

# VINOHEAD



## A Little Dessert Never Hurt

Depending on who you ask, this was either one of the slowest or fastest weeks of the year. Just counting down the days. For most businesses, the unofficial close to the year has arrived. And there are very few things (and wines) left on our to-do list. But perhaps one... Dessert Wines.

If you're anything like us, most often a glass or two of wine "after" the meal qualifies as the perfect dessert. I mean, who needs those wasted calories when there's glasses and bottles to be enjoyed. But even we have to admit it's hard to pass up the holiday dessert table. Thankfully, this isn't an either or situation. There will be wine AND dessert.

Dessert wines shine this time of year, and although they're often an overlooked category, our crew found you an array of delectable indulgences that you can order with confidence. Here are **7 dessert-style wines to end the night, the holiday, or the year on a sweet note.**

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## WHAT WE'RE DRINKING

01

### 1996 M. Chapoutier Banyuls (500ml)



Grenache from Languedoc-Roussillon, France FR

**\$19.00**

If you're a fan of the deep red fruits that can come from a ruby Port, but haven't the stomach for the tannins that can come along for the ride, it is time to turn your sights to Banyuls. Banyuls is one of the oldest fortified sweet wines in the world, made from Grenache in the Roussillon region of France. M. Chapoutier represents a commitment to high-quality expressions of Grenache from across the Rhone Valley, and their dedication is reflected in this Roussillon dessert wine. With a robust strawberry jam flavor and hints of cinnamon and black pepper, this is a decadent treat for those who like sweets. And the relatively unknown status of Banyuls in the American market makes this an absolute knockout in terms of value. The French know their desserts - and dessert wines. — *Alex Lopez* **7.8**

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02

### 2015 Alvear Pedro Ximenez de Anada

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Pedro Ximenez from Montilla-Moriles, Spain ES

**\$30.00**

Let's talk about Sherry. And I'm not referring to your grandma's grocery store cooking wine. Pedro Ximénez, or often referred to as P.X., is a Spanish dessert wine made from sun-dried PX grapes. Its chocolatey amber hue looks as delicious as it tastes. Toffee, caramelized oranges and figs, this rich wine is lush and silky. For a match made in Mediterranean heaven, double down on the orange flavors and pair with a healthy slice of Sicilian Orange cake. The slight bitterness of the cake, from the orange peels baked in, beautifully balances the wine's unctuous sweetness. Serve this wine slightly chilled for maximum pleasure. — *Vivian Chen* **8.0**

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**03**

### Vadin Plateau Renaissance Premier Cru Extra Brut



Pinot Meunier from Champagne, France FR

**\$50.00**

When you think of dessert wine, an extra brut grower champagne may not be the first thing that comes to mind, but bubbles are perfect from start to finish at any meal. And there are few grower champagnes at this price point with such laser focus and all owing to the expertise of the multi-generational Vadin Plateau. The Renaissance is 100% Pinot Meunier and the flagship for the house. Lightning acidity plays with tightly wound cranberry and honeydew aromas demonstrating a true purity of fruit. This is a holiday treat worthy of your imported gourmet, dessert cheese spread or even those dried fruits and candied nuts you know you'll be snacking on all night. — *Maxx Eichberg* **8.2**

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04

### Churchill's 20 Year Old Tawny Port



Blend from Porto, Portugal **PT**

**\$54.95**

If I'm going for a glass of Port, it's going to be a Tawny. Give me all that nutty, marmalade, oxidative goodness. The grapes for Churchill's Port are hand-picked and foot-stomped, fermented with wild yeast and produced with minimal intervention. Here, the "master blender" incorporates time, wood, and experience to produce a smooth, rich, and complex treat for the senses. Chill your bottle, pour a glass, and grab a few of those gingersnap cookies for this sweet and savory elixir. And if you happen to have a Cuban on-hand, light it up while you're at it. It's the holidays. — *Kristy*

*Wenz* **8.3**

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05

### 2015 Domaine Dugois Vin de Paille Arbois (375ml)



White Blend from Arbois, France **FR**

**\$29.99**

The French region of Arbois is an unsung hero of dessert-style wines. Although they are not produced in high quantities, and are often difficult to source, their availability has greatly increased over the years. This bottling is a blend of Chardonnay, Trousseau, Savagnin and Ploussard – all of which were hand harvested and left to dry out for five months. This allows for a boost in flavor concentration with notes of fig, honey, walnut shell, and citrus. It is naturally sweet, but not overly cloying. A showstopper for a wide range of typical desserts, but don't shy away from a post-dinner cheese plate. — *Phil Castelluzzo* **8.4**

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06

### 2013 Disznoko Tokaji Aszú 5 Puttonyos (500ml)



Blend from Tokaji, Hungary HU

**\$49.99**

Difficult to pronounce but extremely enjoyable, this gem from Hungary is one of the most famous sweet wines of the world. A blend of many different native varieties, the grapes used for the base of this wine are botrytised (the “noble rot” mold) to help add layers of honeycomb and sweet citrus to the already stellar profile of spices, white flowers, candied pineapple, and baked pear. These wines are meant to age, but younger vintages won’t disappoint if they are easier to find. Thankfully it has screaming acidity to balance out the residual sugar, so it finishes very clean, and gets you thirsting for more. — *Phil Castelluzzo* **8.4**

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07

### Broadbent 10 Year Boal Madeira



Madeira from Madeira, Portugal PT

**\$49.99**

Ahh, Madeira... the mistress of sommeliers outside of their romance with Riesling. One of the most storied wine regions in history, these fortified wines can age forever and are super versatile at the table. This bottling from Broadbent, one of the icons of the region, is a blend of different age lengths, the minimum of which is 10 years old. Toasted nuts, caramel, toffee, fruit cake, and orange peel dominate the profile and are perfectly suited for chocolate or nutty desserts. For me, though, good company is all you need. Hands down one of the best wines to sip during a conversation by the fire. — *Phil Castelluzzo* **8.5**

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## NATTY'S CORNER



### **THE OJAI VINEYARD BARBERA FORTIFIED WINE (375ml)**

Barbera from Ventura County, California

\$38.00

It should be known that I have a sweet tooth. I can sniff out a sweet a mile away, and somehow I always have room for a bite or sip of something sweet to round out a meal. Personally, I like the contrast of something a little bitter or salty with my sweet, making the final note of the meal a balanced one. If there's an espresso shot, there's going to be a vanilla gelato, or a berry cobbler with fresh whipped cream, and if there's dessert wine, that usually means I'm getting a dark chocolate something, especially if that 3-ounce pour is Ojai Vineyard's Barbera Fortified wine. A hipper version of port, this bright and lively wine is an elevated way to close out any meal.

**Not So Nutty:** One of port's distinct qualities is its slightly oxidative, nutty taste, which outweighs any fruit tones. This is "nut" the case with this California dessert wine: it's vibrant pomegranate, those raspberry and cherry Italian hard candies (you know the kind in the tin?), with some notes of blood orange and herbs. It's deep and layered, yet nothing too intense. The lower than usual ABV 15.5% keeps it from feeling too heavy.

**Life is like a box of chocolates:** you never know what you're going to get," a sentiment our dear friend Tom Hanks made popular as Forrest Gump. And with this bottle, you really can't go wrong with any box of holiday chocolates. Being a dark chocolate person, I'd say a dark chocolate truffle would be perfect, but have fun taking bites of different chocolates and see for yourself what works for your palette!



**Heatwave:** With temperatures all over the world being impacted by climate change, the winemakers at Ojai Vineyard took a roaring hot 120-degree day, and saw their opportunity to make lemonade out of lemons. I have a hunch that this will be happening world-wide, and we will be seeing dessert wines popping up from more regions!

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## WHAT WE'RE READING



TECHCRUNCH

**FINTECH VINT HOPES TO TURN WINE & SPIRITS  
INTO A MAINSTREAM ASSET CLASS**



HYPEBEAST

**BIG BANG'S T.O.P LAUNCHES T'SPOT WINE  
LABEL**



WIRED

**WINE IS GETTING PRICIER THANKS TO A  
LOGISTICAL NIGHTMARE**



WALL STREET JOURNAL

**AMERICAN SECOND-HOME BUYERS ARE  
POURING INTO ITALY'S WINE COUNTRY**



FINANCIAL TIMES

**AUSTRALIANS SWAP BEER FOR WINE AS 'AMBER  
NECTAR' LOSES ITS APPEAL**

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## IF YOU DON'T KNOW, NOW YOU KNOW

Sweet treats can be some of the most difficult foods to pair with wine. The reason? The wine has to be as sweet, or sweeter, than the dessert. If it's not....well, have you ever brushed your teeth and then had a glass of orange juice. Eek! All pith and no fruit. It's the same with wine and sweets. If your wine isn't as sweet as your dessert, expect your wine to taste bitter. And what's worse, it's hard to recover your palate after eating something sweet, so to be safe, finish your dinner pour and move on to a dessert style or sweet wine before you bite into that tiramisu. Fortunately, options are plentiful from fortified styles to bubbles, and from botrytised styles to ice wines. It's time to start exploring this luscious, and often overlooked category.

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