

# @ THE WINERY

## A SWEET TOOTH

A good proportion of people like sweet things - chocolate, cakes, desserts, soft drinks, sweet wine.

There is an old aphorism in the wine business that 'consumers talk dry, but drink sweet' and sweet wines (for example Sauternes) and fortifieds like Port or Sherry have been made for many centuries.

Winemakers aim for flavour balance in the wines they make and that generally means, for good table wines, that the reds are completely dry and the whites mostly so as well. The exceptions of course are dessert styles and most rosés.

Wine grapes start off containing about 25% sugars (mainly fructose) and this is converted into alcohol during fermentation. So when a wine has completely fermented it has no sugars remaining ('dry'), but alcohol itself tastes slightly sweet. By deliberately stopping the fermentation before it's complete you can leave more sweetness in the wine.

Wine can also be sweetened by the addition of concentrated grape juice, after fermentation is completed.

The terms used for various sweetness levels in wine are -

Dry (called 'Extra Brut' in sparkling wines)

Less than 9 grams of sweetness per litre. This equates to 2 teaspoons of sugar in a litre of wine - that's not very

much, particularly as it is balanced by the wine's acidity.

Medium Dry ('Brut' or 'Sec')

Up to 18 grams per litre. Most Rosés are in this range.

Medium ('Demi Sec')

Up to 45 grams per litre

Sweet ('Dulce')

More than 45 g/L (Port has about 80g/L, Coca-Cola has about 130g/L, 'Noble One' has a massive 230 g/L)

Unfortunately the sweetness (g/L) is not shown on a wine label.

Last year there was some U.K. market research done to determine people's preferred sweetness in Shiraz. They took a \$10 wine, added various levels of sweetness and asked people which they preferred. The majority (59%) liked somewhere between 16 and 20 g/L sugar and, interestingly, they described this level as 'fruity', not 'sweet'.

The mass-market wine producers often add sweetness to their low to mid-priced wines. Brands such as Yellow Tail and McGuigans are notorious for making all their red wines quite sweet, purely to satisfy that market (and probably ignoring the wishes of their own winemakers. Marketing always prevails over production).

*Warwick Adams*

Winemaker

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