



# Late-Harvest Wines

By Stacy Briscoe

AN EARLY-WINTER WALK through the vineyard is generally quiet, as leaves rustle on the ground and the vines get ready for dormancy. You turn your head, see a cluster of grapes—full, over-plump, ready to burst, maybe looking a little bit funky on the outside. Were they forgotten? Rejected?

No. They're just waiting for their moment—the moment they can be picked and made into a late-harvest wine. After the regular harvest concludes, but before vines shut down for the winter, a winemaker has one more chance to put their touch on the nearly-finished vintage with a late-harvest offering.

"Liquid gold" is how Cara Morrison, Chardonnay winemaker for Sonoma-Cutrer describes her late-harvest Chardonnay. "OK, being more technical, it's a sweet wine made from grapes picked much later and much riper than for typical wine," she explains.

Grapes for a late-harvest wine are generally picked between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Sonoma-Cutrer celebrates the holiday-season harvest as a team: "We get a group of tasting room, hospitality, administrative, and cellar staff to pick the grapes," says Morrison. "We provide coffee and donuts to make a fun event for employees who don't normally get the opportunity to pick. It's a fun, festive, and cold occasion."

What's more, Morrison sticks with tradition: "We pick the grapes with plenty of botrytis. They don't look too pretty, but they taste fantastic—like pure honey."

"Botrytis is a fungus that can have a negative impact in some wines, but it's a positive component of late-harvest wines. It intensifies the sweetness of the wine and adds a honeyed characteristic," explains Katy Wilson, winemaker for Anaba, which crafts a late-harvest Viognier. "Viognier is a great variety for late-harvest wine because ... [it's] a very aromatic variety and has great texture. This makes for a balanced and complex wine."

Stew Lauterbach of Lauterbach Cellars likes to compare his late-harvest Syrah to his port-style Syrah dessert wine so guests can appreciate the difference. "With port-style wines, I stop [traditionally harvested] Syrah fermentation at 12 percent sugar by fortifying it with wine alcohol, which increases the alcohol to 19%, and keeps all the unfermented sugar," he explains.

But with late-harvest wines, "because of higher sugar at harvest, yeast will stop fermenting naturally. Whatever sugar is left is left. You have no control." The result is a wine that is less sweet than the dessert wine.

Lauterbach's 2013 late-harvest Syrah is a true holiday wine—harvested the day before Thanksgiving and pressed the day before Christmas. "My wife, Barb, loves this wine with dark, bitter chocolate," says the winemaker. **S**



## THREE TO TRY

### SONOMA-CUTRER

#### 2018 Late-Harvest Chardonnay

Highly aromatic, with fresh fruit and floral notes and an incredibly viscous, lush mouthfeel. Its sweetness is balanced with crisp acidity. Notes of white peach, dried apricot, baked apple, toasted almonds, honey, citrus zest, and quince paste.

Enjoy with: Lemon-flavored cake and pastries, especially when topped with cream and baked fruit. Also pairs well with the traditional holiday fruitcake.

**\$36 for 375 ml**

707-237-3489 / [sonomacutrer.com](http://sonomacutrer.com)

### ANABA

#### 2018 Late-Harvest Viognier

Aromas and flavors of apricot, pear, jasmine, white tea, and peach along with honeyed notes from the botrytis.

Enjoy with: A glass by itself can often be dessert enough, but do not miss pairing this beautiful wine with pumpkin pie! Or, do as the French do, and finish with a cheese course and the sweet viognier. Winemaker Katy Wilson loves this wine with Cowgirl Creamery's Red Hawk.

**\$34 for 375 ml**

707-996-4188 / [anabawines.com](http://anabawines.com)

### LAUTERBACH CELLARS

#### 2013 Late-Harvest Syrah

Intense aromas of fig jam and plum jam, complemented by savory notes of clove, nutmeg, chili-spiced chocolate, and roasted coffee.

Enjoy with: Bittersweet chocolate, as the winemaker's wife suggests. Or go the savory route and try this 'dessert-style wine' with roast rack of lamb.

**\$28 for 375 mL, \$50 for 750 mL**

707-578-0537 / [lauterbachcellars.com](http://lauterbachcellars.com)