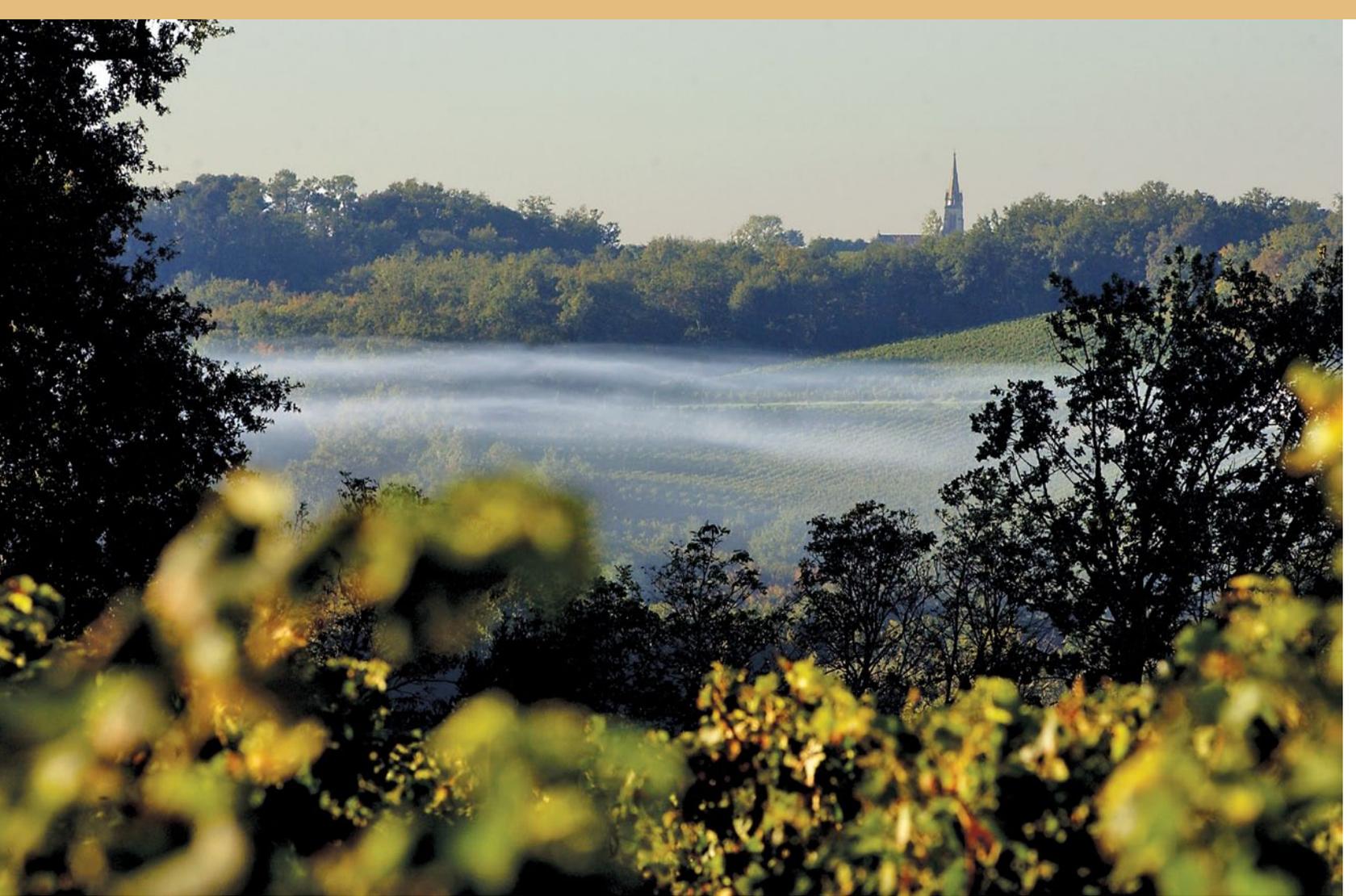






Just as Sweet

BY LAURIE FORSTER | IMAGES COURTESY OF UNION
DES GRANDS VINS LIQUOREUX DE BORDEAUX



Just south of the city of Bordeaux lies the wine region of Entre-Deux-Mers. Its name literally translated means “between two seas” as it’s positioned between the Dordogne and Garonne rivers. This triangle of land offers picturesque landscapes, historical forts, quaint villages and impressive monasteries that date back to the Middle Ages.

The beauty of the Entre-Deux-Mers is matched by its outstanding wines, some of the best being the sweet wines from the towns of Cadillac, Loupiac and Sainte-Croix-du-Mont. Often overshadowed by their prestigious neighbor Sauternes the from Entre-Deux-Mers are just as deliciously sweet and usually much more affordable. In fact, this area is only separated from Sauternes by the Garonne River and about 10 miles.

As a wine educator and author of *The Sipping Point*, a primer on all things wine, I travel the world talking to wine lovers about wine. One of the most misunderstood and most maligned types of wine is sweet wine. And no wonder. Who among us doesn’t have gag-worthy memories of sickly juice-infused wine coolers?

One of my greatest pleasures is introducing the unexpected and steering palates towards beautifully crafted wines they might otherwise overlook. The sweet wines of Bordeaux, specifically Entre-Deux-Mers, are among them.



Both Entre-Deux-Mers and Sauternes are created by a fungus called *Botrytis Cinera*, which is often referred to as noble rot. The fall weather in this maritime climate alternates between misty mornings and sunny afternoons, the perfect conditions for noble rot to develop. Once affected with *Botrytis*, the grapes will shrivel and the acidity will decrease as sugar increases.

Noble rot does not affect all the grapes evenly so harvest is a labor intensive process that must be done in several waves of picking. Another risk to the winemaker comes from Mother Nature. Grapes destined for sweet wines are left on the vine well into the fall when heavy rains, hailstorms or the early onset of winter can devastate a vineyard.

Established as an official wine appellation in 1973, Cadillac is the youngest and smallest of the three sweet wines regions of Entre-Deux-Mers with soils that are rich in chalk and gravel. Its name is familiar to most Americans and for good reason. Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac from this region later settled the area that is now Detroit, Michigan and to commemorate a car was named after him in 1902. The sweet wines of Cadillac are a blend of the traditional white grapes of the region Semillon, Sauvignon and Muscadelle. Cadillacs become smoother, softer and more complex with age.

Loupiac was established in 1937 and is double the size of Cadillac with soils concentrated with clay and limestone. The wines from this area use a more Semillon in the blend and are known to be a bit fuller, more deeply golden and in some cases aged in newer oak barrels.

The Sainte-Croix-du-Mont appellation, established in 1936, is often considered the most important of the three sweet appellations since its conditions are most like those of Sauternes with better vineyards on the gravelly slopes. One of other unique aspects of this area is that it lies on a plateau of fossilized oyster shells. Many of the Chateaus in the area dedicated to detail and hand crafted wines.

Sweet wines should be served at between 8-10 degrees C in smaller white or dessert style glasses. Traditional pairings for Noble Rot wines include fruit tarts, crème brulee, blue cheese and foie gras. Luckily, there are so many more possibilities. More novel combinations include savory dishes with fish, duck, sausage and poultry that have an element of spice and heat to them. Wines that work best with spicy foods are ones with a great balance of fruit, sweetness and acid—all qualities of the sweet wines of Bordeaux.

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SWEET WINES TO WATCH

While these areas don't have quite the history of their Bordeaux counterparts they have developed a reputation for making excellent sweet wines.

Rutherglen Muscats: In Australia they call sweet wines “stickies” after their consistency. The muscats from the Rutherglen region of Victoria are fortified wines that produced using a solera system of barrels similar to how sherry is produced. Caramel, Coffee and spice are typical flavors that Rutherglen Muscats offer to entice a wine lover's palate.

Canadian Ice Wines: Germany may have introduced ice wine (Eiswein) to the world but Canada has taken the ball and run with it. Made from a variety of grapes, including Riesling and Vidal Blanc these grapes are left to freeze on the vine then harvested and pressed frozen. Flavors of apricot, pineapple and honey are typical for ice wines. The concentration of sugar in these wines is balanced by their palate cleansing acidity.

South African Chenin Blancs: A variety of dessert style Chenin Blancs are made in South Africa that rival their counterparts from the Loire Valley in France. Some late harvest styles and other are the result of noble rot. They tend to have a more tropical fruit profile and are sometimes aged in oak, giving them a toasty element. They are almost always a good value.