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Conditions right to produce Gold Digger Cellars' award winning ice wine

OROVILLE - Early on the morning of Tuesday, Jan 4 the Gold Digger Cellars crew headed out the door to brave the cold winter temperatures and pick grapes for the winery's Riesling Ice Wine.

Winemaker, Mike Buckmiller was pleased when the rock solid, pebble-like grapes went to press and delivered a harvest brix of 40. "Brix" is a measurement of the sugar in the wine grapes – a one degree brix translates to about one percent sugar in the juice.

"This is the first time we have had an Ice Wine since our Gold Medal winning 2001 Riesling Ice Wine," said Amy Morris, with Gold Digger. "We will only produce approximately 100 cases of 2004 Riesling Ice Wine so watch for (it) because this wine won't last long."

To make the wine mother nature has to lend a hand and conditions have to be just right for the grapes to be picked. "Typically the temperature should be somewhere between ten to fifteen degrees above zero," said Buckmiller. "The reason for that is, you want the water to be frozen in the grape, which renders a very high sugar content in the juice you squeeze out."

Buckmiller went on to explain that ice cream at 32°F can melt in the freezer because of its high sugar content. "Sugar lowers the freezing temperature, but the water gets bound in the grape and doesn't dilute the juice when pressed," said the winemaker.

Buckmiller said the juice will be left to ferment for awhile and that he hopes to bottle the 2004 Riesling Ice Wine in March. Since it is a sweet wine it generally only needs a few months in the bottle before it is ready to drink, according to the winemaker.

The reason Gold Digger hasn't made any ice wine in the last few years is because the winery didn't have the cold temperatures when they were needed. "I didn't know for sure if we'd have conditions that were right this year. We got them but you have to bear in mind that there often comes a point when you can't wait any more and just have to say go ahead and pick it, and we'll make our Late Harvest Riesling instead."

Speaking of Late Harvest Riesling, the winery is ringing in the New Year with their version of that popular vintage. The wine comes in a distinctive tall, slim, cobalt blue bottle and is also a dessert wine, but not quite on the sweetness level of their ice wine. Gold Digger Cellars says this vintage goes perfect with "family and friends on a cold winter night."

For more on this and other Gold Digger Cellars products people are asked to see their website: www.golddiggercellars.com/wines.asp or to visit their stores in Oroville and Leavenworth.

By Gary A. DeVon, Managing Editor