

Ice wine is a sweet dessert wine. It is not affected by the noble rot *Botrytis cinerea* (aka "noble rot"). It is not beerenauslese or trockenbeerenauslese because those sweet wines are affected by noble rot. By law, ice wine cannot be the botrytised style of wine! True ice wine is made from grapes that have frozen on the vine, not frozen in the winery. There is a difference!

History

According to legend a German winemaker was away from his vineyards when the grapes froze on the vines. Being a frugal sort of fellow, he proceeded to defy convention and pressed them for fermentation into wine anyway. Wine lovers everywhere are indebted to him!

Historical records from 1794 in Franconia, Germany mention "Eiswein" being produced. After the 1829 harvest in Rheinhessen, Germany's largest wine region, growers were going to use the harsh winter's harvest for livestock feed. Instead they started the tradition of making Eiswein when Mother Nature offered them the opportunity to bottle this nectar.

Location

Ice wine is produced in only a few wine regions including Germany, Austria, Italy, the USA and most famously, Canada. The first Canadian ice wine was produced in British Columbia, not in Ontario or Quebec, where the vast majority of Canadian ice wine is now made. The initial commercial version was produced in 1978 although a German immigrant had made some "homemade ice wine" in 1972. The Niagra Peninsula is now the world's most proficient producer of ice wine.

Michigan offers excellent examples of this elegant elixir. Ice wine was first produced in Michigan in 1983 by



Mark Johnson, who studied at the Federal Research Station and Institute in Geisenheim, Germany. The Finger Lakes of New York also produce outstanding offerings of ice wine.

Production

There are just a few spots where the grapes get enough sunshine during the summer to generate enough sugar and have winters cold enough to actually freeze the grapes on the vine.

In Canada, Germany, Austria, and the USA regulations mandate that grapes must be harvested frozen on the vine. If the label reads "iced wine" or "iced dessert wine" the liquid in the bottle may be tasty but it isn't ice wine.

In the United States the law specifies that the grapes must be naturally frozen. According to the Federal TTB (Tax and Trade Bureau) regulations "Wine made from grapes frozen after harvest may not be labeled with the term 'ice wine' or any variation thereof, and if the wine is labeled to suggest it was made from frozen grapes, the label must be qualified to show that the grapes were frozen postharvest." This ensures the quality of wine you enjoy is only the finest!

Optimal weather for harvest is a minimum of 48 hours of below 17F. It's a risky business. If the winter is mild the grapes may rot and just fall off of the vine. Local birds and animals love to eat these nutritious morsels so most growers shield their vines with netting. Yields are much lower than for other wine.

If the grapes don't freeze no ice wine is made. When the grapes are free of *Botrytis*, they are said to be "clean." When harvested, the frozen grapes look like little marbles. They must be picked and pressed immediately in a continuous process so they don't melt and lose any of the precious juice. After being crushed in extra durable presses, they are fermented for two-six months (compared to days or weeks for regular wines). Special yeasts are required for fermentation due to the coldness and the composition of the grapes.

Grapes

Numerous grapes are used to make ice wine. The most popular are Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Vidal Blanc, Grüner Veltliner, and Chenin Blanc. Cabernet Franc ice wines are special treats from Canada. The grapes have a much higher sugar content than grapes used to make regular table wines. Their acidity is also higher than "normal" grapes.

Enjoyment

Ice wines produced from white grapes are usually a light gold in color and, like all white wines, get darker as they age. Cabernet Franc ice wines are rose'-like in color.

These wines are incredibly refreshing on your palate even with their high sugar content. This is due to their high acidity. The simultaneous sweetness and invigorating acidity is unique in the world of wine. The body of the wine is rich, velvety and oh, so luxurious. Few wines are as intense as a fine ice wine. While some other dessert wines have a thick, gloppy finish, ice wines invite you back for just another sip!

Aromas of honey, tropical fruits, exotic spices are just a few of the delights in your glass. If aged in oak, hints of vanilla and fresh bread contribute to the complexity of the

"nose."

Decadent flavors of tangerine, pineapple and candied orange are typical of white ice wines. Macerated strawberries, candied rhubarb and cranberry are classic flavors of red ice wines.

Pairing

The classic pairing of foie gras with ice wine is indulgent, sumptuous, and magnificently rich. It is truly one of the most memorable taste sensations you will ever experience.

Fresh fruits like peaches and apricots or fruit tarts complement white ice wines. Red ice wine pairs perfectly with wild strawberries with crème fraiche or cherry pie.

Intense blue cheeses such as Roquefort and Gorgonzola stand up to the richness of these wines. Some enjoy the contrast of salty Parmigianino-Reggiano with their unctuous ice wine.

In your author's opinion the best way to relish the sublime indulgence of ice wine is by itself. Remember to serve it at approximately 50F. An hour or two in your refrigerator is just right. You want to enjoy the aromas, texture, flavors and finish of this marvelous beverage.

Slainte!



Michael Schafer Esq., The Wine Counselor® is the charismatic wine educator, speaker, Sommelier, C.S.W., writer and consultant who entertains while educating. His humorous and fun approach to wine is reflected in his trademark phrase, "I taste bad wine so you don't have to"®

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The Retailers Shelf

By Dick Scheer, Village Corner
Ann Arbor, Michigan

C.V.N.E. CUNE PENEDES CAVA BRUT SPAIN \$12

C.V.N.E. stands for Compania Vinicola del Norte de Espana—the Winemaking Company of Northern Spain. It's an old name and an old company, firmly grounded in Rioja, where it has many acres of mature vineyards in the sub-zones Alta and Alavesa. Since the acronym is impossible to pronounce, everyone substitutes a 'u' for the 'v' and calls the firm 'Cune' (coo-nay). More than ever today it is indeed a winery representing much of northern Spain instead of simply Rioja. There are ventures in Valdeorras in the northwest and in Ribera del Duero, west of Rioja, as well as a commissioned Cava. Cava is the designation for a Spanish sparkling wine made in select zones by the Champagne method. Cune's comes from Penedes, south of Barcelona, where the majority of Cavas are produced. It consists of 50% Xarello, 35% Macabeo, and 15% Parellada, the leading varieties. This is at once beautifully fruity and wonderfully biscuity after nine months on its bottle lees. You CAN have it both ways. Oh, and the mousse is so creamy! Bring on a brunch buffet.

CHATEAU LA GRAVIERE 2018 ENTRE DEUX MERS FRANCE \$9

The great southwest France port city of Bordeaux grew up at the confluence of two rivers, the Dordogne and the Garonne, that join to form the Gironde estuary. Bordeaux's vineyards are subdivided into three major regions: Left Bank (Medoc, Graves), Right Bank (Saint Emilion, Pomerol, Fronsac), and Entre deux Mers (between two seas) "Mers" is an exaggeration. This region lies between the Dordogne and Garonne rivers. It's blanketed with vines of both red and white varieties, though only its white wines are entitled to the Entre deux Mers appellation. Its reds go by Bordeaux and Bordeaux Superieur. Chateau La Graviere's white-varietal range is typical: 50% Semillon, 45% Sauvignon Blanc, and 5% Muscadelle. Semillon gives body, Sauvignon aromatic vigor, and Muscadelle an extra dash of perfume that, if not particularly musky, is certainly distinctive. A little bit goes a long way toward defining the overall cuvee. This 2018 displays "just out of the box" freshness. It will prove excellent with pasta primavera.

WILHELM WALCH 2017

DOLOMITI PINOT GRIGIO PRENDO ITALY \$13

Wilhelm Walch founded his winery and estate in 1869; today, it is run by the fifth generation. The winery occupies a former Jesuit monastery in the village of Tramin, in northeast Italy's Alto Adige region. Here, beneath the beautiful Dolomite Alps, Walch's vineyards nurture a dozen grape varieties, local and international, including the grape named after the village: Gewurztraminer. My subject today is its Pinot Grigio. Just a generation or so back, Italy's finest Pinot Grigios were considered to come from the extreme northeast, from Friuli and its sub-zones. Today's Alto Adige versions pose a definite challenge. This is a plump, full rendition, not without that dazzling fruit acidity which marks a white wine of high altitude origin. It will surely brighten up a tuna-noodle casserole.

CHATEAU STE. MICHELLE 2016

COLUMBIA VALLEY CHARDONNAY WASHINGTON \$9

Offspring of a winery founded in 1934, Chateau Ste. Michelle is not only Washington's oldest but also its largest winemaker. It's a wonder how it grows and produces so much wine so well. Part of that is thanks to location. In the rain shadow of the Cascades, the Columbia Valley winegrowing region rarely encounters inclement weather. It controls its water needs via measured irrigation. It's a winegrower's paradise! CSM took a strong sprint to growth the end of last century under Holland MI native and U



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of MI MBA Allen Shoup, CEO for 17 years. While Riesling remains its calling card, the winery does everything well. Its Chardonnay, grown on vinifera rootstock, portrays the varietal's apple-citrus qualities in a crisp, northern-grown style, and its toasty oak embellishments are astonishing for a wine in this price range. Bring it to the table with a chicken pot pie.

HUSCH 2018 MENDOCINO COUNTY CHENIN BLANC CALIFORNIA \$15

Chenin Blanc, the foundation of France's Loire Valley classic, Vouvray, was once one of California's most widely planted grape varieties. In fact, during the 1980s California's Chenin Blanc acreage surpassed France's. Rarely bottled as a varietal wine, it formed the foundation of many white blends. Tony and Gretchen Husch pioneered modern-day winegrowing in Mendocino County's Anderson Valley when they planted their first vines in 1968 and then bonded a winery in 1971. Early in my career, their wines had a cult following. I remain a fan and an eager supporter of one of California's few remaining Chenin Blanc varietal wines. Husch's magnifies Chenin's quince and lime qualities. It's smartly finished in an off-dry fashion, like many a Vouvray. An ideal choice with a lobster salad.

MCMANIS FAMILY ESTATE 2018 RIVER JUNCTION VIOGNIER, CALIFORNIA \$15

I'm probably starting to sound like a broken record, as I've recommended this wine in several previous columns. You simply won't find a more explicit, bountiful, and beautiful expression of Viognier on the planet. It's honeysuckle and orange blossom all over the place--a feat and feast of California abundance. All from where? River Junction? One of California's newer (2001) AVAs, it lies at the confluence of the San Joaquin and Stanislaus Rivers southeast of San Francisco Bay. Fifth generation-run McManis Family Estate is the leading player here, and though 90% of the AVA is planted to Chardonnay, it's the family's Viognier that rings my chimes. Enjoy its dry rendition with a warm, well-herbed potato salad

CHATEAU MONT REDON 2018 COTES DU RHONE BLANC, FRANCE \$15

A month back, the Fabre lad paid me a visit, and memories streamed back. Mont Redon has been owned by the Abeille and Fabre families for four generations. Young Fabre was the spitting image of his father, who guided me around the property on my visit 30 years ago. Legendary Frank Schoonmaker first imported its wines. I've enjoyed vintages from 1957 forward. Today Mont Redon is represented by another industry titan, Frederick Wildman. Chateau Mont Redon is the largest Chateauneuf du Pape landowner, with 250 acres. Since my visit, it's added vineyards in Lirac on the cool Right Bank of the southern Rhone Valley. Its

white Cotes du Rhone comes from this vicinity and consists of 1/3 each Grenache Blanc, Roussanne, and Viognier. For my tastes, it's a perfect example of its genre, sporting subtle aromas of peach (Roussanne) and honeysuckle (Viognier), while Grenache Blanc supplies the bulk that makes this a versatile dinner wine. Serve with mussels steamed in a spicy broth.

QUINTA DAS ARCAS 2018 VINHO VERDE ROSE ARCA, NOVA PORTUGAL \$10

Vinho Verde is both a wine and a winegrowing region of northern Portugal. It shares the great Albarino grape variety with Green Spain's Rias Baixas region to its north. The Portuguese spell it Alvarinho. Vinho Verde, literally "green wine," comes in white, rosé, and red versions. "Green" refers to the state of ripeness; grapes here are harvested early, the wines moderate in alcohol and quite tart. Of Espadeiro and Touriga Nacional, this fresh, brisk, strawberry-scented rosé is fully inviting for both aperitif and meal-time service. Juicy and flavorful, it balances fresh acidity and satisfying body with aplomb. This will be a summer treat with bacalao gazpacho

MUD HOUSE 2017 CENTRAL OTAGO PINOT NOIR, NEW ZEALAND \$17

John and Jennifer Joslin sailed the world in search of the ideal spot to plant their roots. In 1996, they found that spot in the winegrowing region of Marlborough, South Island, New Zealand. They built a home of local earth, acquired vineyards, and started a winery. The couple produced 300 cases the first year; ten years later, 80,000 cases. While making excellent Marlborough Sauvignon Blancs under the main label as well as a second, Hay Maker, the Mud House wine that astonishes me it's this Central Otago Pinot Noir. Landlocked Central Otago lies south of Marlborough. Its vineyards yield some of the world's finest Pinot Noirs, and most are priced accordingly: twice the price and more of this rendition. It's ripe, spicy, and effusive of Pinot Noir cherry aromas and flavors, in marked contrast to many a Marlborough Pinot Noir's herbaceous nature. Will fare well with tea-smoked roast chicken.

DONA PAULA 2017 MENDOZA MALBEC LOS CARDOS, ARGENTINA \$10

Established only 22 years ago, Dona Paula has grown to a spread of 1750 acres of vineyards in choice, high-altitude sectors southwest of Mendoza. All its wines are made from estate-grown fruit. Its modest-priced Los Cardos range features thistles (cardos in Spanish) on its labels. Thistles grow where the soil is poor and well-drained, ideal soil for winegrowing too. "Thistle" is chardon in French. The Burgundy village of Chardonnay and the region's great white grape variety, Chardonnay, derive their names from the thistle. The subject wine here is quite the opposite of

Chardonnay. This Argentine Malbec is black in color and rich in aromas of black cherry, dark chocolate, and espresso. The palate adds baking spices and anise. I suggest grilled ribeyes with chimichurri sauce.

DELAS FRERES 2017 COTES DU RHONE SAINT ESPRIT, FRANCE \$15

Founded in 1835, Delas Freres is one of the significant wine estates and winemakers of France's northern Rhone Valley, standing proudly among Chapoutier, Chave, Guigal, and Paul Jaboulet. Since only 3% of the Rhone Valley's vineyards are in the north, most these firms source fruit from the south for their regional Cotes du Rhone-appellation wines. Delas' Cotes du Rhone Rouge Saint Esprit is an exception, sourced in the Ardeche (north) instead of in Vaucluse (south), plus it is predominantly of Syrah instead of Grenache. My first experience with this wine was the great 1970 vintage. I sold it for under two dollars back then. I suppose today's price coincides with the general rate of inflation! This 2017 is brimful of black Syrah fruit, featuring aromas and flavors of black raspberry and white pepper, plus a mineral edge. Serve it with lamb tikka masala.

BARON DE LEY 2015 RIOJA TEMPRANILLO COSECHA, SPAIN \$12

Like Wilhelm Walch above, Baron de Ley's winery is housed in a former monastery, now beautifully restored. While the winery is hallowed, this Rioja Tempranillo is quite modern. Its title "Cosecha" marks vintaged Rioja that has not been aged long in barrel and bottle before release like Rioja's time-honored Crianzas, Reservas, and Gran Reservas. It's spent just six months in barrel and six more in bottle before sale. Of Rioja's (and Spain's) leading red grape variety, Tempranillo, grown in the winery's own Finca Los Amendros vineyards, it speaks for Rioja Baja's Mediterranean leanings (Riojas Alta and Alavesa are Atlantic-influenced). Thus, it features extra, ripeness, roundness, and power. In my area, this wine is being marketed in handsome, stained and branded wood presentation cases of six bottles, with a slide top. This wine is worthy of the special packaging. It will adeptly match up with Spanish chorizo seasoned with smoked paprika.

RENZO MASI 2015 CHIANTI RUFINA RISERVA, ITALY \$15

Renzo Masi's Fattoria di Basciano estate lies atop a hill at nearly 1000 feet of elevation in the heart of Chianti Rufina east of Firenze (Florence). Smaller and much less famous than Chianti Classico (which stretches from Firenze 25 miles south to Siena), Chianti Rufina's wines equal Classico's in overall quality. Unrelated to the Masi winery and estate in Veneto, Renzo's family has been winegrowing in Tuscany since 1900. Masi's Riserva, made only in superior vintages, consists of 95% Sangiovese and 5% Colorino. The wine is aged 18 months in French-oak barriques, followed by 12

months in bottle before sale. Barrel aging really adds a lot of sophistication and complexity here, and the ripe fruit of sunny 2015 fully complements it. Enjoy this with a lasagna recipe that includes spicy Italian sausage.

LANGE TWINS 2016 LODI ZINFANDEL OLD VINES, CALIFORNIA \$13

At a distributor's trade tasting, Randall and Brad Lange really stood out from the other winemakers.. Twins, sure, but also TALL twins. In 1916, their great-grandfather began growing wine grapes in the Lodi area east of San Francisco Bay. It wasn't until 90 years later that the fourth-generation built a winery. The Lodi area boasts Zinfandel vines fully as ancient as the oldest in Sonoma, Amador, and Cucamonga. This Tasters Guild International Wine Judging Double Gold-Medal winner comes from 100-year-old vines. Its jammy fruit concentration reads old-vine low yields. There's an admirable oak complement, adding more seasoning to the peppery fruit. Sporting a respectable 15.5% alcohol level, this big boy is ready to take on a rack of smoked spare ribs and spicy BBQ sauce.

BEGONIA SANGRIA TINTO, SPAIN \$10

A mere sawbuck scores you a liter bottle of this sangria that's so delicious you'll wonder why you ever bothered making your own. Begonia is the brainchild of Patrick Mata and Alberto Orte, MBA classmates who, in 1999, started Ole Imports, specializing in the wines of Spain. While most sangrias on the market are American-made, Begonia is a proud and distinctive product of Spain in which the wine matters as much as the flavorings. It's from Monastrell (Mourvedre) and Bobal grapes growing in the Yecla region on limestone soil. The wine is augmented with Mediterranean herbs and spices and essences of Valencia oranges and Azahar flowers, then sweetened with sugar cane juice. An all-occasion summertime refresher chilled and served on the rocks and garnished with fruit.

Ask Tasters Guild

By Joe Borrello

Q: What is "noble rot" in reference to wine?

A: "Noble rot" is the English nickname for the Latin name *Botrytis Cinerea* which is a form of mold that attacks the skins of ripe grapes in vineyards under certain conditions of warm and misty autumn weather. *Botrytis*-affected grapes cause a concentration of sugar while the fruit's water evaporates. The results are some of the most luscious dessert wines in the world. This natural phenomenon occurs in good vintages in Sauternes, the Rhine, the Mosel, Tokaji in Hungary and in certain areas of the Great Lakes Region. Since hand-harvesting the withered grape bunches yields a restricted amount of juice, the price is usually more expensive than regular wines.

Q: I'm curious to know what is the most widely planted grape in the world? Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay or Zinfandel?

A: Oddly enough, it is none of the above. With over one million acres planted in Spain, the Airén grape claims the world title. Airén produces a rather undistinguished white wine, but it is used extensively to distill into brandy.

Q: How many calories are in a glass of wine?

A: Calories come from the amount of alcohol and what is called "residual sugar" which is left in the wine after the fermentation process. In general, a 5 ounce glass of wine will contain about a 100 calories. Given this information, wines that are sweeter or are fortified with alcohol (like Port and Sherries) will have as much as double the calories. These wines, however, are usually served in smaller quantities.

Q: What's the difference between wines that say "barrel-fermented" on the label versus labels that say "barrel-aged."

A: Although most wine is fermented in large stainless steel tanks, some special premium wines are fermented in oak barrels (50-60 gallon size) where the wood interaction imparts some special flavor elements which add to the wine's complexity. This is an expensive and labor-intensive method and is therefore usually reserved for only top quality juice. Similar, though less intensive results may be obtained by fermenting the juice in the stainless steel tanks and then transferring the wine to oak barrels which is then left to age for a period of time. In labeling a bottle "barrel-fermented," 100% of the wine in the bottle must have gone through the barrel-fermenting process. The

label term of "barrel (or oak) aged" is not legally specified and so the results may vary widely. As usual, in the making of wine, the winemaker determines the process and the final style.

Q: Is Cognac a liquor or a wine?

A: Legally, Cognac is classified as a liquor because it is a distilled spirit over twenty proof. Cognac is a brandy, however, from a designated district (Charente) in western France. Cognac, like brandy, is distilled from wine.

Q: I bought a bottle of what I thought was Champagne, but the label says vins mousseux. Is there a difference?

A: By French law, only sparkling wines made in the designated region of Champagne may use that term. Sparkling wines produced outside of the Champagne region are classified vins mousseux or "foamy wine." For your information the entire European wine community also respects the French's claim to their term Champagne. As a result, German sparkling wines are known as sekt, Spanish sparkling wines are identified as cava and the popular Italy sparkling wines are marketed as spumante. U.S. regulations allow winemakers to use the word champagne as generic terminology provided the geographic location in which it is made precedes the name, such as "New York Champagne." Other sparkling wine terms seen on premium labels in the U.S. are "Blanc de Blanc," "Blanc de Noir" or simply, "Sparkling Wine."

Q: I'm a waiter in a rather expensive restaurant and have bitten my tongue when a customer orders a wine that doesn't go with the meal. Should I say something or is "the customer always right?"

A: This is a very touchy situation and requires a bit of diplomacy on your part. First and foremost, you do not want to embarrass the customer in front of the other guests. On the other hand, you would be doing a service to the customer if you were to steer the client away from a poor choice. The easiest method would be to shift the blame, by saying "I served this wine the other day and it was bit disappointing" or "the chef's treatment of this dish changes the traditional match up with this wine." Use your own judgment as to how well-informed the customer is with the selection and be ready to suggest an appropriate alternative. Always remain polite and never challenge the customer's final decision, no matter how wrong you may think he or she is.