



LIQUID GOLD *from* NAPA VALLEY

NORTH AMERICA'S ONLY WINERY DEVOTED TO PRODUCING A SINGLE, LATE HARVEST WINE

Oakville, CA – Napa Valley's Dolce is the only winery in North America that is solely devoted to producing a single, late harvest wine. It is one of few wineries in the world willing to make such a commitment, sharing a common philosophy with the great Sauternes producers of Bordeaux.

Named from the Italian phrase *Dolce Far Niente* – sweet to do nothing – Dolce (pronounced *dol' chay*) is the brainchild of Dirk Hampson, director of winemaking and partner in Oakville's Far Niente winery. In 1985, Hampson endeavored to make a late harvest wine purely for the enjoyment of himself and his partners, Far Niente Proprietor Gil Nickel and President Larry Maguire. The inaugural vintage produced just six barrels and, encouraged by the quality of the wine, Hampson tried again in 1986, producing nine barrels. Vintages 1987 and 1988 produced no Dolce. The 1989 vintage, released in 1992 -- a full seven years after the initial vintage -- marked the first commercial release of the wine and the launch of Dolce as its own separate winery.

"I had to convince my partners that making Dolce was a good idea, especially since we run the risk of growing a whole vineyard full of fruit, and if no botrytis occurs, we have to write off the entire harvest. It's a high-risk business plan," says Hampson.

By its nature, Dolce is a rare wine and its production costs are high. It is produced by leaving ripe Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc grapes on the vine late in the harvest season and, if the right weather conditions occur, allowing a mold called botrytis cinerea, commonly known as noble rot, to attack the grapes. The botrytis shrivels the grapes, evaporating the water while concentrating the sugars and flavors.

During harvest, the grapes are handpicked over several passes. Individual clusters, partial clusters or even single berries are chosen. The harvest usually lasts six weeks or more, depending on conditions, and often ends in late November or early December. Then the fragile grapes are pressed to release their rich, sugary juice, which is barrel fermented and aged in 100 percent French oak.

It's unpredictable year-to-year if any botrytis will develop in the vineyard and if so, how thoroughly it will spread. While the vineyard produces four-to-five tons per acre of healthy grapes, after the botrytis attacks and the grapes are picked, the vineyard yields only about one ton of useable grapes per acre.

"It's a risk when you only make a botrytis dessert wine, you may have a year when nothing can save the harvest. For us, the first day of harvest means that, no matter what, we got something! We still have to turn it into a great wine worthy of the Dolce label, but the first thing is getting the grapes into the barn," says Hampson.



LIQUID GOLD *from* NAPA VALLEY

More than a decade after its debut, Dolce has proven itself both a critical and business success. Considered one of America's finest late harvest wines, Dolce consistently garners ratings of 90 points and higher from leading wine publications. Dolce has been able to produce wine in every vintage since 1989 although the quantity has varied greatly, from as few as 300 cases to as many as 3,000, depending on how much botrytis develops each year. Plans to expand the future production of Dolce are underway. Currently produced from its own 20-acre vineyard in the Coombsville area, additional acreage has been planted with the hope that the culture of botrytis will take hold and proliferate. Long-term plans call for the construction of a Dolce winemaking facility located next to the vineyard.