We just finished a very festive Thanksgiving Dinner and now we get to do it all over again for Christmas. I usually draw the assignment to shop for the wines for Holiday dinners, and this year is no exception. I will serve a good Rhone Style Wine for the main meal, and probably a Late Harvest Riesling with Dessert. (By the way; I agree 100% with the idea of waiting a while between dinner and dessert, especially since the wine we are serving with dinner is dry and the dessert wine is sweet. Best to give it a short rest.) Just be sure that the dessert wine you choose is a bit sweeter than the dessert.

Riesling is produced all over planet earth, however here in the United States we have selections from just about every state, the best being from the West Coast, New York, and Michigan. None of the Rieslings that you select will put a strain on your budget. Riesling producers that also offer Late Harvest Riesling are, in my opinion, doing us a favor because the Riesling wines are so very food-friendly and the Late Harvest Rieslings have the same compatibility with dessert.

Late Harvest Rieslings are produced by leaving the grapes on the vine at least until late October. During that extended period on the vine Botrytis cinerea will attack the grapes, covering them with a beneficial gray mold. The mold survives by penetrating the grapes' skin and using up all available water in the juice. This remaining juice is concentrated, yielding rich flavors of sugar and acid so that a complex wine of exceptional sweetness can be made. Producers usually have a dedicated plot of land for this product. At harvest time, laborers will make several passes through the vineyard picking ONE grape at a time, picking only those grapes that are ready.

Let's sample a selection from Hogue Cellars in Washington State: A medium-bodied, sweet, mouthwatering Riesling with notes of tangerine.

On the nose, you will experience orange, lemon lime, peach and some mineral. Pairs well with cheesecake or baked pear. Available at Total Wine for $12. It will be a 500ml bottle.

How about a sample from New York State? Hermann J. Wiemer winery from the finger lakes region is the most well-known producer in the area. His Late Harvest Riesling is produced in the same manner as the above named wine. The best bet here is to order from the winery. Approximately $24 plus shipping. Well worth it to try just one bottle. The quality is there as suggested by the fact that the winery has been in existence since the early 1900's.

I limited my choice of dessert wine to Late Harvest Riesling. Are there others? You betcha! However, let's suggest just three more to keep it simple. There are numerous Maderias and Ports, produced all over the European and Continental US. They range in price from $20 to upwards of $2500 for Chateau d'Yquem. Assuming that you opt out of the d'Yquem, lets suggest Mince Pie with Maderia, $24; or a ten-year Tawney Port with just about anything, $40. The prices may seem a bit high, however the pour for the dessert wine is estimated to be approximately four to five ounces. You then cap the bottle and save the remainder for the next holiday. Your budget is still intact.

BONUS – THE CHEESE COURSE: There are as many Individual Holiday traditions as there are families celebrating the Holidays. The fact that the celebrations are worldwide makes the number of traditions countless. Permit me to give just one example. My daughter and son-in-law Frederic live in Paris. Frederic loves cheese and insists that it be served at every Sunday and Holiday meal. Sometimes the cheese is served before dessert and sometimes it is served in place of dessert. At the Christmas dinner the cheese is served before dessert. It includes Morbier, Roquefort, and Stilton. The wine, however, with the exception of Port to accompany the Stilton, is either a Burgundy or a Bordeaux. These red wines are opposite of the recommendations that appeared in my readings but here I am talking Family Tradition. I chose to err on the side of caution and not say a word. Wise choice!

WINESPEAK

My Christmas Wish for all the folks in the Lowcountry is that you have a blessed Christmas and a Peaceful New Year. May all of your wines be exceptional and meet with the approval of your palate.