

## WINE Q&A

# Wines good with (or for) dessert

**Q: Can you recommend some good dessert wines that will make a festive end to the meal? In a similar vein, what wines go well with traditional holiday sweets such as cookies, chocolates, fruitcake, pecan pie and pumpkin pie?**

**Q: Would you be so kind as to recommend your favorite dry red wine, not sweet or fruity yet with a deep aftertaste and delicious! The wines of this sort I have tried in the past have been in the \$100 range. Any cheaper suggestions?**

**A: I'm always glad to find a wine lover with a sweet tooth. I like dessert wines so much I often have them *instead* of dessert.**

Here's a quick guide:

- r chocolate desserts, a marvelous match is port. Ruby ports are inexpensive, vintage ports are not. Ruby is fine.

- Among white dessert wines, the rule of thumb is the wine should be sweeter than the dessert. So for moderately sweet desserts such as cookies, biscotti, pumpkin pie or fruit tarts, late-harvest dessert wines are good. They're often made of sauvignon blanc and/or semillon grapes.

- For sweeter desserts such as cr me caramel, flan and fruitcake, very sweet ice wines — actually made of frozen grapes — are good.

- For something supersweet like wedding cake with inches of frosting, or that Christmas pudding, I like fortified sweet sherry made of the Pedro Ximenez grape. It's so thick and sweet, fans pour it over ice cream. Ask your wine shop owner for a range of prices.

For an excellent, inexpensive, moderately sweet, orange-scented dessert wine, ask for a

French Beaugues-de Venise.

**A: To get the flavors you're seeking, you need red wines with some age on them. Spanish riojas are a good bet because they have relatively low prices. Riojas, usually based on the tempranillo grape, come in three categories:**

- **Rioja crianza** wines are aged at least one year in oak barrels and one more in bottle.

- **Rioja reserva** wines have at least one year in barrel and two in bottle.

- **Rioja gran reserva** wines have at least two years in oak and three years in bottle.

As they age, they lose their youthful fruitiness and take on deeper flavors of oak, vanilla, cloves, even leather.

For about \$25 you can buy a Conde de Valdemar Rioja Gran Reserva with three years in oak and three more in bottle. Most big wine shops will have this or other brands of gran reserve riojas with similar aging.

— FRED TASKER

