

Dessert wines can enhance the ending of a wonderful meal

By L. PIERCE CARSON
Register Staff Writer

Serve a delightful dessert wine to dinner guests and you've taken midweek mundane to weekend wonderful.

Whether accompanying a homemade tart or a summery fruit soup, a dessert wine can provide palatable lift to the final course of a meal.

In fact, a well-made glass of sweet wine in the style of Sauternes, or a pour of top-grade late harvest riesling, might well stand in for a homemade dessert.

Certainly the benchmark for New World dessert wines is Dolce, the exquisite late harvest "liquid gold" first created in 1985 by the partners of Far Niente (Gil and Beth Nickel, Dirk Hampson and Larry Maguire).

Director of winemaking Hampson maintains Dolce is "an extraordinary wine bred from a combination of sunshine, soil, fog, expertise and dedication. Dolce embraces a simply deceptive philosophy — the pursuit of perfection in the art of late harvest winemaking."

The Dolce winegrowing team selected 20 acres of sauvignon blanc and semillon grapes for this project. Then all involved hope weather conditions allow the ripened fruit to be attacked by noble rot, *botrytis cinerea*, which shrivels the grapes to wrinkled sugar-rich globes. A mold, this noble rot was, in 17th-century Hungary, found to enhance the grape, simultaneously evaporating its water while concentrating sugars and flavors.

A concentrated nectar is pressed from the grapes and then spends six months fermenting before being aged for nearly three years in specially selected French oak barrels. The wine is then artfully blended by winemaker Greg Allen and bottled.

Napa Valley's Dolce Winery is the only winery in North America solely devoted to producing a single, late harvest wine.

2005 Dolce: Primarily semillon (90 percent), this year's blend included the usual amount of sauvignon blanc (10 percent) and contained 12 percent residual sugar at bottling. Ripeness is the hallmark of this vintage, with stone fruit and citrus — mostly peaches and oranges — providing inviting aromas and palate-coasting pleasure. The long, honeyed finish also provides a hint of baking spice. As always, this is a dessert wine that can stand alone at the finish of the meal.