

The ²⁰Guide Wine

Pairing sweet with savoury

Don't save dessert wines just for the end of meals - you're missing out, says **Winsor Dobbin**

Most of us reserve dessert wines, or "stickles", for the end of special occasion meals, but that's a pity because these wines are more versatile than you might think.

In France, the sweet wines of Sauternes and Barsac are traditionally served with foie gras and sometimes paired with goat's or blue cheese soufflés, but Julie Mortlock, senior wine maker for De Bortoli Wines, says the wines are a good match for savoury dishes as well as desserts and fruit. "I very much enjoy sweet wines with soft and blue cheeses, and they are also a

wonderful match with rich dishes like pâtés, terrines and truffles," she says. "These wines have the acid and sweetness to balance the fat in those dishes."

The most complex sweet wines are produced by letting the grapes stay on the vine until they are shrivelled by a naturally occurring fungus known as *Botrytis cinerea*. In 1982, De Bortoli experimented with semillon grapes, a thin-skinned, tightly bunched variety native to the region of Bordeaux. The resulting wine started a trend and the grape growers were thrilled to be able to sell their "rotten grapes".

The 1982 De Bortoli Botrytis Semiillon "Sauternes" (as it was then known), it has been called Noble One since 1999) became one of the world's most awarded wines, with accolades at national and international wine shows. De Bortoli's 2007 vintage Noble One marked the 25th anniversary of the wine, which is now a global benchmark.

Today, dozens of wineries in Australia are making exciting dessert wines from semillon and riesling grapes, including excellent ranges from d'Arenberg, Lily Hills, Josef Chromy and McWilliam's.

Sweet wines are nicknamed stickles because, in addition to sweetness, they often have an almost honey-like texture

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