



All about Ice Wines

Part One: (from Wikipedia)

Ice wine is a type of dessert wine produced from grapes that have been frozen. The sugars and other dissolved solids do not freeze, but the water does, so the result is an unusually concentrated, often very sweet wine. The effect is comparable to the freeze distillation that was traditionally used to make applejack and similar beverages, but in the case of ice wines, the freezing happens before the fermentation, not afterwards. Unlike other unfortified dessert wines, grapes for ice wine tend not to be affected by *Botrytis cinerea*. When the grapes are free of botrytis, they are said to have come in "clean."

The most famous (and expensive) ice wines are German Eisweins, but ice wine is also made in Canada as well as in the United States, Austria, Slovenia, Australia, and New Zealand in smaller quantity. Eiswein is part of the QmP category in the German wine classification. Ice wine production in Canada is regulated by the Vintners Quality Alliance. Canada has unusually consistent freezes in winter, and has become the largest ice wine producer in the world.

Natural ice wines require a hard frost (roughly -8°C , 47°F) to occur sometime after the grapes are ripe, which means that the grapes may hang on the vine for several months. If a frost does not come quickly enough, the grapes may rot and the crop will be lost. If the frost is too severe, no juice can be extracted. Bird losses and dropped fruit will also reduce yield the longer it hangs on the vine. Since the fruit must be pressed while still frozen, pickers often must work at night harvesting the grapes within a few hours, while cellar workers must work in unheated spaces.

Some winemakers use cryoextraction (that is, mechanical freezing) to simulate the effect of a frost and typically do not leave the grapes to hang for extended periods as is done with a natural ice wine. An example is Bonny Doon's "Win de Glaciere" (icebox wine). In Germany and Canada the grapes must freeze naturally to be called ice wine.

Because of the lower yield of grapes and the difficulty of processing, ice wines are more expensive than table wines. The high sugar levels lead to a slower than normal fermentation. They are often sold in half-bottles (375 ml).

Typical grapes used for ice wine production are: Riesling, considered to be the most noble variety by Germans; Vidal Blanc, highly popular in British Columbia and Ontario; and, interestingly, the red grape Cabernet Franc. Many vintners, especially from the New World, are experimenting to make ice wine

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from other varieties; whites such as Seyval Blanc, Chardonnay, Kerner, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Blanc, Ehrenfelser or reds such as Merlot, Pinot Noir, or even Cabernet Sauvignon. Ice wines from white varieties tend to be pale yellow or light gold in color when young and can maderize (acquiring deep amber-golden color) as they age. The red varieties tend to have a light burgundy or even pink color like that of rosé wines.

Connoisseurs argue whether ice wine improves with age or is meant to be drunk young. Those who support aging claim that ice wine's very high sugar level (which is often much higher than Sauternes) and high acidity preserve the content for many years after bottling. Those who disagree contend that as ice wine ages it loses its distinctive fruitiness, aroma, and freshness.

Part Two: (Assembled by Quality Wine and Ale Supply LLC)

Real ice wine is made from ripe grapes that get caught in an early freeze and typically are harvested at 2-3 a.m. (in any case must be harvested before the sun comes up and thaws them) and are being processed into wine before sunrise. You can't simply freeze grapes (or any other fruit) and make real ice wine. Grapes destined to make ice wine are late-ripening grapes that ripen much closer to the first hard freeze than most varieties. But they are also grapes that hang well, meaning they do not drop when they have reached or passed optimum ripeness as many varieties do. That means they stand a much better chance of being on the vine when that first hard freeze occurs. Between the time they reach ripeness and the time the first hard freeze occurs, they tend to shrivel and start becoming raisins. If the freeze is very late and they have completely turned to raisin, their usefulness for making ice wine has passed. But if they have only partially turned, meaning only shriveled slightly, their sugars have concentrated and they are prime candidates for ice wine.

When a berry (blackberry or grape) is picked, within minutes it "dies" and undergoes a physical (chemical) change. Its cell walls become "hard" and when the berry is frozen many of those walls break due to the expansion of water when it becomes ice. When the berry is thawed and crushed, it releases juice easier -- which is why many winemakers like to freeze fruit and berries before making wine from them. When a living berry is frozen while still on the vine or cane or stem; the cell walls allow some of the water to pass through them just before freezing. This water is "respired" into the atmosphere or adjoining cellular material and the result is two-fold. First, the cell walls do not tend to rupture when the water in the cells freezes. Secondly, and more important for making ice wines, the loss of a small amount of water results in a further concentration of sugar within the berry -- the same amount of sugar that was there before is still there, but in a reduced amount of fluid. The result is a further concentration of sugar in a smaller volume. These are why you cannot make real ice wines by picking berries and then freezing them.

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The process of making Ice Wines was first developed in Franconia, Germany in 1794. It is highly priced drinks mostly available Germany, Austria and Canada. The Niagara region of Ontario, Canada is currently the leading producer of ice wines. In Ontario and in Germany, ice wine called as naturally frozen. This means that here as in Germany, no other method of making ice wine is allowed other than the natural method. No artificial freezing method constitutes ice wine by definition or label.

Typical Sugar Levels by temperature:

Temperature Sugar Content

-6°C / 21°F	29%
-7°C / 19°F	33%
-8°C / 18°F	36%
-9°C / 16°F	39%
-10°C / 14°F	43%
-11°C / 12°F	46%
-12°C / 10°F	49%
-13°C / 9°F	52%
-14°C / 7°F	56%

Preparation:

To make Ice wine, the grapes are left on the vine until after the first frost hits. These grapes are harvested after being frozen in the vineyard and then, while still frozen, they are pressed. They must be picked early - mostly before 10 a.m. During both of these processes the temperature cannot exceed -8 degrees C. At this temperature (-8 degrees C) the berries will freeze as hard as marbles. While the grape is still in its frozen state, it is pressed and the water is driven out as shards of ice. This leaves a highly concentrated juice, very high in acids, sugars and aromatics.

Typically Ice wine is made of Vidal and Riesling grapes. After this long harvest process, the grapes go through weeks of fermentation, followed by a few months of barrel aging.

Ice wine generally tastes sweet with fruity (apricot, peach, mango, melon) and usually drunk as a dessert wine. It should be chilled for one to two hours before consuming it.

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