

Savoury wine

BY MELINDA EARSDON AND ROBIN LYNAM



LOW RES

GOLDEN GLOW
Good desserts deserve
a good wine.



JUST DESSERTS

Round off an outstanding meal with a sweet glass of pure indulgence

Some of the greatest wines in the world are sweet, yet with the exception of rare Chateau d'Yquem Sauternes, which is always highly sought after, recent years have seen a general decline in demand.

That is beginning to change and discerning diners increasingly recognise that a good dessert, or a good cheese, deserves a good dessert wine.

The Chocolate & Cheese Bar, located at Marina Bay Sands on the Sands SkyPark, offers a range of sweet and savoury creations, ranging from Strawberry Basil Chocolate Puffs to Chocolate Caramel Apple Cake, and from a robust Stilton to the milder goats' cheese. The venue has recently expanded its menu, created by executive pastry chef Ryan Witcher, to include dessert wines. "We wanted to offer something different that would expose guests to new experiences, which is why we have developed a wine pairing menu, with two choices of wine flight," says Witcher.

As Witcher recognises, the practice of using sweeter wines to pair with dessert is still not very common in Singapore, but it is noticeably growing.

Interest in fortified wines – another unfashionable category until quite recently – has also picked up, and increasing numbers of people are discovering the concentrated sweetness of vintage port and Pedro Ximenez sherry.

German eiswein, beerenauslese and trockenbeerenauslese – also made in Austria – are superb dessert wines, with the sweetness of the ripe grapes concentrated by the action of the fungus Botrytis Cinera or "noble rot", or, in the case of eiswein, by the grapes being picked while frozen.

In addition to its vast range of liqueurs, Italy produces a number of notable dessert wines, including Tuscany's Vin Santo, generally

SAVOUR *wine*

The best dessert wines qualify as an intellectual as well as a sensuous experience

enjoyed with biscotti, and Recioto from the Verona area, a “straw wine”, for which the grapes have to be painstakingly dried before pressing to achieve a high concentration of sweetness.

The greatest dessert wines of France come from the Bordeaux sub-regions of Sauternes and Barsac. Both are dedicated to the production of unfortified sweet wines; and names to conjure with from Barsac, home of slightly lighter wines than Sauternes, are traditional rivals Chateau Climens, Chateau Coutet and Chateau Doisy-Vedrines.

In Sauternes, Chateau d’Yquem, which countless people consider the greatest unfortified dessert wine in the world – it is certainly the most expensive – reigns supreme, but there is also great quality at less heart-stopping prices available from Chateaux Rieussec, Suduiraut and De Fargues. But buyer beware: Sauternes from the region always has a second “s”. “Sauterne” on a wine label generally denotes a sweet style of inexpensive wine not made in Bordeaux.

The great dessert wines of the Iberian peninsula are fortified, meaning that grape spirit has been added to them to arrest their fermentation and increase their alcoholic strength.

All ports are relatively sweet; and vintage and tawny ports are classic wines to enjoy with desserts or cheese or after meals as digestifs. Much sherry, however, is relatively dry, including the world’s best selling Fino sherry, Tio Pepe.

There are sweeter styles consumed as aperitifs rather than dessert wines, but sweet, concentrated Pedro Ximenez sherry is too intense for that. It makes a fine alternative to vintage port later in a meal and is particularly good as an accompaniment to ice-cream, whether taken by the glass or drizzled over the top of a scoop.

In Hungary, dessert wine tokaji, or tokay, has led the recovery of the wine industry since its re-emergence from state control in the 1990s. Hungarian wine makers are once again focusing on quality rather than quantity of production – the approach that established tokaji as one of the most highly-prized wines in Europe as long ago as the 17th century.

In the New World, South Africa’s Constantia dessert wine was tokaji’s great rival as far back as the 18th century, when both wines were more sought after than the greatest dry wines of Bordeaux and Burgundy. In recent years something resembling that wine has been



SWEET DREAMS
The Chocolate & Cheese Bar’s Piña Colada with Milk Chocolate-Rosemary Whipped Ganache. Chocolate-Green Apple Mousse Cake (inset).



recreated by the Klein Constantia Estate under the name Vin de Constance.

In Australia, dessert wines are known as “stickies” and include the often magnificent liqueur muscat, a uniquely Australian dessert wine style much appreciated in the country, but little of which is exported.

Canada exports only modest quantities of its increasingly good dry wine, but is recognised around the world as the home of Inniskillin ice wine – a cousin of the eiswein of Europe’s German-speaking countries, which is produced in essentially the same way.

For winemakers, dessert wines are rewarding, though often difficult to make, and the sheer concentration and complexity of the best qualifies them as an intellectual as well as a sensuous experience.

At the Cheese & Chocolate Bar there’s plenty in the glass to discuss. Guests can choose from two wine tastings, including the Classic Wine Flight that features a selection of three varietals. Resident Wine Director Alphonse Kaelbel recommends the Errazuriz Estate Sauvignon Blanc from Chile, which is dry yet fruity on the palate, conjuring the delicate aroma of gooseberries and guava and making this a perfect paring with a soft cheese such as goats’ cheese.

This is then followed by a glass of medium-bodied Penfolds Private Release Shiraz Cabernet, which features fruity flavours of red berries and dark plums, highlighted by black pepper, spice and a savoury oak. This tippie is a good match for harder cheeses such as Gruyère.

THE CHEESE & CHOCOLATE BAR is located at Sands Skypark (Level 57, Hotel Tower 2) The Club at Marina Bay Sands. Access from Rise Hostess desk at Hotel Lobby Tower 1, tel (65) 6688 8858



MATCHMAKERS

Strawberry Basil Truffle Pops (left), Earl Grey Exotic Cone (inset). Opposite from left: Hans Tschida Zweigelt Schilfwein (2004); Domaine de Durban Muscat Beaumes de Venise; Errazuriz Estate Sauvignon Blanc; Graham's Fine Ruby Port; Penfolds Private Release Shiraz Cabernet.



Finally, Kaelbel suggests a glass of the intensely aromatic Graham's Ruby Port, which is packed with ripe red and black fruit aromas, and goes extremely well not only with a strong blue cheese such as Stilton, but also with dark chocolate. "The darker the chocolate, the darker the wine," he says.

For more adventurous guests Kaelbel recommends the Deluxe Wine Flight, which also offers three extraordinary varietals. "The Pouilly-Fumé, Cuvée De Boisfleury is also a sauvignon blanc but it's not as fruity as say the New Zealand sauvignon blancs," he says. "It's much more delicate, and therefore not for chocolate; however, it goes

Picture credits: Marina Bay Sands



very well with triple cream cheeses and goats' cheese."

Diners who try this flight should then follow with the Château La Tour de By, Médoc, which is a Cabernet-dominated Bordeaux blend, packed with spicy blackcurrant fruit and well-integrated toasty oak. According to Kaelbel this is not a big Bordeaux, and therefore goes well with dark-chocolate desserts.

To complete this sensuous feast, there is the golden Carmes de Rieussec Sauternes, with its fresh apricot, pineapple and honey undertones that partners beautifully with a wide range of dark and milk chocolate delights, making this a perfect companion for the sumptuous dessert buffet Chef Ryan presents daily.

Of course, guests needn't choose a predefined wine flight – they may select their preferred varietal from the list. Nevertheless, Kaelbel has three pairing recommendations that shouldn't be missed. He is especially fond of matching White Chocolate Panna Cotta with Citrus Gelée with a glass of Schlossgut Diel Goldloch Riesling Spatlese from Nahe, Germany. He also suggests pairing the Domaine de Durban Muscat Beaumes de Venise from Rhone, France, with the Pina Colada with Milk Chocolate Rosemary Whipped Ganache. And finally Kaelbel is a big fan of the dark chocolate Nanaimo bar, accompanied by the Hans Tschida Zweigelt Schilfwein from Burgenland in Austria. **S**