

FOOD & WINE

6 Common Myths About Sweet Wine

Wine pros weigh in on why dessert wine gets such a bad rap, and why it's such an exciting category.

If hearing the words "sweet wine" conjures a neon pink bottle of glorified cough syrup, you're not alone. While sweet wine, also known as dessert wine, has been meticulously-made and highly-prized for centuries, it's taken a reputation hit in recent decades thanks to cloying, mass-market bottles that were all the rage in the mid-1980s. But not all sweet wines are created equal.

"White Zinfandel gave wine with sugar a poor reputation because they were mass-produced and poor quality wines," says Amy Racine, Beverage Director for New York's IRIS and JF Restaurants. A Riesling from a small German producer, or an off-dry Chenin Blanc from Vouvray, or a Sauternes, is a world away, she says. "These wines are extremely difficult to make, high quality, and most important, have balance."

And while dessert wines come in a diverse range, from red and white to sparkling, Jonathan Feiler, group director of wine for Ocean House Collection in Rhode Island, suggests trying one from a winery you already love for its dry wine. "There is one out there for everyone," he says.

Related: Maximum Coziness Is an Evening Glass of Sweet Wine

Below, wine pros weigh in on the many misconceptions about sweet wine, and why now is the time to try a bottle and judge for yourself.

All Rieslings and rosé wines are sweet.

In fact, says Jonathan Feiler, there are very few sweet Rosés, and most Rieslings are dry. "But the sweet ones can be very well balanced and age incredibly well," he says of the latter.

Sean Rouch, F&B manager at Marigold by Jean-Georges in Keswick, Virginia, loves both dry and sweet Riesling. Specifically, he says the Spätlese category—meaning the wine is made with late harvest, fully-ripe grapes—includes wines that are among the most expressive and versatile. "The residual sugar combined with piercing acidity is a magical combination and can compliment a wide variety of dishes," he says. "The sweetness has the ability to tamp down heat from spices and peppers while imparting an exotic honey and fruit note, while the acidity of Riesling simultaneously cleanses and refreshes the palate."