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Snow Wine – A Winter Elixir

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Ice wine is not the way to serve white wine with ice cubes or chilled in the refrigerator. The term “ice” or snow wine refers to the way a special wine is produced in winter, mainly in Germany and Austria.

The first ice wine was „invented“ in the municipality of Bingen-Dromersheim in February 1830 out of necessity. In 1829 a large part of the harvest remained unpicked in the vineyards. It was only in February that the growers managed to gather the frozen grapes. They noticed, however, that the berries contained a very sweet juice with a high must weight and decided to process it into wine. A high-quality beverage produced from frozen grapes.

Minus seven degrees – the perfect temperature

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Ice wine (in English: *Ice wine*), (in German: *Eiswein*) is a type of dessert noble sweet wine produced from frozen grapes that are left on the vine after the autumn harvest and then pressed again while still frozen. The method of producing ice wine is quite different from the traditional one. The grapes are left unpicked on the vines, sometimes for months. With the onset of the winter season, temperatures drop and ice crystals form in the berries, which in practice dehydrate them and leave only the concentrated sugars and acids.

The grapes must be harvested only in a frozen state, which means that specific climatic conditions are required to obtain the winter elixir. If the cold weather is delayed, the grapes spoil and the crop is completely lost. The flavour is lost, especially when the grapes freeze several times and then thaw again in the sun.

If the winter is too cold, it is impossible to press enough juice. The grapes are harvested only by hand, usually late at night, when temperatures are between -7 and -15 degrees. At minus seven to minus eight degrees the water in the grapes freezes and only the sweetest and best extract remains liquid. Precisely for this reason the grapes must be pressed as quickly as possible while they are still frozen. The result is a rarity sought after internationally, which can easily be stored for several decades.

The resulting wines have a bright amber colour (from white varieties) or orange-red colour (when from red varieties), high sugar content, body, alcohol content between 6% and 13% and an exceptional fruity aroma of peach, apricot, honey, citrus fruits and caramel.

Authentic „ice wine“ must comply with the standards of the VQA (Vintners Quality Alliance), which prohibit artificial freezing of the grapes or alternative modifications of the original recipe.

Ice wines are produced not only in Germany and Austria, but also in the USA and Canada, where there are likewise suitable conditions.

In Germany ice wine is usually made from the Riesling variety, while in North America the favourite variety of winemakers is Vidal Blanc. In addition to white varieties, ice wine is also made from the red varieties Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah.

The best-known and most expensive wines of this type come from Germany and Canada. Prices range between 60 and 100 euros, and in 2006 the most expensive bottle to date, produced by the Canadian winery Royal DeMaria, was sold for the amount of 30,000 Canadian dollars (about 20,000 euros).

Ice wines are traditionally served with desserts, but they can also be paired with spicy cheeses.

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