

THE WINE NEWS

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Jyn Farmer **Dessert** in a glass

It is the slow-to-dawn revelation of the restaurant critic's life that you can't eat it all. But I want to. I'm conditioned by wine tastings where I can taste and spit my way through a dozen or more flavor profiles in a single session. Aside from the fact that spitting is definitely out at most restaurants, it's difficult to sample dozens of dishes without alerting the kitchen that a reporter is in the house. Restaurant critics walk a thin line between discretion and obsession, and the line is finest when it's time for dessert.

The dishes are being cleared and you're sitting there taking mental notes, surreptitiously memorizing every last morsel. And just when you think your work is done, the waiter brings out the dessert menu, and the pastry chef steps up to the plate.

Pastry chefs sit high in my pantheon of culinary stars, perhaps because an early job as a pastry chef (I use the term loosely) helped ignite my passion for food and wine. Regardless of the level of expertise, the most deftly made dessert is murder on the remains of a great Cabernet or Syrah deserving to be drunk before the check arrives.

These days, I've found balance at the end of a meal by restricting my own indulgence to a glass of sweet wine. (I am not completely sated, however, until I've sampled one bite from each dessert ordered by my dinner companions.) As for the wine, I'm not overly particular, as long as it's something along the lines of luscious late-harvest Riesling from California; richly honeyed Chenin Blanc from the Loire; inky, unctuous Port; sublime Sauternes; beguiling Beerenauslesen; terrific Tokay...well, you get the idea. The problem is, I'm often drinking alone.

Some of the greatest wines in the world are sweet. They're hard to make, and therefore expensive, but the good ones reward the buyer many times over. There are collectors who covet nothing else, but for the most part, consumers consistently pass on dessert wines.

I even have friends who can rattle on through an entire dinner on the differences between flavor profiles of pinot noir grown in Beaune and Corton, but when I bring out a Sauternes, their response is lukewarm. "It's okay," they allow.

Okay? Are you kidding me? For

depth and complexity of flavor, for nuance and sheer breed, I'll put a Château Suidiraut against a Puligny-Montrachet any day. Made rich and exotic by infection from *botrytis cinerea*, or "noble rot," these are the wines enophiles aspire to appreciate. After four decades, when most *grand cru* Burgundies of the same age are just a faded memory in the bottle, Gaston Huët's Vouvrays are entering a new level of elegance. A single glass is a source of contemplation and enjoyment that fills the end of the meal with lightness and satisfaction. That is, if you can find it.

The problem is, most restaurateurs are as perplexed by these wines as are consumers. But, ironically, there are more dessert wines in the marketplace today than ever before.

The trailblazer among North American sweet wines is Beringer Nightingale, named after its "inventor," the late Myron Nightingale, who "harnessed" *botrytis*. Basically, he figured out how to manipulate the mold that punctures the grape skin, evaporating