

# Misty's View of Icewine

If you get lemons, make lemonade. If you get frozen grapes, make icewine?

That's what some very smart vintners figured out. The origin of icewine, like the origin of the dessert wine Madeira, is a happy accident. Grapes froze then thawed then froze again in an unexpected cycle creating grapes rich in sweetness yet full of the requisite acidity. The exact details of the icewine story is one worth learning about from the experts since their genius in taking happenstance to a level of wine perfection is, I suggest, unprecedented.

Another star in this story is of course, the Niagara biosphere, a climate haven for icewine since it is never too hot to grow grapes and never too cold to kill off the grape vines. In fact, **the Niagara region is the only place in the world where this perfect storm of climate phenomena occurs and icewine is the delicious result**, albeit one that requires enormous skill and craftsmanship from Niagara's winemakers to produce.

During the late 1980s, my husband and I, in our Toronto restaurant, Chez Bear Bistro, hosted an icewine tasting held by wine writer Tony Aspler. He arrived with several bottles, and 70 or so glasses. Guests learned about this new product and enjoyed its unique qualities. At the end of the evening we poured out what was left in the bottles and decided that there had to be a culinary application for icewine.

We reduced and concentrated the wine into syrup and incorporated it to our classic baked cheese cake recipe, adding less sugar to compensate for the blast of sweet fruit qualities furnished by the icewine. We paired the cake with a tart berry coulis to act as a foil for its richness. It was decadent. The wine added a special intensity of flavour that made this dessert worthy of a special occasion!

Since then, **icewine has developed into an even more sophisticated product** and now features Cabernet Franc, a red version that challenges the Riesling and Vidal



strongholds in the market.

So it is Cabernet Franc that is my focus in the kitchen today. Recently, I made a nectarine, apple, and black plum crumble to which I added a reduction of this red icewine. The result was a very grown up, adult dessert not suitable for children but deliciously reminiscent of the comfort of the nursery and childhood dishes.

Nostalgia made current is a trend many chefs have adopted. I saw this idea in action when I ran a kitchen in Oxford, England at the oldest pub in town, The Duke of Cambridge. It was transformed by its new owners into a beautiful, hip, modern place with mahogany bar, comfortable seating and a menu that featured upper class dishes from the Edwardian era. Add well-heeled Oxford students who remember the smoked haddock kedgeree that was served on the hunting breakfast buffet table and you get comfort food elevated in a new context. Think Downton Abbey descendants looking for the past in the present.

So for me, **the judicious addition of icewine to classic favourites works**, especially where fruit is concerned. Roasting peaches with icewine and then serving them over ice cream is a simple way to create a modern dessert that resonates with childhood memories of fruit and cream. Simply cut peaches in half, remove the pit, and roast them on a tray in a hot oven topped with a mixture of Demerara sugar and red icewine.

A Vidal would also be an excellent choice to use.

**Icewine can also transform your main courses into something special.** Baste pork tenderloin or veal tenderloin with it three or four times during the roasting process to give the meat a honeyed coating. Or add a little reduction of icewine to your demi-glace instead.

You can even **use a little icewine in your salad dressings**, especially if your salad features strawberries, raspberries or mango. Cut the recommended vinegar amount in half and substitute icewine for the other half.

Many Niagara wine producers have asked their resident chefs to create wonderful recipes that you should check out as well. These chefs have been tasked with the fascinating job of creating inventive, delightful dishes that feature icewine.

**Get to know icewine. It is a national treasure** and one that my French brother-in-law packs in his suitcase every time he returns to his home in Burgundy. Enough said. **NEV**

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