

## *Sweet Pleasure – Eiswein*

Wine and Dine with Dave Preston

The Guru of the Good Life®

**T**he cold weather gave me a thought that with all this freezing, now is the time to tell you the story of ice wine or *Eiswein* as the European refer to this sweet pleasure. Canada is one of the best producers of ice wine; Ontario and British Columbia are the primary regions. Long after the grapes for the white wines have been pressed and fermented and even after the grapes for the red wines have been fermented and pressed and the wine is sleeping in the barrels, the temperature and the snow falls and its time to pick the frozen grapes for the ice wine.

Grapes for ice wine have to be picked and crushed at a bone-chilling 17°F (-8°C) or below. Depending on the size of the harvest, and the weather forecast, this can mean that the picking begins in the middle of the night and is finished in a few days or the harvest can be spread over a several weeks.

Most years, the grapes freeze and thaw several times before the harvest. This process allows the grape to partially dry out which concentrates the sugars and the flavors. It also causes a transformation in the flavor of the wine. Due to the toughness of its skin and that fact that it doesn't fall off the vines, Vidal is the most commonly used grape for ice wine. As a regular table wine, Vidal is, at best, a pleasant fruity white. As an ice wine, there are a range of flavors and aromas ranging from honey suckle flowers, baked apple and tropical fruits to crème brulee with some nice burnt sugar overtones.

When the harvest does begin, the picking frequently starts in the pre-dawn hours. Flood lights are brought into the vineyards so that the pickers can see the grapes. In the past, many wineries used volunteers to pick the grapes. They would be called and asked to come to the winery to pick. Hot chocolate would be served and a party atmosphere would prevail. Now, most of the wineries hire professional pickers. Volunteers mean well but they don't always have the stamina to pick 10 to 12 hours a day for days on end.

When your pair ice wine with foods, here are some pointers you might want to follow. Canadian ice wines have moderate amounts of natural sugar, about 13%, and balanced by fairly high acidity, so the wines rarely come off as excessively sweet. They are light bodies, not particularly syrupy in texture and have flavors reminiscent of ripe peaches, apricots, pineapples, and citrus fruits. Great matches for these fairly delicate wines include poached fruits, fruit tarts, crème brulee, and simple short bread and sugar cookies.

One of my personal favorites is foie gras, the lusciously rich fattened live of a duck or goose. An ice wine's sweetness is counterbalanced by its penetrating acidity, and

that acidity cuts through the unctuousness of the foie gras like a hot knife through cold butter. One thing that does not go well with these wines is chocolate. The flavors contradict each other bitter, bitter, bitter!

It takes patience to make foie gras. Here's a traditional recipe:

3 duck of goose livers (about 1 1/2 pounds each)  
4 teaspoons salt, divided use  
2 teaspoons cracked black peppercorns, divided use  
4 cups port wine  
Port Wine Reduction

1. Season the foie gras with 2 teaspoons of the salt and 1 teaspoon of the cracked pepper. Put them in a large plastic storage bag or a large shallow plastic bowl. Pour in the port wine. Refrigerate for 12 hours, turning them about every 2 hours.
2. Remove the foie gras from the bags or bowl and discard the marinade.
3. Season the foie gras with the remaining 2 teaspoons salt and 1 teaspoon cracked pepper. Cut each diagonally into 4 pieces, each about 1-inch wide.
4. Line a classic terrine mold (12 x 4 x 2-inches) with a sheet of plastic wrap, leaving enough to overlap the edges by about 3-inches.
5. In a large skillet over high heat, sear the foie gras, 4 to 5 pieces at a time, browning them evenly, 30 to 45 seconds per side. Drain the fat from the skillet after cooking each batch and strain it through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl.
6. Arrange a layer of the seared foie gras in the bottom of the prepared terrine. Pour about a cup of the strained fat over the layer of foie gras. Arrange the next batch of foie gras in another layer, pressing it down gently but firmly so that there are no air pockets. Repeat the process until all the pieces are in the terrine. Reserve 1/2 cup of the remaining strained fat and discard the rest. Refrigerate the fat.
7. Fold the plastic wrap tightly over the foie gras. Wrap the entire terrine tightly with another large sheet of plastic wrap. Weight the top with a brick or two wrapped in aluminum foil. Refrigerate for 12 hours.
8. Remove the terrine from the refrigerator and briefly submerge the bottom in hot water, then carefully lift it out of the mold, grabbing the plastic wrap. Melt the reserved 1/2 cup fat and generously brush the sides, top, and bottom of the terrine. Wrap the terrine tightly in fresh plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 12 hours more.
9. To serve, cut into slices. Serve with the croutons and drizzles of the port wine reduction.

Makes 18 to 20 servings. Bo appetite! Carpe Diem my friends and make it a point to go out and live the goodlife!