

# Sticky and sweet

Tim Atkin's top 12 sweet wines: they're unfashionable and they shouldn't be ...

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- **Tim Atkin**
  - The Observer, Sunday 26 April 2009
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White: 2007 Dr L Riesling, Mosel (£5, 8.5%, Asda)

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Recently reduced in price from £6.78 per bottle, this is a bargain Mosel Riesling from the indefatigable Ernie Loosen. It's floral and crisp, with a good balance between youthful stone fruit flavours and tingling acidity.

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White: 2007 Concha y Toro Late Harvest Sauvignon Blanc, Maule Valley (£5.99 or £3.99 each for two per half, 12%, Majestic)

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One of Chile's best stickies, made (unusually) from Sauvignon Blanc. Elegant and refreshing with citrus fruit and a touch of peachy sweetness.

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Rose: Moscato Freisa Spumante, Giovanni Bosca Tosti (£6.99, 6.5%, Marks & Spencer)

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This is a northern Italian blend of mainly Moscato with 20% red Freisa, the latter adding a note of wild strawberries to the latter's grapey, honeyed base. Perfect with summer pudding.

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White: Mick Morris Liqueur Muscat, Rutherglen (£7.49, 18%, Tesco)

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Ultra-sweet, unctuous and tongue-coating, this aged Muscat from the hothouse climate of northern Victoria is hedonism in a glass. Sticky, complex and attractively mature, it's smoky, raisiny and utterly delicious.

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White: 2007 Jurançon Clos Uroulat, Charles Hours (£8.95 per half, 13%, H & H Bancroft, 020 7232 5470)

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**The sweet wines of Jurançon are some of the freshest and most elegant of all. This is light, citrus crunchy and very fine with the sweetness more than balanced by the acidity on offer.**

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White: 2005 Taste the Difference Sauternes, Château Guiraud (£8.99, 13%, Sainsbury's)

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**A very drinkable Sauternes from Sainsbury's Taste the Difference range, this shows Botrytis-derived flavours of apricot and honeycomb, with a dusting of vanilla spice. Try it with apple tart.**

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White: 2007 Paul Cluver Noble Late Harvest Weisser Riesling, Elgin (£11.49 per half, 12%, [waitrosewine.com](http://waitrosewine.com))

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**Grown in the former apple-growing area of Elgin, this dessert Riesling has lovely fruit flavours and remarkable complexity, elegance and palate length.**

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White: 2006 Cookoothama Botrytis Semillon, Nugan Estate, Riverina (£11.99 per half, 11.5%, Morrisons)

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**This stunning Aussie Semillon looks slightly out of place at Morrisons, but it really is worth a special trip to purchase. Spicy and intense, with notes of honey and tropical fruit.**

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White: 2005 Darting Estate Scheurebe Beerenauslese, Pfalz (£13.99 per half, 9.5%, selected branches of M&S)

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**This Palatinate Beerenauslese packs a lot of flavour for a wine with such low alcohol. Grapefruity and refreshing with flavours of mango and citrus peel.**

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White: 2005 De Trafford Straw Wine, Stellenbosch (£19.22 per half, 12.5%, Bibendum, 0207 449 4120)

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**David Trafford dries the grapes for this wine on straw mats to concentrate their sugars and flavours. The result is very rich: pineapple, vanilla and crème brûlée are all entwined on the palate.**

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White: 2005 Molino Real Mountain Wine, Malaga (£29 per 50cl, 13%, The Wine Society, 01438 740222)

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Produced from old vines in Andalusia, this barrel-fermented stunner gets my vote as Spain's best unfortified sweet wine. Rich, yet refreshing with flavours of orange marmalade and citrus zest.

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White: 2003 Királyudvar Tokaji Cuvée Ilona (£33 per 50cl, 11.5%, [waitrosewine.com](http://waitrosewine.com))

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Drinking this wine is like waking up in Paradise. It's a very modern interpretation of Tokaji, with layer after layer of flavour. As close to sweet perfection as I've tasted this year.

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Yuck," said the American tourist standing next to me in Sauternes, handling a bunch of rotten grapes as if it were a dog turd. "They make great sweet wines out of this stuff? You're kidding me."

Even to a seasoned wine professional, the sight of botrytis cinerea, a grey fungus that sounds like an STD, can be arresting. How does something that looks so revolting - think of a bunch of grapes that have been left in the fruit bowl for a month - produce sweet wines of such poise and complexity?

The answer is that botrytis, also known as noble rot, dehydrates the berries and concentrates what's left behind, namely sugar, acidity and flavour. Many of the world's great sweet wines, from Bordeaux to Tokaji, Germany to Australia, are made in this way, with producers awaiting the onset of something that spells disaster in a red-wine vineyard, where it is known as grey, not noble rot.

Botrytis isn't the only way to produce grapes with high levels of sugar, which is fortunate given that it needs specific, generally humid conditions to occur. You can stop the fermentation (Moscato d'Asti), fortify the wine with neutral spirit (Port, Madeira, Sherry and Rutherglen Muscat), dry the grapes on mats (Vin de Paille and Recioto della Valpolicella), leave them to freeze in the vineyard (Icewine and Eiswein) or just pick them very late in the season (Beerenauslese, Late Harvest). That's one of the reasons why sweet wines are so diverse.

The other is that they are made from dozens of different grape varieties in most of the world's major wine-producing countries. For all that, you can divide them into two main camps: those made in hot regions, which tend to be fortified, and those made in cooler climates, which are generally fresher and (to my palate) better balanced because they have higher levels of natural acidity.

Sweet wines are out of fashion at the moment, which is why they are comparatively cheap given how much work goes into making them. Part of the problem is that they are often lumped together as "dessert wines", when many of them work better as aperitifs or with cheese than they do with, say, chocolate.

Some people worry about the calories that so-called stickies contain, but what's wrong with the occasional glass of something sweet, especially when it tastes this good? Go on, indulge yourself!

- For more from Tim Atkin go to [thewinegang.com](http://thewinegang.com); [timatkin.com](http://timatkin.com)

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