



## Ice Wine: Born in Frost Upstate

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NEW YORK -- It's called ice wine -- dubbed "the nectar of the gods" for its rare, sweet intensity and high price. It's so rare that upstate New York winemaker Art Hunt had to wait three years for the current harvest.

With the temperature at 10 degrees and the fruit just ripe enough, Hunt and his crew picked six tons of Vidal grapes and quickly pressed them to make the new ice wine now fermenting to drink by springtime.

Bert Miller can't wait for the day to arrive. Miller, the manager of the revolving rooftop restaurant above the Marriott Marquis hotel in Times Square, had bought out Hunt's 2002 ice wine supply and is awaiting the 2005 vintage in April.

"Ice wine is a hot item all over the country," said Miller, manager of The View.

The white elixir goes for as much as \$100 for a half-bottle that is slightly larger than a can of soda. Hunt's goes for about \$40 -- less than half the price of the best from Canada, which leads the world in ice wine production.

At Hunt Country Vineyards in Branchport, about an hour from Rochester and five hours from Manhattan, good weather for picking grapes means the kind of subfreezing temperature that would ruin a normal harvest.

The temperature must be low enough so the water in each berry freezes -- far lower than 32 degrees, given the concentration of sugar and acid. The ideal temperature is about 10 degrees, when water turns into crystals that stay solid and are left behind in the berry when it is pressed.

Before this final process, the grapes must ripen with the right balance of rain and sunshine, warmth and cold. In the cold, rainy season of 2003, Hunt's huge crop never quite made it to fruition.

This winter, even with the vineyard ready for harvesting, there was one last danger: wild animals, from deer and turkeys to birds, aiming their hunger at "the only thing left that's delicious," Hunt said.

To protect the grapes, long, wide swaths of netting covered his vines until they were picked.

Ice wine is believed to have originated in Germany in the late 1700s. A farmer had failed to harvest his grapes before an early freeze set in, "then he rushed to get them in and started pressing them," Hunt explained.

It wasn't until the 1980s that commercial ice wine production started in North America.

In 1981, the first was made in the United States, by the Great Western Winery in upstate New York's Finger Lakes region. It was an experiment, "but it was a wild success, winning many awards," said Hunt.

He jumped into production in 1987, adding ice wine to his other types of wine and also garnering awards with it. From his 2005 harvest, he expects to produce 400 cases of 12 half-bottles each.

Some will go to Manhattan's Union Square Wines & Spirits, which has four bottles left of Hunt's 2002 Vidal Blanc; only about 5,000 were produced that year. The store also carries ice wine from the largest Canadian maker, Inniskillin, made from frozen-on-the-vine Vidal and selling for \$59.

"It's a special-occasion wine. Ice wine is intense -- at once breathtakingly sweet and mouth-puckeringly tangy," said Alexis Beltrami, the store's wine manager. Sipped slowly after a meal, Beltrami said, "these are wines for contemplation."

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Hunt Country Vineyards: [www.HuntWines.com](http://www.HuntWines.com)  
Inniskillin: [www.Inniskillin.com](http://www.Inniskillin.com)

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